



## Neither Fascist nor Authoritarian: The 4th of August Regime in Greece (1936-1941) and the Dynamics of Fascistisation in 1930s Europe

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### Abstract

The 4th of August regime in Greece under Ioannis Metaxas has long been treated by theories of ‘generic fascism’ as a minor example of authoritarianism or at most a case of failed fascism. This derives from the ideas that the Metaxas dictatorship did not originate from any original mass ‘fascist’ movement, lacked a genuinely fascist revolutionary ideological core and its figurehead came from a deeply conservative-military background. In addition, the regime balanced the introduction ‘from above’ of certain ‘fascist’ elements (inspired by the regimes in Germany, Italy and Portugal) with a pro-British foreign policy and a strong deference to both the Crown and the church/religion. Nevertheless, in this chapter, I argue that the 4th of August regime should be relocated firmly within the terrain of fascism studies. The establishment and consolidation of the regime in Greece reflected a much wider process of political and ideological convergence and hybridisation between anti-democratic/anti-liberal/anti-socialist conservative forces, on the one hand, and radical rightwing/fascist politics, on the other. It proved highly receptive to specific fascist themes and experiments (such as the single youth organisation, called EON), which it transplanted enthusiastically into its own hybrid of ‘radicalised’ conservatism. Although far less ideologically ‘revolutionary’ compared to Italian Fascism or German National Socialism, the 4th of August regime’s radicalisation between 1936 and 1941 marked a fundamental departure from conventional conservative-authoritarian politics in a direction charted by the broader fascist experience in Europe.

### Keywords

interwar Greece, Ioannis Metaxas, the ‘4th of August’ dictatorial regime, generic fascism, conservative-authoritarian politics, transnationalism, fascistisation

### The Case of Greece in Fascism Studies

Very little has been written on the topic of ‘Greek fascism’. For many scholars—and arguably the most authoritative—the words ‘Greek’ and ‘fascism’

presented together constitute a conceptual oxymoron. In many ways, Greece's political trajectory in the interwar period resembles Spain's (Mavrogordatos 1983; Sfikas 1999). Like Spain, Greece developed an unstable, deeply polarised political system leading to a series of coup d' états (mostly military led) throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The constitutional conflict between the republican and the monarchical forms of government had a long history dating back to the days of the so-called 'National Schism' of 1915-1917, a conflict between the elected government headed by Venizelos and the king that continued to poison relations between rival political parties on the right and left (Alivizatos 1995). Like in Spain, the result of this political instability and ideological polarization was very much in line with broader trends across the 'authoritarian half of Europe' (Mann 2004: 24ff). Following the coup d' état in August 1936, Greece's liberal-parliamentary system was suspended, left-wing organisations were persecuted, and a series of populist political and social experiments inspired by fascist regimes in Italy and Germany were implemented. This was accompanied by hyper-nationalist rhetoric, and a descent into the devastating experience of WW2. By April 1941 Greece had ceased to even remotely resemble a sovereign state: invaded by the German forces during Operation Marita, the country succumbed to the military superiority of the Wehrmacht military machine and was absorbed as a puppet (non-)state into the fascist 'new order'.

Yet, unlike Spain, Greece never witnessed a successful 'fascist' popular mobilisation on the basis of a genuine socio-political movement. In spite of its well-documented flaws, the interwar Greek party system dominated by the right-wing/monarchist Popular and the reformist/republican Liberal (Venizelist) parties continued to command the loyalties of the overwhelming majority of the electorate. Smaller parties did exist, spanning the entire political spectrum from the communist left to the more intransigent monarchical right, but a genuinely 'fascist' party (like the Spanish Falange) or even a strong movement directly inspired by foreign 'fascist' models was conspicuously absent. The gradual and painful descent into authoritarianism that started in the aftermath of the 1932 elections was punctuated by two unsuccessful pro-Venizelist (March 1933 and March 1935) and one successful anti-Venizelist (October 1935) coups. Yet the primary instigators and supporters of the constitutional deviation continued—and, indeed, strengthened—the country's foreign alignment with Britain at a time when Britain was entering the final stages of a lethal confrontation with the emerging Axis front. Spearheading the slide into dictatorship was former general-turned-politician Ioannis Metaxas, a staunch royalist, leader of a failed political party Eleftherofrones

(‘Free Opinion’ Party) in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Metaxas espoused a form of traditional ethno-patriotic nationalism, and, although he admired the German imperial military tradition, he sought to align the country with British rather than Italian or German interests. After many years as an obscure political figure, he was appointed war minister in January 1936, then prime minister in April, before orchestrating the final successful coup, backed by the monarchy, which awarded him full dictatorial power in August. His sudden death in January 1941—in the midst of a rather successful military campaign against Fascist Italy, which had attacked the country in October 1940 - left behind very little in terms of momentum for a further radicalization of the dictatorial regime that he had been so instrumental in setting up and shaping in the previous fifty or so months. The German attack and crushing defeat of the Greek armed forces in the spring of 1941 produced a result (the full alignment of the country with the Axis powers) that was neither prefigured by internal political developments nor caused by any domestic political agency (as was the case in countries like Norway and post-1944 Hungary).

With these points in mind, it is not surprising that theories of ‘generic fascism’<sup>2</sup> treat the Greek case as an aberrant, ‘failed’ or marginal approximation of fascism. Earlier and conceptually less sophisticated accounts of fascism and dictatorship in interwar Europe handled the subject in a cursory manner at best, highlighting the collapse of the democratic-parliamentary system and the installation of a dictatorial regime, but stopping short of defining the Metaxas regime itself as ‘fascist,’ both in terms of a social movement or political regime.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Few biographies of Metaxas exist. The work of Kallonas, *Ioannis Metaxas* (1938) was published during the dictatorship and is of limited heuristic value. For a recent biography in English, see Vatikiotis 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘generic fascism’ refers to an understanding and analysis of fascism as a broad ideological phenomenon with a series of national permutations that shared ‘core’ values even if they differed in other aspects of beliefs, political conduct, and style. Theories of ‘generic fascism’ were developed from the 1980s onwards as a reaction to (a) the tendency to arbitrarily and exclusively associate ‘fascism’ with Germany and/or Italy; and (b) the many general survey studies of the 1960s and 1970s that covered many case-studies without however providing a conceptual understanding of what ‘fascism’ stood for. ‘Generic fascism’ is more like an ‘ideal type’ (Griffin 1993) that distinguishes between ‘core’ (what Griffin calls the ‘ideological minimum’) and ‘secondary’ features of fascism, as well as between ‘diachronic’ and ‘period-specific’ features. It encourages a comparative approach to a series of case-studies that is sensitive both to critical similarities and important differences (e.g. race, territorial expansion, corporatism).

<sup>3</sup> It is indicative that the bulk of early comparative or survey accounts of interwar fascism do not cover or even mention Greece. See, for example, Eugen 1964; Hans and Weber 1966; Carsten

Recent and conceptually more elaborate accounts on the ideological essence of ‘generic fascism’ have raised the taxonomical bar to the point that the inclusion of Greece merely serves the purpose of illustrating a ‘grey zone’—in terms of its failure of democracy and the descent into authoritarian dictatorship—but still by no means as an example of successful ‘fascism’. The absence of key indicators and benchmarks deduced from the study of other, more widely accepted as ‘fascist’, parties and regimes in 1930’s Europe—such as the lack of an electoral and/or popular social base for Metaxas’ party and then regime—rendered the case of interwar Greece ill-suited or problematic for comparative fascism studies. At the same time, the growing consensus amongst scholars that ‘fascism’ as a form of rule was qualitatively different—more radical and revolutionary—from the more traditional forms of authoritarian (military or monarchist) dictatorships meant that the Metaxas regime could be explained away as a formulaic manifestation of the authoritarianism, the only possible concession being that it emulated a few and selected features of other regimes (some ‘fascist’, like the Italian and German varieties; other, like Salazar’s regime in Portugal, less clearly so).

In the last two decades, the elaboration of the conceptual core of fascism by scholars such as Roger Griffin, Stanley Payne, Martin Blinkhorn, and Michael Mann has brought the Metaxas regime into the comparative analysis fold. Yet this comes with a crucial caveat, as most generic interpretations regard the case of interwar Greece as an incomplete exercise in mimetic ‘fascistisation’, one with a limited character and strong conservative–authoritarian tendencies; hence, terms such as ‘authoritarian’ or qualifiers such as ‘abortive’ or ‘monarcho-’ are often applied to Metaxas’s Greece (Griffin 1993: 116–45; Mann 2004: 45–6; Payne 1996: Chapter 5 and 318–19).<sup>4</sup> With the exception of some earlier scholars who have not hesitated to analyse the regime as essentially ‘fascist’ (most of them reflecting a Marxist approach to the meaning of fascism) (Pouliopoulos 1958; Lindardatos 1975: 9–30; Psiroukis 1975), the majority of the accounts tend to view the Metaxas regime as essentially authoritarian, autocratic and dictatorial, all in generally conservative terms. While Thanos Veremis and David Close tend to emphasise the derivation of the

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1967; Mosse 1979; Laqueur 1979. The exception is Hayes (1973), who offers a chapter on Greece that however places the Metaxas regime together with the 1967–74 Colonels’ dictatorship. In Payne Stanley’s earlier work (1983), references to the Metaxas regime are extremely limited.

<sup>4</sup> Blinkhorn (2000) summarily dismisses Metaxas as “fascisant imitator” (110), although the early volume edited by him – (1990) – does cover Greece as a case-study.

regime and its leader from a conservative military tradition (Higham and Veremis 1993), Jon Kofas uses the terms ‘monarcho-fascism of one man’ and ‘caesarism’ to describe its oblique (but rather limited) similarities with the fascist paradigm as manifested elsewhere in Europe (Kofas 1983). In a recent study of the Greek interwar right, Spiros Marketos (2006) chronicles the penetration of ‘fascist’ ideas and programmes in Greece (mostly from Italy), but focuses on the period up to 1932 which does not include the Metaxas regime. Hagen Fleischer doubts the genuine ‘fascist’ origins of the Metaxist regime, analysing it as an old-style authoritarian dictatorship with a parallel attempt to emulate the ‘fascist style’—or as he put it, ‘fascist more in appearance than substance’ (Fleischer 2006). In a 1990 volume edited by Blinkhorn that offered a more nuanced approach to interwar relations between conservatives and fascists, Greece is analysed as a mostly authoritarian case (the Metaxas dictatorship included) with only very limited ‘fascist’ elements (Close 1990). A similar approach is taken by Mogens Pelt, who underscores the ideological and political limitations of the regime but nevertheless identifies Metaxas as a figure willing to ‘prepare Greece for a New Order in accordance with Hitler’s vision of a Europe under German leadership’ (Pelt 2002: 167). It did not help matters that leaders and ideologues of the regime consciously avoided using the term ‘fascism’ to describe their worldview or political objectives, opting instead for the more ambiguous (at the time) qualifier ‘totalitarian’. Overall, the consensus among scholars has been that the inclusion of Greece as a case study could not contribute anything to existing theories of ‘generic’ or comparative ‘fascism’ studies. A traditional ‘authoritarian’ dictatorship installed ‘from above’, short-lived and arguably stillborn, barely populist, with a limited horizon of radical change, and unsupported by any significant social movement, the Metaxas regime was branded as decidedly ‘non-fascist’ or even treated as irrelevant to the discussion of interwar fascism (Griffin 1993: 122; Payne 1997: 317–40; Andricopoulos 1980).<sup>5</sup>

### **Greece in the 1930s: Opportunities for and Limits of Political Departure**

Nevertheless, the period between the defeat of the Liberal Party in the 1932 elections and the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war in October 1940 constituted a period of dynamic and unpredictable political transformation that

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<sup>5</sup> It is indicative that in Morgan (2002) there is not a single mention of the Metaxas regime.

charted a radical departure with a number of crucial peculiarities and caveats that determined (and limited) the horizon of political change (Roberts 2006). Although Greece belongs to a limited group of countries that experienced dictatorial government with only limited 'fascist' elements (Payne 1997: 468-9; Kallis 2000), this regime did not evolve in a genuinely 'fascist' direction because Metaxas' party (not ideologically 'fascist' in the first place) never broke free of its elitist, conservative and largely marginal role in the Greek politics of the 1930s to embrace and mobilise broader social and/or electoral constituencies. Then, even if the 1936 Metaxas coup represented the most 'radical' rightist solution to the liberal-parliamentary deadlock in Greece, the ideological profile of its leader and the political conditions in which the 4th of August regime (named after the date of Metaxas' final coup d'état) was established, ensured that a radical departure from conventional policy goals pursued by the conservative-royalist-military establishment since the early 1930s was neither possible nor desired by the leader of the Greek New State or by the monarchical and military sponsors of the new regime. Furthermore, although Metaxas carefully fashioned himself as the gifted leader of a new kind of regime—one promising unity and national regeneration after decades of paralysing ideological division between the two established parties, his vision appeared as little more than a forced return to a status quo ante. He supported a restoration of the monarchy, an aggressive reversal of a series of liberal political and social experiments associated with Venizelos' person and vision, and the immediate dissolution of a flawed and allegedly unworkable party system. His antidote to the upheaval of the preceding period was based on the rhetoric of a more conventional kind of organic unity of the nation, fused with traditional pillars of Greek society involving the monarchy, the church and the military (Woodhouse 1984: 231ff). Simply, Metaxas fancied himself as a politician whose mission was to forge a decidedly nationalist 'third way' in Greek politics as a remedy for the country's perceived decadence. But his vision had largely been forged in the difficult years of World War One and shaped in the fringes of the conservative anti-Venizelist political platform. He was a radical of sorts, a self-styled outsider but in no way a revolutionary.

These Greek 'peculiarities' not only sealed the fate of the flawed liberal-parliamentary system in the second half of the 1930s but also set the parameters for, and the limits of, a particular form of dictatorial regime that replaced it. This regime oscillated between its conservative-authoritarian ideological origins and the allure of organisational and ideological elements pioneered by 'fascist' regimes in Europe, such as in Italy, Germany and Portugal (Kallis 2000: 89, 94-5, 97; Andricopoulos 1980: 568-84; Linardatos 1975:

Chapter 2). The 4th of August regime, as I have argued elsewhere, remains a multiple paradox in the political history of interwar Europe (Kallis 2003). As it did not involve any genuine ‘fascist’ popular or party constituency, it fails to tick the checklists of all major theories of ‘generic fascism’—whether those focusing on the ingredients of a distinct ideological vision of radical (indeed ‘revolutionary’) transformation (Eatwell 1996) or those that adopt a more historical approach to the transformation of a fascist party into a ‘fascist’ regime.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the specific context and process of its establishment (‘co-opting from above’) meant that it had to operate into a de facto polycentric structure of power, in which Metaxas was expected to act in line with the wishes of the monarchy and the military. Yet, the ‘4th of August’ regime developed into a ‘hybrid’ political phenomenon, fusing new radical ideas into an otherwise seemingly conservative-authoritarian ideological core. As Pelt noted, ‘Metaxas’s reliance on certain aspects of National Socialism and [F]ascism’ amounted to much more than cynical political opportunism; instead it constituted one expression of a wider realignment of large sections of the European interwar right with more ‘radical’ political prescriptions (Pelt 2002: 167). I have suggested elsewhere that fascist regimes (including the ‘paradigmatic’ ones in Italy and Germany) emerged not in a political vacuum but through processes of ideological and—perhaps more importantly—political hybridisation between radicalising conservative-authoritarian and radical ‘fascist’ constituencies. While in some cases the influence of the latter component gathered momentum (in the absence of the failure of intended checks) and altered the fundamental parameters of political rule in particular countries in ways not previously experienced or envisaged, in the majority of cases the dynamics of hybridisation were more or less successfully enclosed in notably less radical political containers that either limited its horizon or channelled it towards the attainment of more limited political goals. I do, however, identify a further scenario of hybridisation, namely

(selective and deliberate) emulation of ‘fascist’ organisational, political or even ideological elements from above essentially from within the existing elite configuration -, either as a pre-emptive move designed to neutralize indigenous fascist movements, or even in the absence of such elements. The adoption of specific ‘fascist’ attributes by figures of the

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<sup>6</sup> For an interesting theory of fascism that reverses the emphasis of intellectual origins and ideology of the so-called ‘culturalist’ approach and focuses more heavily on the regime-phase of fascism, see Paxton 2004, largely based on his earlier “The Five Stages of Fascism” (1998). Still, even in this approach, any reference to the Metaxas regime remains largely extraneous to the core debate on ‘fascism’.

conservative establishment or traditional institutional pillars of the state... amounted to what many commentators have described as ‘fascism without movement’, in the sense that there was either no such movement that was politically active (Greece; Spain in the 1920s) or it was marginalized and suppressed by the authoritarian apparatus of the state (for example, Preto’s National Syndicalists in Portugal targeted by Salazar; the Romanian Iron Guard suppressed initially by King Carol and later by Antonescu). In all these cases, ‘fascist’ political, ideological, organisational, and liturgical elements were appropriated and/or adapted by traditional conservative elites either to strengthen an already instituted authoritarian, anti-liberal/socialist regime... or to further legitimize the shift from a flawed liberal system to dictatorship (as happened in Greece in 1936 and in Spain in the 1920s under Primo de Rivera)—without risking power sharing or the handing over of the leadership to outsiders (as happened in Germany and Italy). (Kallis 2003: 230-1.) [emphasis added].<sup>7</sup>

Even this notion of ‘hybridisation from above’ is problematic in the Greek case because of the absence of a native fascist political constituency. However, the repositioning of the conservative right closer to a model of populist, increasingly radical (particularly in its opposition to liberalism and socialism, as well as in its embrace of nationalism), and activist politics pioneered in Italy after 1922 and confirmed in Germany after 1933 gathered critical momentum in the 1920s before becoming a widespread political norm in the 1930s. In his *Fascism and the Right*, Martin Blinkhorn underlined

the need to recognize the encouragement that Fascist and Nazi ‘successes’ gave to authoritarians elsewhere in interwar Europe who, in the strict ‘ideological’ sense of the term, were not fascists themselves. [...] Not only did this growing, Italian- and German-induced sense that Europe’s future was ‘fascist’ assist the overthrow of many interwar European democracies, but the character and conduct of many of the authoritarian regimes then established was strongly if selectively influenced by their leaders’ and architects’ interpretation of the Italian and/or German reality (Blinkhorn 2000: 108-9).

Blinkhorn concluded by noting that ‘a “fascist” regime ... can be established in a variety of ways, of which impulsion from a powerful fascist movement is only one’. For him, placing ‘fascism’ and ‘authoritarianism’ at the two extremes of a litmus test for the interwar right points to a kind of dualism that is difficult to sustain in ideal-typical terms, let alone in the nebulous political space of the interwar period. In addition, Blinkhorn analysed the striking trend towards anti-liberal, anti-socialist authoritarian-dictatorial government in interwar Europe as the critical intersection of two developments: on the one

<sup>7)</sup> For Salazar’s Portugal see the seminar monograph by Costa Pinto 2000: 1–41. For an account of the earlier dictatorship by Primo de Rivera in Spain (as well as the use of the term ‘fascism from above’) see Ben-Ami (1983).



hand, the hardening of the conservative right's attitude towards democracy/liberalism and socialism to the point of violently attacking and dismantling previously untouchable (at least in theory) aspects of the political order; on the other hand, the moulding of this radicalisation closer and closer to the (at that time) unfolding, dynamic example of 'fascism' as an experience of political regime. In all these scenarios, the growing fascination with, and allure of, the political experiments carried out in Fascist Italy and/or Nazi Germany are recognised as a primary source of transnational influence—sometimes valorised and adapted by native 'fascist' constituencies but often imported (and again adapted or selected) 'from above', in the absence of, or pre-emptive such constituencies.

The case of the Metaxas regime clearly fits the latter scenario; this kind of semi-authoritarian/semi-fascist regimes which lack a genuine social dynamic or a 'revolutionary' ideological profile comes very close to what Roger Griffin has called 'para-fascism'. In his *Nature of Fascism* (1993) Griffin rejected the terms 'fascistised' or 'fascisant' to describe this particular product of hybridisation, perhaps in order to underline the qualitative difference (and ostensibly irreconcilable gap) between 'fascism' (as ideal-type) and 'para-fascism'. For him, as well as for the majority of 'generic' fascism scholars, the latter term designates a space of political failure—either to achieve a 'fascist' potential or to formulate it in the first place (Griffin 1993: 120ff). This space had all the markings of a residual category—a metaphorical dumping ground for 'failed', 'abortive' or 'not quite' fascisms. Like all residual categories, however, it raises as many complex questions about what it is as the ones that it allegedly attempts to settle by focusing on what it is not (Kallis 2003).

### **Re-Locating Metaxas' Regime within Fascism Studies: Rebirth, a New Beginning, and the Sense of Irreversible Transformation**

My attempt to (re)locate the 4th of August regime firmly within the terrain of 'generic' fascism studies starts from two main premises. First, although it lacked a genuinely 'revolutionary' ideological core, the regime proved highly receptive to specific 'fascist' themes that it then grafted on its distinct hybrid of radicalised and radicalising conservatism in a way that marked a clear departure from its own ideological origins. Second, its political consolidation—shortlived though it turned out to be due to external circumstances—can be understood as the Greek chapter of a much wider narrative of transforming (and radicalising) the content and context of interwar anti-democratic, anti-liberal, and anti-communist politics in a way that underlines the impact of the

political experiments that were unfolding at the time in Italy, Germany, and certain other European countries. The regime was the product of a growing, transnational and increasingly internationally inspired process of political and in some cases ideological convergence between anti-democratic conservative and radical right-wing/fascist politics. On the one hand, movements and parties framed their own radicalising momentum under the influence of ‘fascist’ movements (and particularly those that came to power), mirroring and adapting (rather than simply ‘apeing’) their stylistic, organisational, and political-ideological facets. On the other hand, rightist authoritarian regimes responded to the radicalising impetus that appeared to set the political tone across the continent in line with certain political precedents set by ‘fascist’ movements and regimes elsewhere. In fact, the relatively short life span of the Metaxas regime raises further questions as to what would have happened if its figurehead had not died in January 1941 or if Greece had not been attacked by Fascist Italy and eventually conquered by Nazi Germany. For there were indications during the last years of the 1930s that the ‘4th of August’ regime was implementing, or at least planning for, some political and socio-economic experiments that pointed well beyond its alleged horizon of a return to the pre-National Schism status quo and towards certain trademark ‘fascist’ novelties.

Metaxas was not ‘fascist,’ by either conviction or political provenance. His conservative background, his mainstream religiosity, his conventional anti-parliamentarian/ anti-liberal/anti-communist outlook, his unreserved loyalty to the crown and his elite-driven (not popular) legitimacy smacked of ordinary, patrician authoritarianism. He was deeply impressed, however, by the fascist path to a new conception of politics, state, and society, as well as by its commitment to ending once and for all the liberal and socialist paradigms, replacing them with a ‘holistic third-way’ new brand of trans-class nationalist and populist rhetoric, and a highly ritualistic, emotive style of politics (Souroulis 2001).<sup>8</sup> All these prescriptions suited perfectly his vision of a post-Venizelist ‘transformation’ (*metavoli*, as he called it) in Greek politics and society, as well as his aura as a political ‘outsider’ who represented a new beginning in the country’s political history. He showed particular interest in the constitutional and social experiments introduced by Salazar in Portugal during the 1930s—particularly the concept of the ‘New State’ (Costa Pinto 2000: Chapter 4), which constituted one of the central ideological discourses for his

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<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of fascism as a ‘holistic third-way phenomenon’ see Eatwell 1995.

own regime. In 1937 he hastened to communicate to the Portuguese dictator his admiration for and interest in his political ideas.<sup>9</sup> He also authorised the detailed study of the Portuguese Estado Novo as a template for the future revision of the Greek constitution. The two official ideologues of the ‘4th of August’, Georgios Mantzoufas and Nikolaos Koumaros, wrote extensively on the principles of Metaxas’s Neon Kratos (or ‘New State’), which was also the name given to one of the regime’s official periodicals. Mantzoufas, in particular, produced a summary statement on the ideological orientation of the 4th of August transformation, in which he identified family, nation (in its dual dimension as ethnic-cultural *ethnos* and ‘racial’-historical *phyle*), Christian-Orthodox religion/church, and Greek culture as the founding principles of the ‘national transformation’ effected by the regime (Koumaros 1938).<sup>10</sup> Metaxas now saw Greece aligned with the other (‘totalitarian’, in his words) regimes (Germany, Italy, but also, interestingly, the Soviet Union) that were fundamentally opposed to the democratic model. In his view, there was no other alternative in the highly polarised ideological–political landscape of interwar Europe. While he had to accept the realistic assessment that Greece’s strategic interests could not be served by antagonising the British empire, he also actively promoted unprecedented economic and military ties with Nazi Germany.<sup>11</sup> Even after the Italian attack in October 1940 he attempted to avoid political commitments that would alienate Hitler’s regime and to maintain the appearance of a policy of equidistance towards the two warring coalitions (Pelt 2002: 152–6, 162–6). Even in his dealings with Fascist Italy, either in bilateral terms or through the Balkan Entente (an organisation established in 1934 as a defensive pact between Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania against the revisionist ambitions of Bulgaria), he sought to express his desire for peaceful co-existence in spite of his (and other partners in the Balkans)

<sup>9</sup> Greek National Archives (GNA), F44/024 (12.12.37, the document is in bad condition, without information about the author or recipient but it makes clear that Metaxas authorised the enthusiastic statement about Salazar’s political system).

<sup>10</sup> For further information on the journal *Neon Kratos*, see Kokkinos (1989); Mantzoufas (1938); and Sarandis (1993).

<sup>11</sup> Historical Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry (HAGFM), 13638/A/11/3 (9.6.1939, reports on the economic inroads made by Germany in Greece); 8783/A/11/3 (2.10.1939, German reports and publications providing data that prove the spectacular increase of German economic ties with Greece after 1936).

<sup>12</sup> HAGFM, 8083/A/1-1/4 (18.4.1938, Metaxas to Italian Government, Report on the Meeting of the Balkan Entente, 2.1938 Ankara). The report noted that ‘the question of [the Italian conquest of] Ethiopia has become inexistent for the Balkan Entente...’

growing alarm at Mussolini's expansionist designs.<sup>12</sup> In fact, he came very close to achieving a diplomatic agreement with Fascist Italy in 1938; and he continued, privately, to vent his frustration over Mussolini's increasingly hostile attitude that had pushed him into an alignment with Britain, which he appeared to accept somewhat grudgingly. Therefore, Metaxas' ambivalent, circumscribed, and often seemingly contradictory attitude toward the two 'fascist' regimes in the late 1930s was perhaps conditioned by an acute, highly pragmatic awareness of the complex geopolitical context in which his regime operated. Even so, there is ample evidence that he also viewed what the two regimes represented politically as a source of inspiration in the context of his professed desire to restructure Greece's allegedly broken political system and to revive its national spiritual élan.

Nevertheless, Metaxas and his regime's ideologues expended considerable intellectual energy emphasising how the 4th of August regime was rooted in Greek traditions and history and not an imitation of foreign ideas and practices.<sup>13</sup> As a conservative nationalist, Metaxas wished to marry fascism's contemporary, 'totalitarian' project with the legacy of iron discipline found in ancient Sparta and in the profound religiosity of the medieval Byzantine era. He referred to this unique personal vision as the 'Third Hellenic Civilisation'—following the ancient Greek and Byzantine empires—and concluded with this appeal:

Let not our [Greek] previous civilisations intimidate you ... You will perfect [the Hellenic Civilisation] ... And you, modern Greeks, do you not have the ambition to create your own civilisation derived from these two other civilisations [ancient and medieval Greek]? Do you not like such a supreme ideal and a paramount objective? (Linardatos 1975: 55).

The derivation of the title of this project from similar 'palingenetic' visions of the 'Third Reich' or 'Third Rome' (all based on the revival of a glorious historic inheritance and national precedent) is striking. Nevertheless, the Third Hellenic Civilisation was also permeated by a host of particular autochthonous ideas (Carabott 2003). The core of this vision was inhabited by a strong reverence for religion—for Orthodox Christianity—and the historic legacies of the Byzantine Empire (Clogg 1988). Metaxas celebrated the Orthodox Christian heritage of the modern Greek state—a legacy that suggested a cultural continuity from the medieval period to the twentieth

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<sup>13</sup> Metaxas (1969), Vol. I, Speech at Komotini, 7.10.1936, 53–5, in which he emphasises the Greek historical precedents of many of his (and, by implication, of even the 'fascist' regimes') current policies.

century, but also helped modern Greek nationalism to reconstruct an idea of cultural specificity. He had repeatedly spoken about the importance of the Orthodox religion and the institution of the church in the spiritual regeneration of modern Greek society. He appealed to religion as a means for recapturing the ineliminable core of Greek identity after three decades of allegedly corrupting modernisation. Thus, he turned to Orthodoxy as both the figurative moral guardian of the ‘Hellenic soul’ (*elliniki psichi*) throughout the centuries and a contemporary institution capable of assisting his project of forging a new collective spiritual conscience among modern Greeks.

According to Metaxas, church and state were united in an effort to safeguard the continuity of the nation from the perceived decadence of modern society. He identified the triptych of liberalism–communism–secularism as the primary cause of national decline, and saw religion and church as invaluable allies in his efforts to instill a new morality in the modern Greek nation. Apart from relying heavily on religious rituals and symbols in the everyday function of his regime, and apart from adopting the discourse of ‘Helleno-Orthodoxy’ as the crucial identifier of the Greek nation, Metaxas promoted an identification of religion and church with the historical and spiritual capital of the Greek nation throughout the centuries. His belief in a new, all-embracing ‘ethical’ etatism as the vessel for the most authentic ‘historical consciousness’ of the Greek nation and as the sole expression of ‘national will’ intersected with his conviction that only Orthodox religion and the established church could guarantee and underpin the ethical transformation of Greek society. Apart from elevating Orthodoxy to a central element in his (and his regime’s) ideological discourse, Metaxas afforded the institutional Greek church a more important role in the education and moral guidance of the nation during the five years of the 4th of August Regime. The church responded to this call with enthusiasm, seizing the opportunity to consolidate its social position and political role. This tendency—symbolically represented by the constitutional unity of church and state in the modern Greek state (Konidaris 2003; Mouzelis 1978)—allowed the Greek Orthodox Church to play a disproportionately influential role in Greek politics and popular culture, one that outlasted Metaxas’s dictatorship and remains evident today (Kallis 2007).

Therefore, the conjunction of ‘nation’ (*ethnos/phyle*), ‘fatherland’ (*patris*) and ‘religion’ (*thriskia*) formed the ideological nucleus of the 4th of August regime’s vision of epoch-defining national regeneration. To be sure, it was by no means a hugely innovative ideological platform; the promise of national ‘regeneration’ had essentially underpinned the political discourse of every Greek government since the mid-nineteenth century, particularly in relation

to the pursuit of the Megali Idea. Yet Metaxas fully subscribed to the notion that developments in Greece were reflecting a wider political and social transformation already underway across the continent. By 1934 he had declared the liberal-parliamentary model not only detrimental to the Greek national interest but claimed it had been made irrelevant by history. As he put it, ‘for us the problem is not how we will remain a parliamentary system but how we will escape from it—through the door of communism or through that of the national state’ (Linardatos 1975: 10). By identifying parliamentary democracy as the primary cause of alleged national decadence (he associated it both with the National Schism, with the conflict between monarchists and republicans, with the traumatic national ‘catastrophe’ in Anatolia in the war with Turkey in 1922, and with the ‘communist threat’), he used the establishment of the dictatorship as the first, critical stage of an active, wholesale ‘revolt against decadence’ and a ‘new beginning’ in the history of modern Greece.

This sense of ‘new beginning’ in the Metaxas worldview may have been far more modest in its pace and ambition than the more ‘revolutionary’ sense of rupture with the (recent) past put forward by the two major fascist regimes of the time. Its main goal remained the burying of the divisive legacy of the 1915–1917 National Schism, the drastic reversal of the socio-political changes introduced under the leadership of Venizelos, and the overcoming of the mood of national humiliation that paralysed Greek society in the aftermath of the defeat in the 1920–1922 Greek–Turkish war. But the leader of the 4th of August regime was capable of marrying his fairly traditional and conservative socio-political vision with an acute awareness of modern techniques of social mobilisation pioneered elsewhere at the time. His fierce attack on individualism (which he regarded as both lethally divisive and egotistical) was combined with support for what he called ‘disciplined freedom’, in which individuals find an allegedly superior sense of liberty through their active participation in the national community. The regime’s concerted efforts to establish a new framework for controlled social mobilisation and education—two indisputable priorities that yielded immediate tangible results<sup>14</sup>—betrayed an acknowledgement that the true ‘national transformation’ could only be achieved through the forging of a new collective consciousness, starting from the individual and the family before moving seamlessly through the stages and institutions of socialisation (schools and universities, leisure organisations, work organisations).

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<sup>14</sup> Petrakis (2006); Pavlidou (2007); Iordachi (2004).

**National Youth Organisation (Ethniki Organosis Neoleas, EON): The Laboratory of ‘Fascistisation’**

In this context, the Metaxas regime identified the youth as the primary vehicle of a lasting political and spiritual ‘transformation’. The founding and enthusiastic promotion of the National Youth Organisation (Ethniki Organosis Neoleas, or EON) in October 1936 established the much-needed ‘total’ ideological and political incubator for a new generation steeped in the ideals of an organic ‘Helleno-Christian’ collective consciousness. (Machaira 1987; Kofas 1983: 83–97; Rigos 1997; Linardatos 1975: 151–203). Metaxas worked hard and with unwavering determination to establish EON as the only youth organisation in Greek society, with obligatory membership for all ‘Greek’ youth (excluding members of ethnic and religious minorities) from the age of at least eight until twenty or even twenty-five. In his address to the first official EON local section in December 1937, the leader of the 4th of August Regime once again stated his passionate belief that ‘national regeneration depended on the preparation of the whole young generation’.<sup>15</sup> In setting up EON the regime made extensive use of the German and Italian experience with similar groups (Hitlerjugend, Ballila and so forth). This was Metaxas’s laboratory for a future mass social constituency of devoted followers that simply did not exist in the late 1930s; it was the crucial device for pursuing his experiment in ‘fascism from above’, and for laying the foundations for the future enduring ‘fascistisation’ of Greek society. The importance, symbolic and political, that the dictator attributed to this organisation is apparent in the highly emotive language with which he described his plans for ‘my own EON ... my own child’:<sup>16</sup>

You need to know that EON is a state institution, my own creation, on which I have put my biggest hopes for the future of this country... On this matter [EON], gentlemen, I am determined to act against any form of reaction (Dimaras 1971: 189–90).

For different reasons, the king’s entourage, church elites and the military leadership viewed this initiative with considerable skepticism. The plan entailed the forced dissolution of a number of prestigious, long-established groups, such as the (internationalist) Christian Brotherhoods (HAN/HANTH,

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<sup>15</sup> Metaxas (1969): Address to the members of the EON Athens section, 31.12.193, 312–13; and Speech to EON members, 29.12.1938, 435–7.

<sup>16</sup> GNA, Metaxas Archive, F/119/003 (12.11.1940: Metaxas speech to members of the Greek Academy).

HEN, founded in the early 1920s), student organisations and the scout movement (*Soma Ellinon Proskopon*, established in 1910–1912). Forcing the dissolution of the scouts in particular, however, proved an extremely sensitive political issue. The heir to the throne, Prince Paul, had taken a strong personal interest in the scout organisation, acting as its honorary figurehead. The church felt very protective of its youth organisations and their autonomous educational activities. As for the armed forces, they feared a future exploitation of EON by Metaxas as the basis for a paramilitary organisation (like the Hitlerjugend in Nazi Germany). However exaggerated such fears may have been in the late 1930s, or with the benefit of hindsight, they revealed a justifiable unease with some of Metaxas's more radical and long-term goals. The initial disagreement with the palace over the dissolution of the scout movement escalated into a real political bout over prestige and influence when Metaxas proceeded with his plans to abolish all other youth organisations, while simultaneously imposing the condition of obligatory EON membership for all children and young people.

Tensions with regard to EON continued in 1938, with Prince Paul using every opportunity to deride the regime's plans for the new organisation. At the same time, opposition to EON and to Metaxas' authority also came from within the government. The minister of education, Konstantinos Georgakopoulos, was known to have reservations about EON's all-embracing educational activities that impinged upon state schools, religious education and even family jurisdiction. Eventually Metaxas forced Georgakopoulos to resign and took over the Portfolio of Education himself. This was a key turning point, interpreted by the royalist establishment as evidence of Metaxas' unwavering position on the matter (and another indication of EON's significance in the general's long-term plans for the 'transformation' of Greek society). In early December 1938, the two parties agreed on a compromise: the palace consented to the 'voluntary' dissolution of all traditional youth groups and satisfied Metaxas' desire to see Prince Paul as 'General Leader' of EON (with the royal princesses leading the girls' equivalent organisations). But, contrary to the wishes of many within the monarchical circles and the military, EON continued to grow—both in membership and as an umbrella organisation for every kind of youth activity. Barely a year after the difficult compromise with the monarchy, Metaxas decided to incorporate the regime's only real, autonomous para-military organisation, the Work Battalions (*Tagmata Ergasias*), into the youth organization. This decision was in some ways a political retreat for the regime, as the Work Battalions had been instituted in order to turn unemployed young men into activist squads at the service of the regime, not



dissimilar to organisations such as the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) in Germany and the *Squadristo* in Italy (for example, the members of the organisation often greeted Metaxas with the ‘fascist salute’). However, their absorption into EON strengthened the latter’s function as a broad political base for mobilising fanatical support for the regime while largely maintaining their other use as a ‘praetorian guard’ and a network of informers (Petrakis 2006: 24; Kofas 1983: 96–97).

The establishment and (contested but successful) expansion of EON mirrored the regime’s overall political consolidation from 1936 to 1941. As a devout royalist and Christian with strong ties to the army, Metaxas’ rapid ascendance in 1935–1936 owed much to the support and often sponsorship from these sources of power. The backing of the monarchy in particular was crucial for the dizzying succession of political promotions that saw Metaxas rise from obscurity to the first minister, then prime minister and, finally, dictator with ‘emergency’ powers. With such high-profile political sponsorship and lack of popular support for Metaxas himself, the consolidation of the dictatorship proceeded at a cautious pace and in a mostly cooperative fashion between the country’s traditional sources of power (Kallis 2000). Yet, by 1938 Metaxas felt powerful enough to pick multiple fights with his sponsors in order to foster the development of EON—and win them over in the end. His private diaries recorded his sense of political confidence and his determination to stamp out any form of opposition to his rule, wherever it came from. From then on, Metaxas noted with satisfaction, he could devote all his energies to ‘his EON’.<sup>17</sup>

In the end, EON was conceived by Metaxas as a genuinely ‘totalitarian’ device for social engineering, and for creating a new, extensive, and enduring ‘charismatic’ constituency of support for the regime. It was in many ways a response to his (and his party’s) earlier failure to penetrate the deeply polarised electorate around two main parties. By the end of the 1930s, EON still looked like a heavily managed, imposed rather than spontaneous preparatory step towards the creation of a truly ‘charismatic community’ (*Gemeinde* in Weberian terms). Nevertheless, it was a necessary step in this direction, supported by carefully choreographed liturgies of Metaxas’ own ‘leadership cult’. In the four years of its existence, EON gradually expanded its functions and jurisdictions to include organisation of leisure and sports, media production, voluntary work organizations, and paramilitary groups. Given that once in power

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<sup>17</sup> Metaxas (1936), entry for 15.12.1938.

Metaxas shied away from organising a mass single-party, EON was founded more than simply to compensate for this lack: it was a mass social movement in-the-making, shaped through the totalitarian indoctrination of a younger generation unaffected by the deeply divisive political legacy of the previous decades. For Metaxas, this was the only conceivable strategy for both overcoming the political ‘schism’ that had shaped (and split down the middle) an entire generation of politicians and voters, and for producing a truly organic mass base of popular support and controlled mobilisation in favour of his regime. With more than 600,000 members—and with the upper, probably exaggerated estimate reaching one million (Lindardatos 1975: 169)—by the outbreak of the war, EON was a truly ‘totalitarian’, heavily monitored and militarised institution that served Metaxas’ long-term ambitions regarding his envisioned ‘transformation’ of Greek society.

### **Intentions versus Limits: The 4th of August Regime’s Political Horizon**

There were further similar ‘statements of purpose’ that demonstrate the regime’s desire to subscribe to ‘fascist’ contemporary political experiments elsewhere in the continent, albeit less successfully translated into concrete political action during the regime’s limited life span. For a leader who lacked any coherent ideological profile prior to August 1936—and indeed capitalised on his allegedly ‘a-political’ stance (Petrakis 2006: Chapter 2)—as prime minister Metaxas quickly formulated a platform based on easily detectible fascist rhetoric. In addition to the comprehensive political container of the ‘New State’, the regime embarked on a programme of ‘horizontal’ restructuring of economic and syndicalist relations in a pattern that revealed the influence of the Italian Fascist experiments with corporatism.<sup>18</sup> As with the Italian case, expansive rhetoric was not matched by any lasting transformations beyond an initial declaration by the Finance minister Konstantinos Zavitsianos in the autumn of 1936. By 1939 any allusions to the corporatist reshaping of economic relations had disappeared from the regime’s official rhetoric.

Much more successful was the reorganisation of the state’s political surveillance organisations and activities. The new Ministry of Press and Tourism under Theologos Nikoloudis developed quickly into a pervasive mechanism of social, political, and cultural supervision, complemented by a special

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<sup>18</sup> HAGFM, 13099/A/10/3 (report on the positive reception of Metaxas’ corporatist experiments in Fascist Italy).

Censorship Committee and by the active persecution of any form of dissent by the (also reorganised) police and the Ministry for Public Security. The person in charge of the latter institution, former army officer Konstantinos Maniadakis, explicitly stated that the ‘4th of August’ regime goals were, first, ‘purging [society] from the “pests” and “weeds”’, and then ‘handing-over of responsibility for the nation’ to the generation forged in the ranks of EON (Petrakis 2006: 78). The ‘purge’ was pursued with ruthless determination as a necessary precondition for a new, ‘fertile’ (as Maniadakis put it) national condition to stave off the prospect of ‘falling down the precipice’ (Carabott 2003: 28; Panourgia 2007: 395–8). But the regime would maintain its heavy-handed approach to secure the foundations of the *metavoli* until a new, wholly reformed generation of ‘new’ men and women would arise from the ranks of EON and take over the role of a national and spiritual vanguard. The critical investment in EON reflected the conviction that it could effectively forge that ‘new man’ over time and thus render the ‘transformation’ of August 1936 an irreversible, dynamic, and self-sustaining ‘total’ project—a ‘cosmo-theory and a system... [and] not a parenthesis’ (Petrakis 2006: 33).

Such nebulous ambitions aside, it is now clear that Metaxas and some of his closest colleagues were genuinely fascinated with ‘fascist’ experiments—mostly from Germany and Portugal. The influence of Salazar’s corporatist ‘new state’ has already been discussed above. It is interesting, nevertheless, to note that as late as January 1941 the new ambassador to Lisbon, Kimon Kollias, was given explicit instructions to express to both Portugal’s president Carmona and to Salazar himself ‘the admiration [of the Greek regime] for the regeneration project carried out in Portugal’ and ‘the strong interest with which Metaxas is following the model of governance [in Portugal], which is very similar to the one in Greece’.<sup>19</sup> But there was also genuine interest in, and (qualified) admiration for, the German National Socialist regime. Maniadakis was an enthusiastic supporter of the National Socialist regime and admirer of its effective control over left-wing organisations. He initiated high-level contacts with German officials in order to promote cooperation with what he perceived as a European-wide ‘anti-communist mission’, including the then new Nazi Minister of the Interior, Heinrich Himmler. Metaxas had been indirectly dealing with the Nazi regime since 1936, negotiating the extension of economic ties and Greece’s tactful alignment with the German *Grossraumwirtschaft* bloc emerging in southern Europe. His German interlocutors recognised the delicacy of his position. As the German consul in Thessaloniki noted in

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<sup>19</sup> HAGFM, 5548/A/13/2/3 (folder 22) (Kimon Kollas, 7.1.1941).

January 1939, it was indeed difficult to understand how the king and Metaxas could still work together, given that ‘the former is described as English while the latter as sympathetically inclined towards the [Axis] countries’. Nevertheless, the consul was convinced that Metaxas was ‘in a very difficult position because he is forced to follow a different [pro-British] policy against his own wishes’.<sup>20</sup>

Pelt also notes at least one episode in which Metaxas was rumoured to have confided to Joseph Goebbels that he was such an admirer of the National Socialist regime and intent on emulating many of its facets in Greece (Pelt 2002: 156). While it is true that Metaxas was very careful not to antagonise either the monarchy or its pro-British foreign policy orientation until well into 1937, there was a palpable increase in his self-confidence in the 1938–1939 period, with the regime often bypassing formal channels of negotiation with Germany or the sanction of the palace. The timing of this change does coincide with the hardening of Metaxas’ attitude with regard to EON and his growing self-confidence regarding both the monarchy and the church (Kallis 2007: 239–40). Faced with increasing pressure from Nazi officials to clarify the regime’s international stance, Metaxas gave his personal authorisation to the country’s ambassador in Berlin to inform Goebbels that ‘foreign policy is the exclusive responsibility of the government and not of the crown’.<sup>21</sup> It was a risky course of action that may have left the Germans convinced of the sincerity of his intentions but alarmed pro-Entente circles both within Greece and in Britain. Eventually by 1939–40, such political overtures to Nazi Germany had to be abandoned in the face of seismic international developments—namely, the outbreak of the war and finally Italy’s attack on Greece. Still, Metaxas’ determination to actively pursue closer ties with Hitler’s regime in the late 1930s, coupled with his private or confidential statements of long-term geopolitical vision, appear to have been genuine and not simply the result of sheer political opportunism and calculation as often believed.

To compensate for his chronic weaknesses as political communicator, the regime’s propaganda institutions and organisations made a concerted effort to promote the image of Metaxas as a ‘charismatic’ leader. Prior to 1936 his cold, patrician style, lack of genuine personal charisma, and limited appeal both to the conservative party elite and electorate had reduced him to a marginal, if uncompromising figure of the anti-Venizelist camp. Not only did he not seek

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<sup>20</sup> HAGFM, 1600/A/11/6 (24.1.1939, Report by General Director of Foreign Citizens, Ap. Skouras).

<sup>21</sup> GNA, Metaxas Archive, F30/038-41 (6/7.3.39: Ragkavis to Metaxas; 6.3.39: Metaxas to Ragkavis).

to cultivate a ‘personality cult’ amongst his party followers but, once in power, he showed little interest in setting up a single party as his very own ‘charismatic community’. To put it differently, Metaxas was an old-style politician of a bygone generation that had increasing problems understanding, and appealing to, the Greeks of the 1930s. His own political party, ‘Free Opinion’ had repeatedly failed to garner a level of electoral support that would enable him to negotiate on equal terms with the leaders of the largest conservative group, the Popular Party (*Laiiko Komma*). In hindsight, his failure to enter mainstream conservative politics in the period up to 1935 was beneficial for his long-term political ambition. It allowed him to keep a critical distance from the more moderate outlook of the Popular Party and to establish himself as the fiercest independent critic of the Venizelist establishment. Faced with two ‘lesser evil’ options—joining (and possibly be absorbed into) the big conservative anti-Venizelist camp headed by the Popular Party or maintaining his political autonomy and possibly ending up in a position of political and electoral irrelevance—Metaxas chose the latter. Thus, he provided only nominal support for the Popular Party government in 1933–1935 but remained committed to his party’s independence—even in the face of the disappointing performance in the June 1935 elections of the Royalist Union, which he headed (14.8 percent). The political gamble did not pay off: although viewed as an ‘outsider’, untarnished by the political intrigue of the 1932–1935 period, in January 1936 his party received a devastatingly low 5 percent of the national vote, a failure that brought him on the verge of giving up his political ambitions. However, he recovered his determination to fight back for ‘[his] own solution’ (Metaxas 1936: IV, 3.3.), no doubt encouraged by the king’s respect for, and trust in, his political abilities. It was with the critical support of the monarchy that Metaxas succeeded in turning his meagre electoral support into invaluable political capital that allowed him to climb to power, first as war minister, in March 1936, then as a theoretically ‘transitional’ prime minister in April (receiving a vote of confidence by a parliament in which his party held only six seats), and finally as leader of the *metavoli* in early August (Clogg 1987: Ch 1).

Metaxas presented himself not only as essentially a-political but also (and ironically, given his close ties with the monarchy) as an anti-establishment figure that could truly reunite a deeply fractured nation. The regime’s propaganda network orchestrated a pervasive ‘leadership cult’ that centred on the image of Metaxas as a safe ‘great governor’ and a ‘fatherly’ figure for the nation. Both these metaphors reflected an accurate assessment of his qualities and limitations as a leadership figure. For, as noted before, Metaxas did not possess any real aura of ‘extra-ordinariness’ or exceptionality most often associated

with genuine ‘charismatic’ leadership. He was a competent but uninspiring orator, a calm but distant figure, often awkward in his appearances at mass rallies. What is even more interesting in his case was the nearly complete absence of a ‘charismatic community’ that recognised him as a leader or as having extraordinary qualities. Mussolini’s and Hitler’s examples of ‘charismatic’ leadership provided an authoritative frame of reference and inspiration for a generation of interwar political leaders, only some of whom (for instance, Codreanu, leader of the Iron Guard movement in Romania) shared the ‘radical/revolutionary renunciator’ status of the Duce and the Fuehrer.<sup>22</sup> Those leaders who assumed power through the more conventional channels of conspiratorial ‘high politics’ without the benefit of a genuine popular ‘charismatic community’ (apart from Metaxas, Salazar in Portugal, Dollfuss in Austria, to an extent even Franco in Spain) did endeavour to legitimise and strengthen their own political authority by seeking recourse to an adaptation of the ‘charismatisation’ process that Mussolini and Hitler had so effectively roused from below. This kind of ‘leadership cult’, cultivated and promoted from above in the absence of a genuine ‘charismatic community’ of supporters, was overwhelmingly state-induced and displayed crucial elements of bureaucratisation and rationality, a calculated use of charisma in order to legitimise a new regime *ex post facto*, as opposed to a model of ‘charismatic leadership’ that rested on the extension of an already strong ‘charismatic community’ at the popular level (Kallis 2006).

### **Conclusions—Or Why Metaxas’ Regime should Interest ‘Fascism Studies’**

The image of Metaxas—father of the nation, consumed by a total love of country, a safe and responsible governor, but otherwise ‘ordinary’ (he insisted on being called ‘the first peasant’ and ‘the first worker’) and aware of the task to win over his national audience—encapsulates the essence of political compromise that defined the short history of the 4th of August dictatorship.

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<sup>22</sup> On Codreanu, as a third major example of a charismatic fascist leader, beside Hitler and Mussolini, see Iordachi (2004). On fascism and charisma, see Costa Pinto, Eatwell and Larsen (2007), whose contributions were originally published in a special issue of *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7, no. 2 (2006). In particular, see Roger Eatwell, ‘The concept and theory of charismatic leadership’, 141–56; Michel Dobry, ‘Hitler, charisma and structure: Reflections on historical methodology’, 157–71; and Antonio Costa Pinto, “‘Chaos’ and ‘order’: Preto, Salazar and charismatic appeal in interwar Portugal”, 203–14.

The regime's ideological and political hybridity can only be properly understood in the context of a wider re-mapping of the interwar European political space under the influence of 'fascist' political experiments. In fact, unlike the 1920s and early 1930s, when Fascist Italy functioned as the hub of inspiration for most radical nationalist movements and 'hybrid' dictatorial regimes across Europe, the late 1930s was marked by a mounting fascination among radical(ised) conservatives with the dynamism of Nazi Germany. Although in both ideas and in overall visions, comparisons between Hitler and Metaxas are bound to expose a profound chasm of ideological and political qualities or ambitions, the kind of 'departure' in an increasingly radical direction pursued in Greece after 1936 bore the marks of a much wider and more complex process of dynamic (if partial and inconsistent) 'fascistisation' of the European right's political space. 'Fascitization' did not of course automatically signal the establishment of a fascist regime or the certainty of such an outcome—far from it in fact. To go back to Blinkhorn's earlier argument, however, it did establish new paths that could (and did, to an extent at least) lead to one. The fact that many theories of 'generic fascism' have focused mostly on the ideological and (in the case of Robert Paxton) political characteristics of Italian Fascism and German National Socialism has produced a kind of qualitative benchmark for all other hyper-nationalist, anti-democratic/parliamentarian, and anti-communist movements and regimes of the interwar period that is impossible to match or even approximate. When it comes to the case of interwar Greece, the lack of a genuine 'fascist' social constituency (as movement and/or party), of an ideology of true 'revolutionary' rupture, and of a truly 'charismatic' leader with a 'revolutionary' programme have confined the 4th of August regime to a grey analytical zone inaccessible by either the more conventional tools of 'authoritarianism' or the insights gained by the elaboration of the 'generic fascism' paradigm.

This is regrettable because the kind of interwar political-institutional phenomenon that the 4th of August regime epitomises entailed a political and social departure in conjunction with the intention to effect a much more profound transformation in the longer term. Although heavily conditioned by specific legacies of the previous two decades (National Schism, constitutional and ideological polarization, the 1922 'catastrophe') that it sought to overcome, it envisioned much more than a return to an idealized status quo ante. The regime was dominated by complex contradictions: Metaxas' fascination with the 'totalitarian' experiments in Italy and Germany co-existed with a pragmatic pro-British diplomatic orientation; his intention to produce a 'new man' from the laboratory of EON openly antagonised military, church,

and royal interests—all institutions that he unwaveringly promoted and transformed into unshakeable pillars of his regime; his belief in the ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’ was both millenarian in its horizon and unspectacularly traditional in its constituent elements (nation, church, culture); his own ‘charismatisation’ treaded a very cautious path so as not to antagonise the king or the church. Throughout his relatively short time as head of the ‘4th of August’ regime Metaxas was consumed by doubts about the effectiveness of his transformative project, about his popularity with the masses, about the very viability of his ‘national revolution’. His rule was synonymous with his personality, his strengths and shortcomings. Towards the end of the 1930s he privately questioned the durability of all the changes that he had introduced or was planning. Indeed, his death in January 1941 confirmed his fears: the ‘New State’ had started to unravel even before the Nazi attack that ended any prospects for a sovereign Greek state during WW2. But the anxiety that he privately expressed (mostly in his rather extensive personal diaries) reveal that Metaxas had much broader intentions than he ever confessed in public. His *metavoli* envisioned a cautious, controlled but clear break with the past that cannot be fully appreciated outside the rapidly changing political landscape of interwar Europe in the wake of ‘fascist’ consolidation and—in the late 1930s at least—its aura of novelty and invincibility.

In the end, Metaxas represents a multiple heuristic paradox that transcends the conventional authoritarianism-fascism divide. Coming from a unique political generation, social background, and ideological origins, he nevertheless displayed an acute awareness of the significance and international relevance of the ‘fascist’/‘totalitarian’ political experiments of his time. Even if he remained loyal to the traditional institutions of the church and the monarchy, he pursued a distinct political ‘third way’ that set him apart from his political peers well before he seized power—and even more. Although he fashioned himself as an a-political, paternalistic figure of tradition, his domestic ‘regenerative’ project was holistic and populist, imbued with contemporary ‘fascist’ organisational, liturgical and political elements. The way in which he shaped his regime reflected an astute, personal reading of the ‘fascist’ paradigm and gave rise to a growing political hybridisation that was neither subservient to any particular political model nor opportunistic but marked by genuine ideological and political convergence. The kind of political space that Metaxas came to occupy in 1930’s Greece mirrored a much wider process of political elite radicalization within the conventional space of the European right in directions mapped by the ‘fascist’ regimes, first in Italy and then Germany. In hindsight, this kind of radical political ‘departure’—from the certainties of



interwar Greek politics and from the traditional profile of the conservative right—had a frame of reference that was critically defined by the apparent success of ‘fascist’ regimes at the time—and by the allure of many ‘fascist’ experiments in the organisational, political, stylistic/liturgical or even ideological fields. Furthermore, it evidenced a distinct political orbit that underlined the (ever-strengthening in the late 1930s) political gravitational field of ‘fascism’ as an international paradigm of political rule and social organisation. In this respect, the 4th of August Regime was a distinctly Greek facet of the ‘fascistisation’ of large sections of the interwar European right—and a ‘hybrid’ political phenomenon alongside others in Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary or even Austria that theories of ‘generic fascism’ can no longer afford to shun as irrelevant or ‘failed’.

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