

The ‘National Socialist Party of Greece’ and its Contacts with Italy: Contribution to the Study of Greek Fascism

Eleftheria MANTA*

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Abstract: *The economic crisis of the early 1930s facilitated the spread of fascist ideas in Greece. It was in this context that George Merkouris founded the National Socialist Party of Greece, on 7 April 1933. Merkouris' contacts with Italian fascism and the CAUR began in February 1934. What the Greek politician wanted was support for the National Socialist Party and help with propagating fascist ideas in Greece. Having secured assurance of financial support from Italy, Merkouris decided the publication of a newspaper called *Ethniki Simaia* ('National Flag'). Its first number appeared on 9 December 1934. The purpose was to disseminate the 'new ideas' to the mass of the people, these 'new ideas' representing the need to change the parliamentary system that had led the nation into an impasse.*

Merkouris also participated to the Montreux Conference (December 1934), which was organised by PNF and the CAUR, intending to serve as a forum for Europe's fascist forces. He was elected as a member of the Organising Committee, which would prepare the next International Fascist Conference the following year.

The political developments in Greece of 1935, put an end to any dealings between Merkouris and the Italian Fascist Party. Finally, with its ban on all political parties the Metaxas dictatorship of 4 August, 1936 spelled the end for the National Socialist Party itself.

The economic crisis of the early 1930s, which brought about the devaluation of the drachma (1932) and the paralysis of Greece's political system, also affected the country in other ways, one of which was facilitating the spread of fascist ideas.

Up until 1932, Greece's bourgeois political class remained oriented towards the parliamentary tradition, even as the democratic deficit became more and more obvious. It concurred in the repression of labour demands and social unrest and from time to time expressed admiration for the Italian regime, but for all that fascist-type expressions remained circumscribed trends within the bourgeois parties.

With the eruption of the economic crisis in Greece in 1932, however, this picture changed, as the political climate became more polarised and anti-parliamentary fascist ideas spread, challenging the parliamentary system ever more vigorously and overtly.¹ One characteristic sign of the new current was the complicity of the larger middle class parties, corrupted by fascist ideas, in weakening the work of the Greek Parliament and thus in effect debilitating parliamentary democracy *per se*. Several representatives of the more conservative and royalist factions intensified their contacts with retired and serving

* Lecturer of Modern History, Department of History and Archaeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (elefmant@hist.auth.gr, elemanta@yahoo.gr).

¹ Spyros Marketos, *Πώς φίλησα τον Μουσολίνι! Τα πρώτα βήματα του ελληνικού φασισμού* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2006).