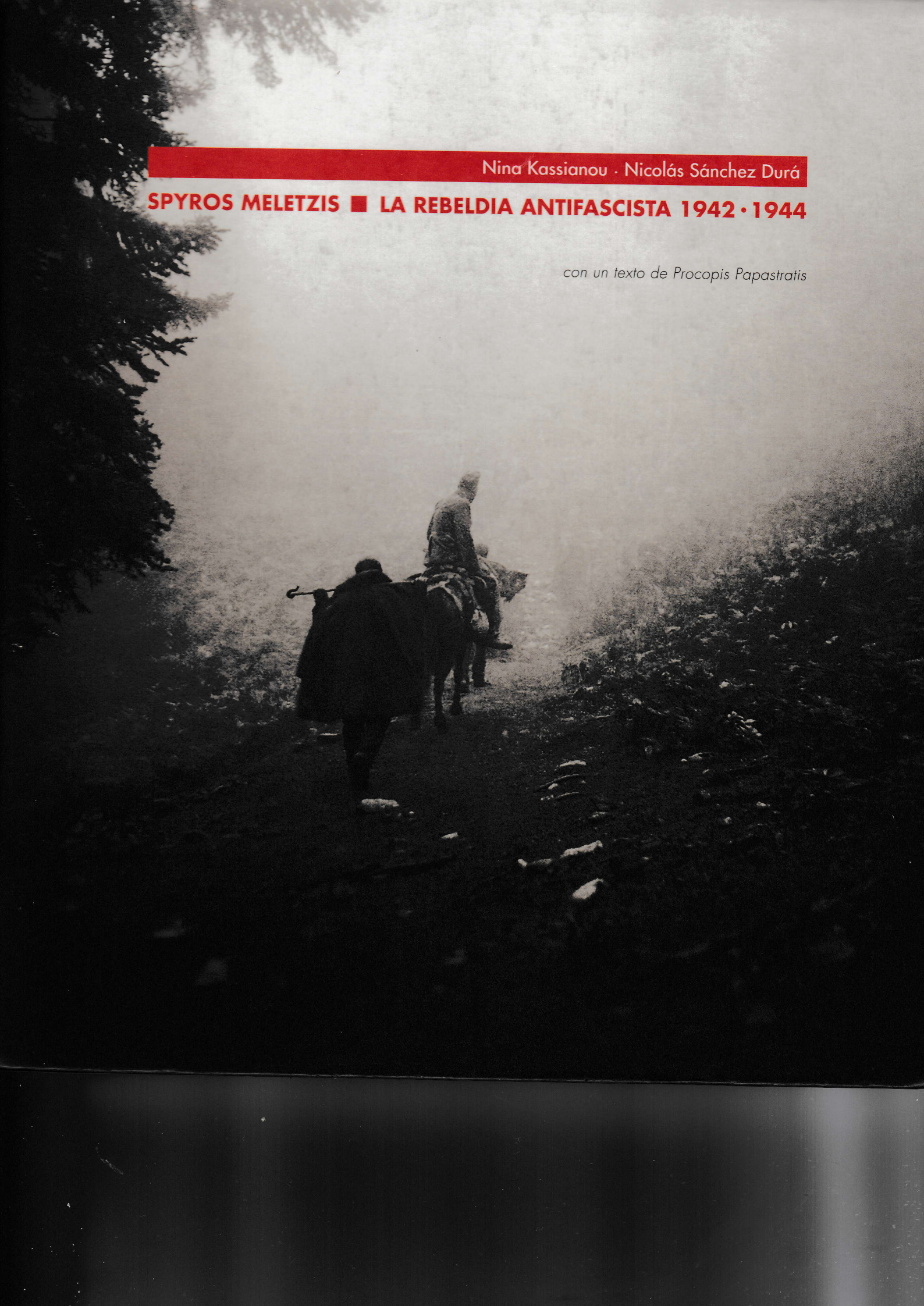
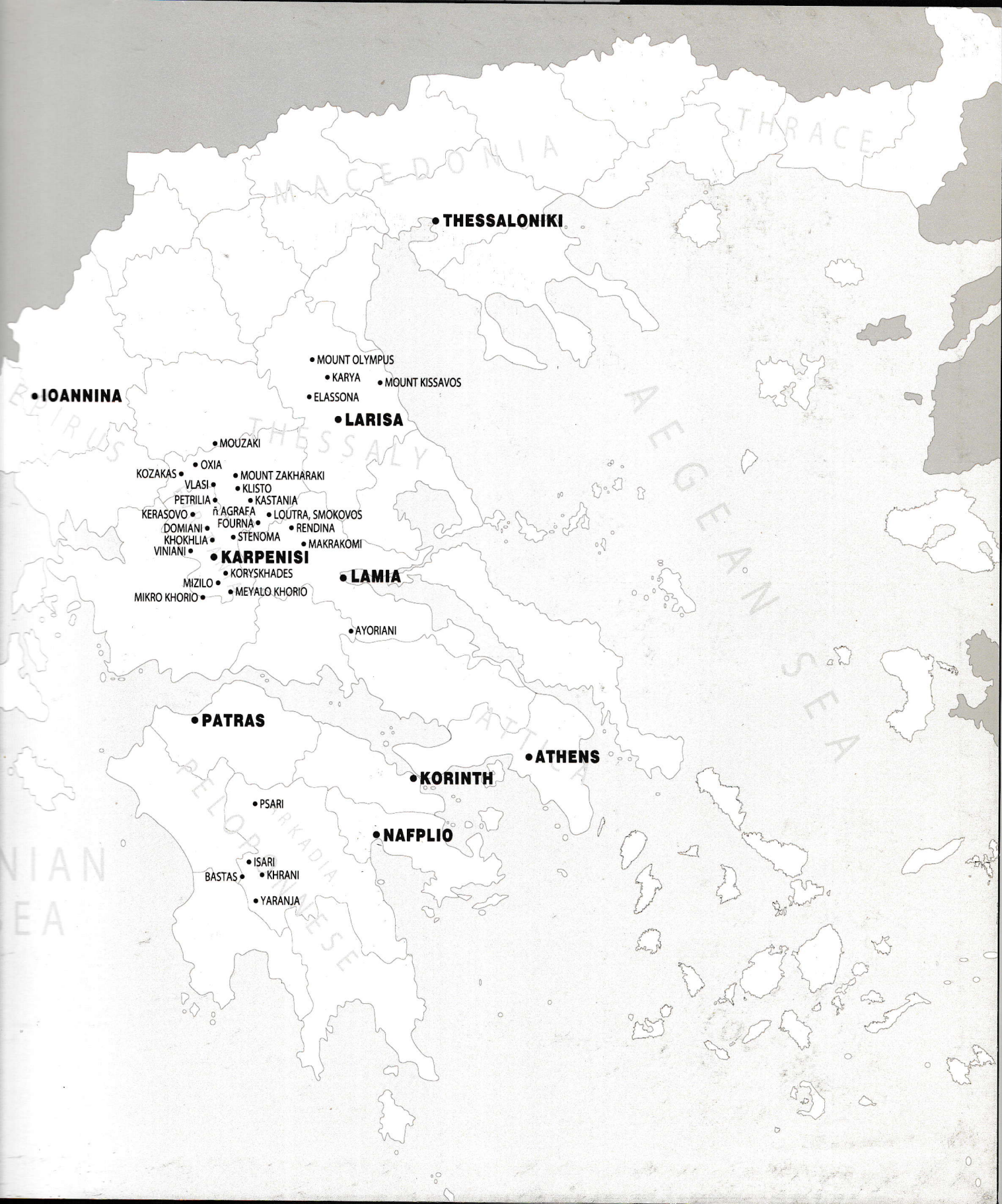


Nina Kassianou · Nicolás Sánchez Durá

SPYROS MELETZIS ■ LA REBELDIA ANTIFASCISTA 1942 · 1944

con un texto de Procopis Papastratis





• IOANNINA

• THESSALONIKI

• MOUNT OLYMPUS
• KARYA • MOUNT KISSAVOS
• ELASSONA

• LARISA

• MOUZAKI
• OXIA
KOZAKAS • VLASI • MOUNT ZAKHARAKI
• KLISTO
PETRILIA • KASTANIA
KERASOVO • AGRIFA • LOUTRA, SMOKOVOS
DOMIANI • FOURNA • RENDINA
KHOKHLIA • STENOMA • MAKRAKOMI
VINIANI • KARPENISI
• KORYSKHADES
MIZILO • MEVALO KHORIO
MIKRO KHORIO

• LAMIA

• AYORIANI

• PATRAS

• ATHENS

• KORINTH

• NAFPLIO

• PSARI
• ISARI
BASTAS • KHRANI
• YARANJA

RESISTANCE IN GREECE DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION 1941–1944

In August 1936 Greece became the latest Royal Dictatorship in the Balkans when King George gave his consent to General Ioannis Metaxas to abolish the Constitution and dissolve the Parliament.

The resort to dictatorship was caused by the inability of the bourgeois class to provide solutions to existing political problems, rather than being the result of any supposed communist threat, as Metaxas regularly claimed. The political parties had reached a similar impasse almost ten years earlier, and had allowed General Pangalos to establish a personal dictatorship. By 1926 the parties had agreed a *modus vivendi* between them, overthrown Pangalos and formed an all-party coalition government in which Metaxas served as minister for transport. Metaxas's regime had ideological affinity with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and attempted to imitate and copy aspects of their propaganda methods and youth movements, whilst establishing a police state and cultivating a personality cult that was centred on Metaxas. However, the similarities ended there. The circumstances through which Greece joined the royalist dictatorships of the Balkans underlined the country's firm attachment to Britain. With its international position secured, the domestic situation was left at the discretion of an authoritarian regime that lacked the support of a mass political party. It can be argued that, in return, Metaxas was permitted, or, to be more accurate, he was not prevented from developing these aspects of "fascist" ritual and organization at the expense of a society characterized by a fierce individualism and a visceral antipathy for any regimentation¹. Metaxas personally oversaw the creation and expansion of the National Youth Organization, in which he made no secret that he was investing his hopes, ultimately vain, for the continuation of his regime.

The dictatorship was brutal in suppressing its opponents – especially communists – using torture, imprisonment and exile. In addition to these methods, the regime took advantage of a legal arsenal designed to counter the alleged communist danger that had been in the process of being assembled since the mid 1920s.

The character of Metaxas's regime continues to be debated: Metaxas himself argued strongly that he was creating a regime that was uniquely Greek in character, and was to use this line of argument when visited by a British official in early 1938. The regime, he claimed, represented the collective will of the Greek nation, and with this being the case there was no point in inquiring whether it veered towards Nazism or Fascism. According to Metaxas, "Portugal under Dr. Salazar, not the Germany of Hitler or the Italy of Mussolini, provided the nearest analogy"².

Metaxas, a fervent royalist, was sent as a young officer to study in the Berlin War Academy. Back in Greece he became actively pro-German and deeply involved in politics, a traditional activity among Greek officers at the time. During the First World War he was a leading figure among a group of officers plotting with the King of Greece, Constantine, to ally the country with the Triple Alliance against the policy of the elected Liberal Government of Eleftherios Venizelos, which wanted Greece to participate in the war along with the Entente Powers. This intense clash, known as *The National Schism*, developed into a civil strife that engulfed the country throughout the interwar years. Metaxas, however, had rescinded his pro-German feelings since the mid 1920s, defending himself against accusations of being anti-British and arguing that Greece had to be attached to Britain on account of its Mediterranean location³.

¹ P. Papastratis, "Metaxas: A dictator of compromise", in *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 1, UNICISISTE, Lisbon, 2005, pp. 33–34.

² J. Kofas, *Authoritarianism in Greece: the Metaxas regime*, East European Monographs, Boulder (Colorado), 1983, p. 186. V. Aggelis, *Why are People Happy and Smiling Father: Lessons in National Conduct and Youth*

Propaganda in the Years of Metaxas Dictatorship, Bibliorama, Athens, 2006 [in Greek].

³ I. Metaxas, *Personal Diary*. Volume 4, Ikaros, Athens, 1960, pp. 285–286 [in Greek].

Thus, on 28 October 1940, an ageing pro-British dictator had to defend Greece against an attack by Fascist Italy, with which his regime had close ideological affinity. The successful Greek resistance which quickly pushed the invading Italian army back into Albania precipitated the German attack on 6 April 1941.

In January 1941 the British Government had decided on political grounds to send military assistance to Greece. It was a calculated decision, aiming at the post-war restoration of British influence in Greece. At the same time London wanted to convince the still neutral American public opinion that it was ready to assist the only country in Europe still fighting with Britain against the Axis power.

However, Yugoslavia and Turkey were reluctant to participate with Greece in a British-designed Balkan Front. The aim of this front was to block the German army that had entered Romania and was establishing itself in Bulgaria to attack Yugoslavia and Greece. As a result, an insufficient British Expeditionary Force arrived too late in Greece and in fact fought a rearguard action before it was evacuated back to the Middle East.

When Germany attacked Greece, initially through the Greek-Bulgarian frontier, the Greek army was holding the front against the Italians approximately 50 kilometres inside Albania. However, in Athens the regime was collapsing while the military situation was rapidly deteriorating. The King, whom the death of Metaxas in January 1941 had revealed as the true leader of this dictatorial regime, ignored the strong British pressure to form a national government at this moment of crisis. He chose instead to appoint as Prime Minister a minister of the Metaxas government, Alexandrios Koryzsis, in order to guarantee the continuation of the existing social regime. Nevertheless, the new Prime Minister committed suicide on April 18 because he was unable to face the crisis and especially the pressure from the leadership of

the Army to sign an armistice with the Germans before the British forces evacuated Greece.

The King and a hastily formed government under Emmanouil Tsouderos, the Governor of the Bank of Greece, left Athens for Crete in late April 1941 and then for Egypt⁴.

The Greek people were facing a triple occupation as, apart from Germany and Italy, Bulgaria occupied Thrace, the north-eastern part of the Greek mainland. At the same time they realized that the King and his Government, now in exile, were in fact a continuation of the Metaxas dictatorial regime. As a result they felt betrayed and increasingly resentful towards an unpopular and aloof king and a government out of touch with the harsh realities of the occupation. It came as no surprise, therefore, that large sections of the population were ready to answer the call for resistance, as they had reached the decision that they had to take the situation into their own hands.

Occupation and Resistance ■ Following the occupation of the mainland of Greece in late April and Crete in early May 1941, two centres of power dealing with Greek affairs emerged: the Occupation authorities in Athens with the three collaboration governments they appointed one after another until the Liberation in October 1944, and the Governments-in-Exile established initially in London and then in Cairo.

In March 1944 a third centre of power finally emerged in the mountains of Greece, an area practically liberated since autumn 1943. It was the Political Committee of National Liberation, the Government of Free Greece as it was commonly known, established by the National Liberation Front (EAM), by far the largest resistance organization, which was dominated by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE)⁵.

Although Italy was nominally accepted as an equal occupying power, it was Germany that was governing Greece. The economic situation of the country was

⁴ This administration was the last one in a series of governments-in-exile which had left their countries before they were occupied by Germany. The Allies recognized them as the only legal governments representing their countries until their liberation. Thus Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Yugoslavia and Luxemburg also had governments-in-exile, mainly established in London. General de Gaulle's French Committee of National Liberation was not recognized as the temporary French Government until October 1944, after the liberation of Paris.

⁵ P. Papastratis, "Local Government in Liberated Areas of Occupied Greece", in Bruno De Wever, Herman Van Goethem, Nico Wouters (eds.) *Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939-1945)*, Academia Press, Gent, 2006, p. 218. The KKE and EAM had been planning to form this government since the autumn of 1943 but the traditional bourgeois parties refused to participate. In Yugoslavia Tito had established his in November 1943.

already critical when the Germans overran the country. It was made very much worse when they ravaged the Greek economy and confiscated all available foodstuffs, totally indifferent to the economic catastrophe this meant for the Greek people. The cost of supporting the occupation forces destroyed the financial structure: it amounted to forty per cent of the national income in 1941, and climbed to ninety per cent in the year after. This resulted in an inflation of unprecedented dimensions.

Before the war, Greece imported up to 500,000 tons annually of grain and other foodstuffs from Australia, Canada and the United States. While the country was occupied by the Axis powers all food imports from the Allies ceased, and the poor harvests of 1941 and in the remaining years of the occupation aggravated the situation further. The Germans knew from late April 1941 onwards that the food situation was critical, but such measures as they took along with the Italians were so hopelessly inadequate that they had very little, if any, effect. The famine that hit Greece was catastrophic. German army officials recorded a death rate for December 1941 of 300 per day in Athens alone. The estimate of the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross was even higher: an average of 400 deaths per day, with as many as 1,000 on some days (compared with an average of 40 before the war). Starvation was the primary factor in this excessive mortality rate, as no epidemic was recorded for that period. The daily toll in lives fell only towards the end of 1942, when sufficient quantities of food relief were available through the International Red Cross⁶.

The British applied a very rigid blockade in the case of Greece, which was partially relieved for political reasons when tens of thousands had already perished from famine. However, they allowed Vichy France to be supplied with foodstuffs when they had ample evidence that part of these supplies did eventually go to Nazi Germany⁷.

The different approaches regarding the question of resistance became clear as soon as the Axis Powers

occupied Greece. The so-called "official" line advised abstinence, whereas the immediate reaction of the people was active participation in the Resistance. It was indeed a novel conception, expanding at the time all over occupied Europe. This difference grew wider as the resistance movement became stronger, and underlines the distance between what the inactive traditional political leadership in occupied Greece and the Government-in-Exile wanted and what the people actually did.

In February 1943, a document emanating from the Greek Government-in-Exile warned loyal officers against joining EDES or ELAS, both of them resistance organizations. The Greek people themselves remained unaffected by such considerations of expediency and, undeterred by the official capitulation, continued to fight against the enemy under the banner of resistance. Defiant public demonstrations in central Athens in early May 1941, which cheered British prisoners of war, quickly developed into serious acts of sabotage by the end of the same month. Also, on the last day of May, two students – M. Glezos and A. Santas – removed the swastika from the Athens Parthenon. The first armed guerrilla bands appeared in Western Macedonia on 5 July; concentration camps were set up in the same month. At the same time the Greek people, individually or organized in small groups, secretly sheltered British soldiers and helped them escape to the Middle East⁸.

Nobody had exhorted the Greek people to resist. Those who had previously made decisions on their behalf had either fled abroad or kept an attitude ranging from opportunist silence to open collaboration. The small Communist Party of Greece, the KKE, which had been disorganized and thrown into disarray by the Metaxas dictatorship, was busily rebuilding underground with those of its members who managed to escape from the prisons and the political internment camps before the camps were turned over to the occupation authorities. When, on 1 July 1941, the KKE Central Committee called on the Greek people to form a national front for the

⁶ P. Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece during the Second World War 1941–1944*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, p. 115.

⁷ L. Woodward, *British Policy in the Second World War*, HMSO, London, 1971, pp. 286–289.

⁸ F.O.837/1230 F.O. to MEW, 8 May 1941.

liberation of Greece in order to fight the occupation authorities and overthrow the puppet government, KKE members who had escaped internment were already proceeding to their posts all over Greece to start organizing resistance. The birth of the resistance movement owed little to the KKE, however. It came about spontaneously as individuals and groups moved forward to fill the power vacuum created by the sudden and rapid collapse of the Metaxas regime. While there can be no question that the Greek communists were prominent at the initial stage of the resistance, then as well as later it was above all the will of the people to resist which made the resistance movement possible and successful. Thus, when the KKE with other small socialist parties formed EAM, the National Liberation Front, it was this spirit of resistance which increased its membership so rapidly that it turned into one of the biggest mass movements of occupied Europe. The three main resistance organizations were, in order of importance: EAM and its military wing ELAS, EDES and EKKA. A considerable number of other organizations also engaged in espionage and sabotage.

The National Liberation Front, EAM, was formed on 27 September 1941, on KKE initiative and with the participation of three small socialist parties – the Socialist Party of Greece (SKE), the People's Democratic Union (ELD) and the Agrarian Party of Greece (AKE). All other political parties (or, to be more correct, their leaders) declined the invitation to join. Some of them offered as an excuse their belief that a resistance movement was premature, but undoubtedly a major reason for this refusal was that they did not want to cooperate with the communists. Negotiations with the political leaders had started in June 1941 and continued during the summer, but it was only at the end of September that EAM was finally set up⁹. It announced from the very outset that any party or organization that agreed with its principles and believed in the necessity of the National Liberation Front would be accepted into EAM on equal terms.

In fact it was the KKE that was controlling the new organization. The declared EAM aims were the following:

(a) the liberation of the nation and the complete independence of Greece; (b) the formation of a provisional government by EAM immediately after the liberation, for the sole purpose of proclaiming elections for a Constitutional Assembly; (c) the safeguarding of the fundamental right of the Greek people to decide themselves on the form of their future government.

Early in January 1942, the KKE Central Committee decided that "guerrilla warfare is of prime importance" for the liberation of the country; this stand was endorsed a few days later by the Central Committee of EAM. Systematic guerrilla warfare was to be carried out by the People's Liberation Army of Greece, ELAS. In early March 1942 the formation of the guerrilla bands, which eventually became the constituents of ELAS, was entrusted to Thanassis Klaras, who, under the name of Aris Velouchiotis, became the "fighting genius of ELAS".

In early October 1941 another resistance organization, the National Republican Hellenic League, EDES, was formed. Negotiations to this end had started in late September, when Komninos Pyromaglou arrived in Athens from France as the representative of General Nikolaos Plastiras (one of the leaders of the 1922 republican revolution), with instructions to form an organization with a clear political and social programme. Pyromaglou met with Plastiras's friends and other political personalities. He pointed out to them that the organization of armed resistance was of great political importance, and that its initiative should not be left to the KKE. He received mixed reactions. It was especially the leaders of the republican parties who criticized the initiative, which otherwise was received enthusiastically though without willingness to take concrete action. When, contrary to Plastiras's instructions not to meet with Colonel Napoleon Zervas, whom he suspected of double-dealing, Pyromaglou did meet him, the colonel expressed his full agreement with Plastiras's views.

The EDES Charter declared the organization to be strongly antiroyalist, branded "ex-King George II" as a traitor and announced that EDES, "irrespective of the outcome of the war", aimed at the establishment of a

⁹ KKE Official Documents 1940–1945, vol. 5, Athens, 1974, pp. 60–64, 82–83 [in Greek].

republican regime. The Charter made no reference at all to the German occupation and the situation it had created, nor did it mention anything concerning the resistance or how it should be organized. It concluded with a pledge to establish a true People's Social Republic as soon as EDES's revolutionary programme could be realized¹⁰.

The strongly socialist tone of its charter notwithstanding, EDES had no consistent ideology. Towards the end of July 1942, Zervas and Pyromaglou left Athens for Zervas's native area in north-west Greece to organize their guerrilla bands.

The third resistance organization, EKKA (National and Social Liberation), also had a strongly socialist Charter. It was set up in the early autumn of 1942, although the preliminary discussion had begun at the end of 1941 between G. Kartalis, a young Member of Parliament, A. Kapsalopoulos, and Colonels D. Psarros and E. Bakertzis. Their aim was to form an organization independent of both EAM and EDES. They therefore declined any cooperation with EAM, though agreeing to cooperate with EDES without, however, joining in.

In Athens the resistance movement was expressed with massive protest demonstrations and strikes in which the role of the students was prominent. The recruitment of volunteers to work in the Reich was an issue that produced such demonstrations. In October 1941 only 550 Greeks were employed out of 3.5 million foreign workers. A year later and following an intensive propaganda campaign, approximately 12,000 Greeks had registered instead of 30,000 as expected. The hardships of the occupation and the famine, especially during the winter of 1941–1942, had undermined any attractiveness of working in Germany. In February 1943 the Commander of the German Army in Greece turned to forced recruitment. All men between the age of 16 and 45 were ordered to register for work service. The reaction was swift and catalytic. This time the demonstrations started in the last days of February and

culminated in a massive protest on March 5. The offices of the Ministry of Labour were invaded and files of conscripted workers were burned. The people clashed with the police and the occupation army supported by armoured cars, and succeeded in destroying several civil service offices. The Logothetopoulos government was forced to deny categorically that any such orders existed¹¹. In the neighbourhoods around the centre of the city the increasing presence of the Athens ELAS forced the occupation authorities to patrol in strength.

In the countryside, however, a different pattern gradually emerged as the growth of the resistance movement was becoming evident not only by its military activity but also by the control it exercised, especially in the mountains. The predominant feature of mainland Greece is its mountains. These mountains have gradually been inhabited by whole villages since the 16th century. This phenomenon continued for three centuries, until the 1830s, after the end of the Greek War of Independence¹². The mountain provided security from the despotic rule of the Ottoman Turks. It also provided an escape when the Turkish feudal system expanded in the plains. As a result, on slopes well hidden from the plains, the villages had to adopt cultivations and modes of economic activity in accordance with the surrounding landscape. The Sublime Porte in Istanbul quickly followed a system of rule which, in return for a secure collection of taxes, allowed local self-government. This became the prevailing administration pattern during the four centuries of Ottoman occupation in Greece, establishing a long tradition on this matter.

In a poor Balkan country such as Greece in the inter-war period, in any poor country in fact, the central authority in the capital is rarely able to face local problems in remote rural areas, or interested in doing so. This was the case for a number of villages in the mountainous district of Evrytania in Western Central Greece. In one of these villages, named Karoplesi, a Progressive Union was formed in the summer of 1933. It addressed local

¹⁰ K. Pyromaglou, "The Organization of Athens EDES", in *Historical Archive of National Resistance*, vol. 5, 1958, pp. 20–25 [in Greek].

¹¹ Ch. Hadjiiosif, "Facets of the Greek Economy during the Occupation 1940–1944", *Symposium in Memory of Nicos Svoronos*, Society for the Study of Neohellenic Civilization and General Education 1, Athens, 1993 pp. 144–145. The Germans managed to register 2,653 workers for

Germany in 1943 and only 2,029 during the first half of 1944. In order to meet *Wehrmacht* needs in Greece the Germans had to import unpaid forced labour from Italy. J. Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance. The Greek Agony 1941–1944*, Pella, New York, 1983, pp. 76–77.

¹² K. Moskof, *National and Social Conscience in Greece 1830–1909*, Thessaloniki, 1972, pp. 75–77 [in Greek].

issues, especially the problem of the tense relations between farmers over agricultural damages, forestry, pasturing and irrigation rights. These differences and other minor offences resulted in the villagers suing each other in the local Court of Misdemeanour, 15 hours away on foot. A "Compromise Committee", as it was called, was thus established and soon became an exemplary and successful People's Court. The initiative was followed in the neighbouring villages and eventually the lawyers in the provincial capital reacted by asking the public prosecutor to dissolve these unions. The Metaxas Dictatorship dissolved them in 1937 after four years of successful operation¹³.

The Axis Occupation created entirely new conditions. Now it was not only a matter of solving local problems *in situ*, in order to reinforce participation and cooperation between the members of the community as a reaction to the absence of an indifferent central authority. It was, instead, a question of the disappearance of the authority of the state, in spite of its nominal existence, under a brutal foreign occupation. In these conditions, animal theft and banditry reappeared, a traditional activity in rural areas, which had previously been eliminated.

The reaction was quick. It was not a coincidence that the first village committee to spring into action was established in late July–August 1941 in the same area where the Progressive Union of 1933 had been functioning for four years. Georgoulas Beikos, a local journalist and a communist but also a founding member of the movement for local self-administration in the 1930s, was the protagonist of this new effort.

In that summer the Communist Party of Greece and other small Socialist parties were busy forming the National Liberation Front (EAM), which was established in September 1941. In the early spring of 1942 the first guerrilla bands of the Hellenic People's Liberation Army (ELAS) appeared in the same area where local government had briefly functioned. Armed resistance was not only an undisputed fact but was rapidly becoming a massive movement, as demonstrations in Athens had already shown. These new conditions inevitably created additional responsibilities

for the main resistance organizations. The issue of local self-government thus ceased to be the result of local initiatives and acquired new dimensions. As the resistance movement was gradually consolidating its presence in the countryside, self-government became an integral part of the liberation struggle and eventually the same laws and regulations were applied to all liberated areas.

The approach to the issue of local government differed, however, in the areas where EAM and EDES were predominant. The predominance of EDES was in fact limited to the region of Epirus, in north-western Greece, the native area of its leader, Colonel Napoleon Zervas, a republican officer with a dubious character. EAM, on the other hand, was predominant or strongly present in the rest of the country. In the EDES areas, the village committees were largely appointed by the organization¹⁴, and the available evidence shows a lack of interest in local self-government on the part of the EDES organization.

EAM, in contrast, gradually showed a keen interest in this issue, although at a certain point there was a policy directive to curtail its implementation. Thus, when local self-government started on a wider scale, it was in the same area where it had been tried in the summer and autumn of 1941. The same people, showing admirable tenacity, formed the nucleus of this new attempt. It was again an initiative to help the political instructors of EAM in the region. The actual legal texts were drafted in early December 1942 and declared that the General Assembly of all adult inhabitants elected the organs that exercised the people's power. These organs were the Committee of People's Self-Government and the People's Court. The members of the Committee were unpaid, their position was obligatory and honorary.

The legal texts just mentioned became known as the "Poseidon Code" and in fact formed the cornerstone of all laws and regulations that followed on this issue. They were applied initially in a number of surrounding villages, and in areas of West Thessaly in central Greece. In the spring of 1943, self-government and people's justice expanded further in Central Greece. The following

¹³ Th. Tsouparoloulos, *People's Institutions in the National Resistance*, Glaros, Athens, 1989, pp. 21–24 [in Greek].

¹⁴ K. Ioannou, *Free Mountainous Greece*, Dromeus, Athens, pp. 34–40 [in Greek].

August a new Code superseded all previous ones, covering an even greater part of Central Greece. For the first time in Greece, it introduced universal suffrage for men and women from the age of 17. It also declared that collaboration with the enemies of the people and exploitation of existing circumstances for profit was *considered a criminal offence*. Until then, this legislature was applicable to areas where the National Liberation Front was predominant. However, a few days later, the Joint Guerrilla Headquarters, formed by the British Military Mission and the three main resistance organizations, EAM, EDES and EKKA, issued Decision No. 6 on Self-Government and People's Justice. For the first time, the main resistance organizations had agreed to apply the same corpus of regulations in their respective areas of operation, which in fact meant the largest part of mainland Greece¹⁵. Nevertheless, the civil conflict that erupted between the National Liberation Front (EAM) and the National Republican League (EDES) in late October 1943, lasting until February 1944, abolished this joint effort of local government.

At the same time, EAM was careful not to establish its power in liberated cities. A typical case was the city of Karditsa, a regional capital with a population of approximately 16,000 people, in the plains of West Thessaly. The city was liberated in March 1943, "the first European city to be liberated by resistance forces", as the BBC transmitted at the time¹⁶. The city remained free until November 1943, when it was occupied by German forces. During this period the city functioned under the existing administration with elements of self-government. EAM had repeatedly declared that it would not take over power during the liberation struggle. It is evident that by following this policy it wanted to avoid accusations of this sort. EAM also did not allow its ELAS guerrilla units to stay in the city, in order to avoid retaliations on the population by the German forces.

A result of the consolidation of EAM power in occupied Greece was its decision to apply uniformity to the existing

regime of local government. From January 1944, a new corpus of 146 articles replaced all existing codes and regulations. This new development was directly related to the EAM decision to establish its own government in Free Greece, as the liberated areas were commonly known.

The decision to establish a government in the mountains was taken by KKE in January 1944. It was approved by EAM, and in early March the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA) was established in a mountainous village in western central Greece. PEEA proclaimed elections for a National Council, which took place at the end of April. These elections were unique in many aspects. As they were held under occupation, it was the ballot box that went to the voter, in conditions of secrecy, and not vice versa. For obvious reasons, there were no electoral rolls. It is estimated that 1,500,000–1,800,000 people registered their votes all over Greece, including urban centres. In all, 206 national councillors were elected, including 5 university professors, 25 lawyers, 15 doctors of medicine, 23 workers, 4 priests, 3 judges, 8 generals and 6 officers. The Political Committee, enlarged with new members, had a president, a vice-president and eight ministers¹⁷. Only two of them were Communists, the rest were Socialists and Liberals; all were well-known personalities in academia and in politics. The reaction of the British authorities in Cairo was that this Political Committee could not be ignored, at least for reasons of political expediency. On the political level, the establishment of this Committee was used as a lever to apply pressure in the negotiations EAM was conducting with the British and the Greek Government-in-Exile regarding the formation of the Government of National Unity¹⁸.

In the domain of local government, however, the Political Committee worked with diligence, producing a considerable amount of legislation. The Political Committee ceased to function in early November 1944, Greece being liberated in October. During this period it introduced 64 laws, 79 government decrees and a number of other decisions covering an extensive area

¹⁵ M. Glezos, *National Resistance 1940–1945*, vol. 2, Stohastis, Athens, 2006, pp. 813–819 [in Greek].

¹⁶ L. Arseniou, *Thessaly in Resistance*, [no publisher], Athens, 1966, pp. 264–265 [in Greek].

¹⁷ Justice, Interior, War, Finance, Public Health, Agriculture, National Economy.

¹⁸ B. Bouras, *The Political Committee of National Liberation*, Diogenis, Athens, 1983, p. 88.

of issues, from education to forestry protection. What did all these efforts accomplish? I will use the remarks of a scholar and officer who observed all these developments very closely, Colonel C.M. Woodhouse, Head of the Allied Military Mission with the Resistance:

"The initiative of EAM/ELAS justified their predominance, though not their tyranny. Having acquired control of almost the whole country except the principal communications used by the Germans they had given it things that it had never known before. Communications in the mountains, by wireless, courier and telephone have never been so good before or since; even motor roads were mended and used by EAM/ELAS. Their communications included wireless extended as far as Crete and Samos, where guerrillas were already in the field. The benefits of civilisation and culture trickled into the mountains for the first time. Schools, local governments, law-courts and public utilities, which the war had ended, worked again. Theatres, factories, parliamentary assemblies began for the first time. Communal life was organised in the place of the traditional individualism of the Greek peasant"¹⁹.

The population in the countryside, but also a considerable section in the urban centres, for the first time developed a political consciousness independent from the old traditional party formations and tried new forms of decentralized power.

The emergence and rising growth of the resistance movement produced diverse but mainly negative reactions to a wide spectrum of forces ranging from the occupation forces, the collaborationist government and the bourgeois political leadership in the occupied country to the British and the Government-in-Exile.

The Germans and the Italians tried to eliminate it with every possible means, imprisonments and brutal reprisals including massive executions, massacres and burning of villages²⁰. The collaborationist government

was a servile partner to this increasing reign of terror unleashed upon the people.

The predominance of left and in fact communist influence in the resistance movement offered a justification for unwarranted alliances among political groups and tacit, if not open, acceptance of the measures taken against it because it became politically convenient to equate it with communism. In this context it was Theodoros Pangalos, the ex-dictator of 1925 and former republican, and Stylianos Gonatas, one of the leaders of the successful republican revolution of 1922, who were the instigators of the Security Battalions created by the third collaborationist government of Ioannis Rallis in autumn 1943 and staffed with officers of the Greek regular army to fight communism with German weapons²¹.

The Greek Government-in-Exile and the King had other priorities than a successful resistance movement in their occupied country. Prime Minister Emmanouil Tsouderos had requested far-reaching British intervention in Greek internal affairs in order to restore the King to the throne even with the use of force, while he himself would be the head of government. Apart from the fact that initially they did not believe that such a movement would succeed, they feared, as the bourgeois political leadership also did, that a strong, communist-led resistance movement would obstruct their uneventful return to power in a liberated Greece. As a result, in 1943 Tsouderos asked the British, whom he held responsible for arming the guerrillas, to urge them to return to their villages, cultivate their fields and await future possibilities of action²².

The basic objective of the British Government was to restore British political influence in Greece after the cessation of hostilities, within the wider south-east European perspective. In this sense, they viewed the development of resistance in Europe and in the Balkans in particular within the context of the Allied military strategy. As a result, short-term military considerations took precedence

¹⁹ C.M. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, Hutchinson, London, 1948, pp. 146-147. This book was published in 1948 in order to explain and justify the British presence and involvement in Greek affairs at the time.

²⁰ Italy signed an armistice with the Allies in September 1943. The Italian Army in Greece surrendered to the Germans. The *Aqui* Division resisted in the island of Cefalonia in the Ionian Sea and it was massacred by the Germans (5,000 men). The *Pinerolo* Division surrendered to ELAS in Central

Greece. More than 1,000 villages were destroyed. M. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece. The Experience of Occupation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993, p. 393.

²¹ J. Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance*, op. cit., pp. 81-85.

²² P. Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece*, op. cit., p. 152.

over post-war political objections until the advance of the Soviet Army on the Eastern Front consolidated the final victory of the Allies. Thus the British Government had to take these considerations into account when formulating its policy towards the Resistance in Greece. There is no doubt that the British operated from a position of strength in Greek affairs and lost no opportunity to underline it. It was a fact that the Greek Government-in-Exile had to accept. At the same time the British did not explain the basic tenets of their policy to the weak and unrepresentative Greek Government-in-Exile, which kept complaining about the supplies sent by the British authorities to the left-wing resistance movement. The British listened politely, in most cases, to these complaints and carried on with their Greek policy, informing the Greek Government when they considered it necessary.

When London realized early in 1942 that EAM was putting ELAS – the People's Army – in the field it put pressure on the leader of EDES, Colonel Napoleon Zervas, to establish his own guerrilla army. The British, however, were well aware of the limited ability of Zervas to organize a strong guerrilla army beyond his native area in north-western Greece. Therefore, as an alternative to communist-led EAM/ELAS, they tried to organize the resistance movement on a new basis, so that it could be controlled from Cairo. Nevertheless, the people they contacted secretly in Athens, a group of six colonels in the regular army, were singularly unable to realize the potential of resistance as it was developing in occupied Europe but were also unwilling to get involved in a movement they knew little about and cared less.

When the British tried to control the Resistance they realized that EAM/ELAS, in contrast to the Greek Government-in-Exile and the EDES organization, were absolutely not to be manipulated by them. The Foreign Office also realized that its policy of support for the King and his Government was incompatible with any form of

support and cooperation with EAM/ELAS. However, the Resistance was of overriding importance for the Allied war effort at the time. Therefore cooperation with the organization had to be tolerated for the time being, but the supplies designated were gradually reduced to what was absolutely necessary and only for operations authorized by the British in Cairo, against the Germans²³. Consequently, for the British, the only alternative to the expansion of EAM/ELAS was to support the other two organizations, EDES and EKKA.

The failure to control the resistance movement from Cairo coincided in March 1943 with a sharp disagreement between the Foreign Office and the Special Operations Executive (SOE) regarding Greek affairs²⁴. This was a typical case of conflict between short-term military objectives and long-term political interests which resulted in the Foreign Office trying unsuccessfully to curb SOE activities in Greece. This attempt was no doubt made in order to prevent SOE encroaching upon the Foreign Office's right to handle Greek affairs. It was also in accordance with the decision to reinforce British support for the King in view of his transfer along with his Government in Cairo. This transfer aimed at restoring the cohesion of the Greek Government and defusing the political situation. It was overtaken by events, however, and as a result of the serious army crisis of March 1943 Venizelist opponents of the King were included in the government. Nevertheless, the policy of support for the King was continued, following explicit instructions from Churchill and the Foreign Office. These instructions directed the British authorities in Cairo to concentrate their efforts on measures helping to build up the King and restore him to the throne. At the same time, the Tsouderos government decreased in importance.

The Greek Government-in-Exile and the situation in the Middle East ■ The Greek Government-in-Exile, more than any other government-in-exile, functioned throughout the Second World War

²³ Premier 3/211/7: W.P. (43)522 MEDC Meeting 7 November 1943, "British Policy Towards Greece", Minister of State Memorandum.

²⁴ This organization, an offspring of the Secret Intelligence Service, was formed in the summer of 1940 to organize clandestine activities in occupied Europe.

In Greece it was active from the beginning of the occupation. In the autumn of 1942 a small group of officers parachuted into central Greece and blew

up the Gorgopotamos viaduct, the Italian guard having been defeated by combined EAM/ELAS and EDES forces. The railway line, the only one connecting Athens and Piraeus to the rest of Europe and a vital German supply line, was cut for six weeks. It was the greatest SOE success in Europe in 1942. The party formed the British Military Mission in Greece. At the time of Liberation in October 1944 the Allied Military Mission, as it also included U.S. officers, numbered approximately 450 liaison officers with the Resistance stationed throughout occupied Greece. D. Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance 1940-1945*, Macmillan, London, 1980, pp. 99-100.

within a Greek political microcosm, with all the advantages and disadvantages that this unique experience entailed. The Greek Government and the King, forced into exile by the German invasion, had moved first to Cairo and then to London. However, they left a substantial part of the Government in Cairo.

Mainly in Egypt, but also in the Middle East, there were large, wealthy, influential Greek communities. Ever since the 19th century Greeks had been emigrating to Egypt in large numbers, encouraged initially by the policies of the country's ruler, Mehemet Ali, who favoured the settlement of foreigners. Organized in "communities", with the one in Alexandria, founded in 1843, being the oldest, the Greeks of Egypt soon flourished in commerce, particularly in cotton, but also engaged in other sectors of the Egyptian economy²⁵. By the outbreak of the Second World War there were approximately 100,000 Greeks in Egypt.

With the arrival of the King, the Government and the Greek Armed Forces in 1941, the already active involvement of the Egyptian Greeks in Greek politics gained further momentum and considerably aggravated the explosive political situation that was soon to permeate Greek affairs. Within this context the Greek Armed Forces could not but become actively involved in politics, inasmuch as army interference in such an activity had been a constant inimical phenomenon in Greece throughout the inter-war period. However the new element in this process was that for the first time the Greek Armed Forces experienced the predominance of a left if not communist ideology. The traditional split between royalist and republican officers was rapidly superseded. A huge majority of the rank and file of the three branches of the forces declared in favour of EAM and formed clandestine organizations, which in fact controlled the Armed Forces until they clashed openly with the British authorities. This involvement became evident soon after they started to reorganize in order to continue participating in the war effort under British Command.

The ships of the Greek Fleet, which were not sunk by the Luftwaffe, reached Alexandria at the end of April

1941. The next month the Fleet was again operational and within a few months was reinforced with newly built British destroyers. The Greek Army raised two brigades and a number of special units, while the Air Force formed three squadrons.

All Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force) saw action mainly on the Mediterranean Front. Conscription of eligible Greeks living in the numerous Greek colonies abroad was introduced. However, the main source of manpower for the Forces was occupied Greece. A secret network was established to organize the escape journey. Small sailing boats were employed to cross the Aegean Sea unnoticed by the enemy patrols and reach the Turkish coast. Although the exact number of escapees cannot be ascertained, suffice it to say that one of the organizations involved brought out 600 persons.

The Greek merchant fleet was integrated into the Allied transport system under the direct control of the British Government, and transported war supplies all over the world, especially in the North Atlantic. This fleet was ninth in terms of gross tonnage and consisted of 577 steamships, of which 429 were lost during the Second World War, 77 percent of the total²⁶.

The Process of Liberation ■ The main problem of the Greek Government-in-Exile vis-à-vis the Greek people in occupied Greece and the British was its unrepresentative character, a common problem in fact for all governments-in-exile during the Second World War. In spite of all the efforts to strengthen this government with suitable persons, the situation did not change until the summer of 1944, when a new Government of National Unity was finally formed on the eve of the liberation of the country.

One of the reasons for this inherent weakness of the Government-in-Exile was the development in occupied Greece itself. There a political void had resulted from the collapse of the Metaxas dictatorship and the departure of the King and his Government. The leaders of the old political parties were both unwilling and unable to fill this gap; they were unable because they were cut off from and without any influence on the Greek people; they were

²⁵ C. Hadjiiossif, *La Colonie Grecque en Égypte 1833-1856*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, E.P.H.E., 1980.

²⁶ Approximately 16,000 seamen served in Greek merchant vessels. More than 25 percent of them became war casualties; 2,000 lost their lives, about

2,500 were injured and an additional 150 became psychiatric cases. P. Papastratis, "A Fighting Navy in Exile: The Greek Fleet in the Mediterranean and Beyond", in J. Sweetman (ed.), *New Interpretations in Naval History*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1993, pp. 364-366.

unwilling since they were opportunistically hesitant to cooperate with the Greek Government-in-Exile²⁷.

The Government-in-Exile could strengthen its own position by recruiting from the younger generation of politicians and technocrats. Such a development would introduce new persons qualified for political office when Greece was liberated. This, however, ran contrary to the ambitions of Tsouderos, Prime Minister of the Government-in-Exile, as well as of the leaders of the old bourgeois political parties.

For this reason, when he had to seek allies in occupied Greece to face the political challenge of EAM, it was the old political leaders to whom both he and the British had to turn out of necessity; that is, the group which until then they had referred to as "the old gang". At the same time, the Greek people facing the realities of a brutal occupation viewed with marked indifference a distant and secure Government-in-Exile, the activities of which they learned mainly from what the BBC decided to transmit.

From the late summer of 1943 the basic issue for the British Government in respect of the new political configuration created by the rapid growth of EAM was whether the movement would try to seize power when the Germans left and, if so, how to prevent it. While the Anglo-American invasion of the Balkans which was under consideration at the time might have offered a solution, the success of the operation was certain to be affected by the Greek people's strong opposition to the King – and hence to Allied moves which could be interpreted as attempts to impose him by force. At this stage Britain's pro-King policy became ambivalent. On the one hand, the Foreign Office wanted the King to declare that he would submit the question of the regime to a plebiscite – a move which would demonstrate the untruth of the accusation that British bayonets were about to force the monarch on an unwilling people; on the other hand, Churchill, and the Foreign Office too, wanted the King to return to Greece with the first British liberation troops, i.e. before a plebiscite could be held.

These contradictory tactics stemmed from the fact that the Foreign Office was, at the same time, trying to appeal to the so-called moderates in Greece, including the republicans, and also wanted the King to act as a rallying point in their efforts to prevent EAM from gaining political dominance in Greece at the time of the liberation. However, the King's unpopularity and its consequences for British policy were a constant impediment that hampered the Foreign Office throughout this period. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the possibility of abandoning the King was never contemplated, and that intervention in the Greek political situation by Churchill (the King's main supporter) only grew greater the more Greek opposition to the King increased.

The Allied decision not to launch military operations in the Balkans opened up a new phase in the Greek political situation, and in autumn 1943 the question of whether or not EAM would attempt to seize power upon liberation had assumed very considerable importance. The matter became ever more acute as reports from Greece kept confirming the waxing strength of EAM and the certainty of active opposition if the King should return. In view of these facts, Britain adjusted its policy vis-à-vis Greece in accordance with the actual political and military exigencies, but without abandoning its basic principle of support for the King: London accepted the proposals of Reginald Leeper, Ambassador to the Greek Government-in-Exile. The twin campaign advocated by Leeper involved breaking with EAM and attempting to divide the movement by discrediting its leadership and winning over its moderate members; and a pledge given by the King that he would not return to Greece until the question of the regime had been settled, until which time he would appoint Archbishop Damaskinos as Regent²⁸. The latter proposal was actually a tactical turnabout to a position demanded by the opposition to the King (including EAM) and turned down by the British Government a few months earlier. Combining it with a rupture with EAM was meant to help win the support of

²⁷ On this issue see John A. Petropoulos, "The Traditional Political Parties of Greece during the Axis Occupation", in John Iatrides (ed.), *Greece in the 1940s. A Nation in Crisis*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1981, pp. 27–36.

²⁸ F.O.371/37231 R9703 Leeper telegram 295, 5 October 1943, F.O.371/37200 R10452.

at least part of the non-communist members of EAM and to unite them under Damaskinos. However, this line had to be dropped because the King, unexpectedly seconded by Roosevelt, refused to give the required pledge or appoint Damaskinos as Regent²⁹.

As a result, the idea of a direct attack on the EAM leadership was abandoned. The aim was partly achieved, however, by extending the existing ban on further material supplies to EAM/ELAS, because of armed clashes between EAM and EDES. What sparked this confrontation cannot, as yet, be safely ascertained. What seems beyond doubt is that, according to the available evidence, the strong anticommunism of EDES leader General Zervas was, at least in part, instigated by the British military mission assisting him³⁰. EAM, in turn, no doubt wished to have the monopoly of the resistance movement, and meanwhile was determined not to allow its dominant position to be encroached upon. It must be noted that in all the internecine fighting which was breaking out between the resistance organizations a certain polarization was inevitable, since in the recruiting of new guerrillas many of the young men were forced to join whatever organization was dominant in their area.

When Leeper and Tsouderos, the Prime Minister of the Government-in-Exile, were forced to give up all thought of direct attacks on EAM, they tried to subdue the movement by more subtle means, the most important among which was to invite EAM to participate in the national government then under discussion³¹. Although this meant recognition of EAM as a political party – a marked change in the British attitude towards it – this recognition would be entirely offset by EAM's neutralization in a coalition government with a bourgeois majority. Consequently, Tsouderos rejected EAM's own proposals for a national

government; EAM reacted by forming the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA). For Tsouderos, this permitted only one reply: successful negotiations with the old political leaders in Athens, to whom he had turned in advance. He failed, despite support from Leeper and the Foreign Office, because the King, backed by Churchill, refused to agree to this policy. Even more than the King's attitude, it was events in the Middle East arising out of the formation of PEEA which overtook Tsouderos: when, in April 1944, the Greek armed forces mutinied in a demand for the recognition of PEEA, Tsouderos was forced to resign, followed by his entire Cabinet. The mutiny in the harbour of Alexandria, the main British naval base in the eastern Mediterranean, was put down by a Greek commando group with considerable casualties on both sides, fifty dead or wounded. As a result the Greek Army was thoroughly reorganized, under British supervision. Out of 18,500 men, approximately 2,500 "loyal elements" were taken to form the Third Mountain Brigade, which participated in the Italian theatre of operations. A number of special units were also set up. Approximately half of the remaining troops were put into internment camps, while the rest, closely watched, were employed for garrison duties³².

Tsouderos's failure to persuade the King to approve his policy and his subsequent resignation revealed the inherent barrenness of the Greek political scene in Egypt. As a result the King, after having been bitterly criticized by the Greek Government and the Foreign Office alike for his obstinacy on the regency issue, found himself as the only remaining authority the British could utilize to solve the Greek constitutional issue. It was indeed the British in whom the power rested to deal with this crisis, and specifically Leeper to whom the King appealed for

²⁹ F.O.371/37231 R12837 Churchill to Eden, 7 and 9 December 1943. J. Iatrides (ed.), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports, Greece 1933-1947*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1972, pp. 157-162.

³⁰ F.O.37137210 R13508 and R13769 Lt Colonel Barnes to Cairo, 11 and 16 December 1943, F.O.371/37207 R11098 F.O. telegram 241, 4 November 1943.

³¹ F.O.371/37209 R13216 Leeper telegram 387, 12 December 1943; R13188 Leeper to F.O. telegrams 390 and 299, 14 and 19 December 1943.

³² P. Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece*, op. cit., pp. 169-171. An additional consequence of this reorganization was that the 277 detained right-wing officers and men were free to return to the Greek Army. They had been arrested in March 1943 because they had refused to obey orders from their republican commanding officers and return to their duties. W.O.201/1765: Main 9 Army telegrams ADC 180 and 1810, 9 and 10 March 1943; Rear 9 Army to Brigadier Sherston No. AQ1, 18 March 1943.

advice and guidance at every turn. Leeper had no scruples about intervening decisively³³.

The problem was viewed in London and Cairo in the context of Britain's policy towards EAM. As formulated by Leeper, this policy aimed at the formation of a national government in which all traditional political parties would participate (and stand united against EAM), and in which EAM would be invited to participate as well. If EAM should accept, it would actually be reducing itself to a minority party. The British clearly hoped that this decision would at the same time make it difficult, if not impossible, for EAM to seize power at the time of the liberation. If EAM were to refuse to join the national government, the Foreign Office was ready to denounce it to the Greek people as responsible for preventing national unity.

What the Foreign Office needed at this point to put its policy into action was an able politician with a strong personality of his own who would, however, faithfully abide by British policy requirements, and whom the British could confidently promote as the right person for the premiership in the new national government. In George Papandreou they found such a suitable prime minister, the leader of a splinter party from the old Venizelist Liberal Party, Papandreou was already known to the British for his anticommunism. Moreover, he was the only hope for the foreseeable future, as the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, very aptly remarked³⁴. Papandreou, in turn, realized that he was in fact representing that part of Greek society whose interests would be endangered by the establishment of a people's democracy as envisaged by EAM and more particularly by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). This became clear in the Lebanon Conference of May 1944. In order to proceed with the formation of the Government of National Unity, a conference was organized in a remote hotel in the mountains of Lebanon, where all delegations representing the traditional parties and the resistance organizations in Greece as well as the Greek politicians in Cairo gathered. Ostensibly called by the Greek Government, the political conference was in fact organized by Ambassador Leeper, who carefully controlled every facet

of it, having established his headquarters a few miles away. Before the start of the proceedings the representatives of the traditional parties rallied to Papandreou and Leeper. Thus the British insistence on forming a common front against EAM was rewarded³⁵. EAM refused to enter the national government, contrary to what its representatives had agreed at the Conference. The Foreign Office decided against breaking with this organization, however, seeing that only EAM's entry into the government would secure the political stability that was indispensable for the unopposed arrival of the British forces and the national government in Greece. Unable to appreciate the British attitude on this issue, Papandreou and the King were proposing quite the opposite, a rupture with EAM and an open denunciation of its tactics. Papandreou did not press this demand, fully aware of his total dependence on the British and grateful for their strong support for him in the final phase of the negotiations for EAM's incorporation in the government³⁶.

The attitude of EAM regarding the issue of its eventual participation in the national government still remains one of the most controversial questions of that period; the more so as no satisfactory explanation was ever given for this decision by the leadership of the organization. That EAM should have agreed to take part in the Lebanon Conference, and even sent a PEEA delegation, looks like a contradiction of PEEA's very *raison d'être*. The fact is that Papandreou and the British Government were in an advantageous position as they had rallied the bourgeois political leadership in the Lebanon Conference and profited from a series of tactical mistakes made by the leadership of KKE, EAM and PEEA. The question of participation in the Government of National Unity was extensively discussed by the leadership of KKE and EAM, while the non-communist members of PEEA had already declared in favour of participation and pressed towards this direction.

In taking this latest decision, the EAM and KKE leaderships were no doubt influenced by the fact that the Soviet Union had not recognized PEEA, as well as by Soviet advice to them tendered by Ambassador Novikov and the head of the Soviet military mission to ELAS, Colonel Popov³⁷.

³³ F.O.371/43729 R6153 Leeper telegram 260, 17 April 1944.

³⁴ F.O.371/43702 R7081 Eden minute, 30 April 1944.

³⁵ P. Papastratis "The Papandreou Government and the Lebanon Conference", in J. Iatrides (ed.), *Greece in the 1940s*, op. cit., pp. 111-130.

³⁶ F.O.371/R11406 Leeper telegram 536, 21 July 1944.

³⁷ M. Partalides, *Double Rehabilitation of the National Resistance*, Themelio, Athens, 1978, p. 115 [in Greek]. L.S. Wither, *American Intervention in Greece 1943-1949*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, pp. 8-9.

EAM's joining the national government solved the political aspect of the Greek question for the British. The military side was secured with the dispatch of a small British force to Greece – an action that had the approval of the Soviet Government and had been discussed with the Greek Government as well as with EAM and EDES in Caserta in Italy, where Papandreu and his Cabinet were spending the final months before the liberation of Greece. The dispatch of a British force was viewed as an essentially political question by the Foreign Office and Churchill, and as a military one by the Chiefs of Staff. The Foreign Office view prevailed in the end, but not until Eden had told the War Cabinet that, unless a government friendly to Britain was established in Greece with the help of British forces, Britain's political influence in south-east Europe and its strategic position in the eastern Mediterranean would be at stake³⁸. The importance attached to the dispatch of British forces is clearly demonstrated by the Foreign Office's decision to prevent an early return of the King, so as to sweeten the pill for the Greek people. The Soviet Government, in September 1944, had no hesitation in agreeing to the dispatch of a British force to Greece, and even added that Moscow did not intend sending any Soviet troops to that country³⁹. This Soviet decision, as well as Moscow's advice to EAM to join the national government, was no doubt arrived at in accordance with the secret British-Soviet agreement on the Balkans which, unbeknown to the KKE, had been in force since the summer of the same year. At the Caserta talks the British secured control of the all-important Athens areas as well as of the ELAS forces at the crucial time of the liberation. EAM's signature to this agreement was consistent with the policy it had been following from the time it entered the national government.

During September 1944 events in Greece were moving fast. The Germans were withdrawing, harassed by ELAS and EDES, and the authority of the Greek

Government was gradually being established in the evacuated areas. On 3 October the Germans moved out of Patras and British troops, which had already landed or parachuted into Greece, entered the city in a very tense, delicate atmosphere due to the presence of a collaborationist Security Battalion as well as ELAS forces. Most members of the Government of National Unity, excepting those of EAM, had tacitly come to consider these units as an effective counter-weight to EAM. Hence their belated, reluctant, incomplete denunciation by the Greek Government on the eve of liberation⁴⁰.

The main concern of the British and Greek Governments, however, was to forestall the seizure of Athens by EAM/ELAS forces and for this purpose the British had organized Operation "Manna" ostensibly to liberate Athens.

The Germans had started to withdraw gradually from the city in early October 1944, continuously harassed by EAM. This organization had decided to cooperate fully with the British and Greek governments in the liberation of Greece. The British liaison officers who had secretly infiltrated Athens reported that there was no EAM activity to seize power during the last days before the liberation, when the city remained under German occupation in name only.

The last German units left Athens on 12 October 1944, with the people already demonstrating in the streets. On that evening Lt. Col. R. Sheppard, the British liaison officer with the Greek Government committee established in Athens, made a tour of the city's suburbs, including the EAM strongholds. He reported that there was perfect quiet everywhere, no unrest, and that the streets were almost empty. ELAS and other organizations were carrying out orderly patrols⁴¹.

Athens received the Greek Government on 18 October with frenzied enthusiasm. The December insurrection and the civil war with its profound and lasting repercussions were still in the future.

³⁸ F.O.371/43715 R12457 W.O.144/433 Eden Memorandum, 8 August 1944.

³⁹ F.O.371/43692 R15193 Ambassador Clark-Kerr (Moscow) to F.O. telegram 2530, 23 September 1944. Premier 3/211/7: W.P. (43)518 "Policy towards Greece".

⁴⁰ P. Papastratis, "George Kartalis in the period of occupation", in *George Kartalis and the Difficult Republic*, Society for the Study of Neohellenic Civilization and General Education, Athens, 1998, pp. 76–77 [in Greek].

⁴¹ F.O.371/43694 R16803 SOE to F.O. "The Situation in Athens", 15 October 1944.

■ Images captions

p.p. 50. Voula Papaioanou. Mess. Athens December 1941.

p.p. 53. Kostas Balafas. H. Colonel Napoleon Zervas, Epirus 1944.

p.p. 60. El coronel C.M. Woodhouse, Head of the Allied Military Mission with the Resistance.