CHAPTER 3
The Asia-Minor Project

3.1 Preliminaries to the Greek National Adventure

The Prussian Minister of Science, Art and People’s Education accepted Carathéodory’s resignation to leave his office on 1 January 1920 and expressed his thanks and his “warm acknowledgement” for Carathéodory’s “long and outstanding effectiveness in the service of the Prussian Universities and to German science”. He wished Carathéodory success in the “great work” with which he had been entrusted on his “return to the homeland”.¹

Carathéodory had accepted Venizelos’s offer because he considered it to be better than his professorship in Berlin. Greece belonged to the victors of the war and had gained new territories. Carathéodory, as any other Greek of the Diaspora, recognised in Venizelos the incarnation of the Great Idea. He also found in Smyrna the cosmopolitan character that suited him and the wealth that a city like Berlin lacked after the war. He believed he would be able to reunite himself with his family and secure a stable high income and be able to avoid the noisy bustle of Berlin.² Indeed, all this may well have been possible had it not been for the consequences of war in Asia Minor.

On 30 October 1918, ten days after the fighting stopped on the Western Front, the Ottoman Empire signed with Great Britain (representing the Allied powers) the Moudros Armistice, which put it at the mercy of the Allies. The armistice provided for the military occupation of the Straits, control by the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France and Russia) of all railways and telegraph lines, demobilisation and disarmament of the Ottoman troops, except for small contingents with police tasks, surrender of all Ottoman troops in the Arab provinces and the freeing of all Entente prisoners of war in Ottoman hands. The conditions of the armistice were put into effect immediately. The British occupied Mosul, the oil producing town of northern Iraq. Constantinople was formally placed under Allied occupation with military control mainly in British hands. B. Lewis describes the symbolism of conquest provided by the French General Franchet d’Espérey: on 8 February 1919, he entered the city, like Mehmed the Conqueror centuries before, on a white horse, a gift from the local Greeks. French troops advanced from Syria into Cilicia to the province of Adana. British troops occupied the Dardanelles and other strategic regions, as well as the entire length of the Anatolian railways. On 29 April 1919, Italian troops landed in Antalya (Adalia).
At the subsequent Peace Conference of representatives of the Allied and Associated Powers held in Versailles and opened on 18 January 1919, the Entente powers were faced with difficult problems. A settlement in Anatolia had to include a homeland for the Armenians and a Jewish national home in Palestine – support for its establishment had been promised by the British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, to the leader of the Zionist movement in Britain, Lord Rothschild, in November 1917. There were also problems emerging from the secret war agreements of the Allies: the so-called Sykes–Picot agreement (French-Russian Agreement of 26 April 1916 and Anglo-French Agreement of 16 May 1916) provided for the annexation of southern Mesopotamia (vilayets of Baghdad and Basrah) by Britain and of Lebanon and a coastal strip of Syria, from a point between Akka (Acre) and Soûr (Tyr) up to and including the province of Adana in Cilicia, by France. In the interior of Syria and the vilayet of Mosul, Britain and France had agreed to recognise and protect an independent Arab state, or a confederation of states, under the suzerainty of an Arab chief. This state or confederation of states was in turn to be divided into French and British zones of influence. In each zone of influence the respective power would enjoy priority of the right of enterprise and local loans and would alone provide advisers or foreign functionaries at the request of Arab states or confederation of states. Russia would obtain the region of Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Trabzon (Trapezunt) and further territory in southern Kurdistan. Palestine was to be internationally administered, but Haifa and Akka were to be granted to Britain. Alexandretta (Iskenderun) would be a free port as regards the trade of the British Empire and Haifa a free port as regards the trade of France. The Sykes–Picot Agreement excluded Italy from the share it had been promised by the Treaty of London of 26 April 1915. Greece and Italy expected identical sections of the west coast of Anatolia including Smyrna. To join the Entente, Italy had been promised, together with a recognition of its interests in the Adriatic and Africa, south-western Asia Minor under the London secret war-agreement. For the same reason, offers of Smyrna and its hinterland had been made by the British to the Greeks also in April 1915. The agreement of St. Jean de Maurienne of August 1917, concluded between Italy, France and Britain from 19 April to 26 September 1917 and intended to remove Italy’s objections to the Sykes–Picot arrangement, redefined Italian claims by including Antalya and Smyrna with its hinterland in the Italian zone. A vague zone of influence was to stretch northward as far as Konya. The agreement was subject to the approval of Russia, but the Bolsheviks who had come to power in November 1917 had repudiated all Tsarist international commitments. In January 1919, two Greek divisions had strengthened the French expeditionary force sent to help Denikin’s White Russians against the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine and the Greeks expected their reward from the French at the Peace Conference. The strategic and political significance of Constantinople and the Straits presented the Entente with another dilemma. The Constantinople Agreement (an exchange of notes in the period from 4 March to 10 April 1915) had called for the incorporation of Constantinople and the Straits into Russia. Russia, in return, had agreed to respect the special interests of Britain and France in the region of the Straits and to view sympathetically the realisation of their possible plans for other regions of the Ottoman Empire.