

# NEITHER ‘FASCIST’ NOR ‘AUTHORITARIAN’? THE ‘4TH OF AUGUST’ REGIME IN GREECE (1936-41) AND THE DYNAMICS OF ‘FASCISTISATION’ IN 1930S EUROPE

## The place of Greece in fascism studies

Very little ink has been spilled over the topic of ‘Greek fascism’. For many, if not the most and arguably the most authoritative, accounts of generic fascism the two words together constitute a conceptual oxymoron. An unstable, deeply polarised political system, experiencing a series of coup d’etats (mostly derived from the military) throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and with the constitutional conflict between the republican and the monarchical forms of government having a long history dating back to the days of the so-called ‘National Schism’ of 1915-17 between the elected government and the king that continued to poison relations between rival political parties of the left and right<sup>1</sup>, Greece’s political trajectory in the interwar period crucially resembles that of Spain.<sup>2</sup> Like its fellow Mediterranean counterpart, the conclusion of the story was very much in line with the overall trend across the ‘authoritarian half of Europe’<sup>3</sup>: yet another coup d’etat (in August 1936), suspension of the liberal-parliamentary system, fierce persecution of left-wing organisations, implementation of a series of populist political and social experiments that betrayed their source of inspiration from the ‘fascist’ regimes in Italy and Germany, a hyper-nationalist rhetoric, and a descent into the devastating experience of WW2. By April 1941 Greece had ceased to be anything even remotely resembling a sovereign state: invaded by the German forces in the context of Operation Marita, it succumbed to the military superiority of the

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<sup>1</sup> For the National Schism see the rather lengthy analysis in Smith, M, *The Ionian Vision. Greece in Asia Minor* (London, 1973), 35-61; Leon, G B, *Greece and the First World War: From Neutrality to Intervention 1917-1918* (Boulder: 1990), and his 1990 monograph *Greece and the Great Powers, 1914-1917* (Thessalonica: Institute for Balkan Studies). In Greek the bibliography is rather extensive – see Petsalis-Diomidis, N, *I Ellada ton dio Kiverniseon/The Greece of the two Governments* (Athens, 1988); and Metaxas’ own account of the National Schism *I Istoría tou Ethnikou Dichasmou kai tis Mikrasiatikis Katastrofis/The History of the National Schism and the Asia Minor Catastrophe* (Athens: Govostis)

<sup>2</sup> Mavrogordatos, George T, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press); Sfikas TD, “A Tale of Parallel Lives: The Second Greek Republic and the Second Spanish Republic, 1924-36”, *European History Quarterly*, 29/2 (1999); 217-50

<sup>3</sup> Mann, Michael, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 24ff

Wehrmacht military machine and was absorbed into the fascist 'new order' as a puppet (non-)state.

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 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<sup>4</sup>; but a genuinely 'fascist' party (like the Spanish Falange) or even a strong movement directly inspired by foreign 'fascist' models was conspicuous by its absence. The gradual and painful descent into authoritarianism that started in the aftermath of the 1932 elections and was punctuated by one thwarted and two successful coups was not altogether surprising; yet the primary instigators and supporters of the constitutional deviation continued - and, if anything, strengthened - the country's foreign alignment with Britain, at a time that the latter was entering the final stages of a lethal confrontation with the emerging Axis front. As for the person who spearheaded (with crucial support from the monarchy) the slide to dictatorship - the former general-cum-politician Ioannis Metaxas who was appointed prime minister in January 1936 and orchestrated the final coup in the following August -, he was a staunch royalist, leader of what to all intents and purposes was a failed, insignificant by the mid-1930s, political party (*Eleftherofrones* or 'Free Opinion' party), steeped in traditional ethno-patriotic nationalism and an admirer of the German imperial military tradition, but still far more willing to align the country with British than Italian or German interests.<sup>5</sup> 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 Greek dictatorial regime that he had been so instrumental in setting up and shaping in the previous fifty or so months. The German attack and the final crushing defeat of the Greek armed forces in the spring of 1941 produced a result (the full alignment of the country with the Axis) that was neither prefigured by internal political developments nor caused by any domestic political agency.

With all these points in mind, it is no surprise that any theory of generic fascism has treated the case of Greece as aberrant, 'failed' or marginal. Even the earlier, less conceptually sophisticated accounts of fascism and dictatorship in interwar Europe, treated the subject at best in a cursory manner, highlighting the collapse of the democratic-parliamentary system and the installation of a dictatorial regime but stopping clearly short of including the regime itself in any attempt to theorise the rise of 'fascism' as either social movement or political

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<sup>4</sup> Alivizatos Nicos, *The political institutions in crisis, 1922-1974* (Athens:Themelio 1995 - in Greek)

<sup>5</sup> Regretably, there are very few biographies of Metaxas available. The work of Kallonias, D, *Ioannis Metaxas* (Athens 1938), was published during the dictatorship and is of limited heuristic value. For a recent biography in English see Vatikiotis, P J, *Popular Autocracy in Greece, 1936-1941. A Political Biography of General Ioannis Metaxas* (London & Portland, 1998)

regime.<sup>6</sup> With the emergence of recent, conceptually far more elaborate accounts on the ideological essence of 'generic fascism', the taxonomical bar was raised significantly to the point that the inclusion of Greece merely served the purpose of illustrating a grey zone - failure of democracy, descent into 'authoritarian' dictatorship but by no means success of 'fascism'. The absence of any social movement that could even vaguely approximate ideologically and emulate in terms of either electoral support or sustained popular mobilisation the generic benchmarks set by more easily labelled as 'fascist' movements and parties in many other European countries meant that interwar Greece was ill-suited for inclusion in comparative studies of fascism. At the same time, the growing consensus amongst fascism scholars that 'fascism' as a form of rule was qualitatively different (in short, more radical and moving in a revolutionary direction) from the more traditional forms of authoritarian (military or monarchist) dictatorship meant that the Metaxas regime could be explained away easily as a formulaic manifestation of the latter - the only possible concession being that it emulated clumsily very few and selected features of other regimes (some 'fascist', like the Italian and German ones; other, like Salazar's regime in Portugal, less clearly so).

In the last three decades the elaboration of the conceptual core of fascism by scholars such as Roger Griffin, Stanley Payne, Martin Blinkhorn, and Michael Mann have brought the Metaxas regime into the focus of comparative analysis. Yet this happened with a crucial caveat - 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 the use of terms such as 'authoritarian' or qualifiers such as 'abortive' or 'monarcho-' applied to Metaxas's Greece.<sup>7</sup> With the exception of some earlier scholars who have not hesitated to analyse the regime as essentially fascist (most of them

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<sup>6</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, Weber Eugen, *Varieties of Fascism* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964); Rogger Hans, Weber Eugen, eds, *The European Right* (Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 1966); Carsten Francis L., *The Rise of Fascism* (London: Methuen, 1967); Mosse George L., ed., *International Fascism: New Thoughts and New Approaches* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979); Laqueur Walter, ed., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide - Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). The exception is Hayes Paul, *Fascism* (New York: Free Press), which offers a chapter on Greece that however places the Metaxas regime together with the 1967-74 Colonels' dictatorship. In his earlier work by Payne Stanley, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) references to the Metaxas regime are extremely limited.

<sup>7</sup> Griffin Roger, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 116-45; Mann 45-6; Payne Stanley, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (London: UCL Press, 1996) Ch 5 and 318-19. Blinkhorn Martin, *Fascism and the right in Europe, 1919-1945* (Harlow: Longman, 2000) summarily dismisses Metaxas as "fascisant imitator" (p. 110), although the early volume edited by him - see below, 112 - does cover Greece as a case-study.

reflecting a Marxist approach to the meaning of fascism *per se*)<sup>8</sup>, 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 regime and its leader from a conservative military tradition<sup>9</sup>, 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 elsewhere in Europe.<sup>10</sup> 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’ – “fascist more in appearance than substance”, as he put it.<sup>11</sup> In a volume edited by Blinkhorn back in 1990 that spearheaded a more nuanced approach to the relations between conservatives and fascists in the interwar period, Greece is analysed as a mostly authoritarian case (the Metaxas dictatorship included) with only very limited ‘fascist’ elements.<sup>12</sup> A similar approach is taken by Mogens Pelt, who underlines 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”.<sup>13</sup> It did not help either that the 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 qualifier ‘totalitarian’. All in all, the consensus appeared to suggest that no theory or narrative of ‘generic’ or comparative ‘fascism’ had anything to gain from the inclusion of Greece as a case-study. An ‘authoritarian’, traditionalist 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

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<sup>8</sup> Pouliopoulos, P., *Ta Laika Metopa, o 2os Pagkosmios Polemos, h Diktatoria tis 4hs Augoustou/The Popular Fronts, the Second World War, the Dictatorship of the 4th of August* (Athens, 1958); Lindardatos, *4th of August*, 9-30; Psiroukis, N., *O Fasismos kai h 4h Augoustou/Fascism and the 4th of August* (Athens: Epikerotita, 1975, 2nd ed)

<sup>9</sup> Higham Robin; Veremis Thanos (eds) *The Metaxas Dictatorship: Aspects of Greece, 1936-1940* (Athens: ELIAMEP, 1993)

<sup>10</sup> Kofas, Jon V, *Authoritarianism in Greece: The Metaxas Regime* (Boulder 1983)

<sup>11</sup> Fleischer Hagen, “Authoritarian rule in Greece (1936–1974) and its heritage”, in Jerzy W Borejsza, Klaus Ziemer, eds, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 237–75

<sup>12</sup> Close David, “Conservatism, authoritarianism and fascism in Greece, 1915-1945”, in Blinkhorn Martin (ed) *Fascist and Conservatives* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 200-17

<sup>13</sup> Pelt Mogens, “The Establishment and Development of the Metaxas Dictatorship in the Context of Fascism and Nazism, 1936-41”, in Sorensen Gert, Mallett Robert (eds), *International Fascism, 1919-45* (London/Portland OR: Frank Cass, 2002) 143-72, quote from p. 167

was branded as decidedly 'non-fascist' or even treated as totally irrelevant to the discussion of interwar fascism.<sup>14</sup>

### **Opportunities for, and limits of, political 'departure': Greece in the 1930s**

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 charted a radical *departure* with a number of peculiarities and caveats that crucially determined (and limited) the horizon of political change. Although Greece belongs to a limited group of countries which experienced a form of regime with only very limited 'fascist' elements<sup>15</sup>, this regime did not evolve as the political heir to a pre-existing social movement simply because Metaxas' party (not ideologically 'fascist' in the first place) never broke out of an elitist, conservative and largely marginal role in the Greek politics of the 1930s to embrace and mobilise a wide, ideologically kin social and/or electoral constituencies. Then, even if in Greece the 1936 Metaxas coup represented the most 'radical' rightist solution to the liberal-parliamentary deadlock, the ideological profile of its leader and the political conditions upon which the '4 of August regime' (named after the date of the Metaxas final coup d'état) was conspiratorially 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 indeed the powerful traditional monarchical and military sponsors of the new regime. Furthermore, although Metaxas carefully fashioned himself as the gifted leader of a new kind of regime that promised unity and national regeneration after decades of paralysing ideological division and political bickering between the two established parties, his vision appeared as little more than a forced return to a status quo *ante* - viable restoration of the monarchy, reversal of a series of liberal political and social experiments associated with Venizelos' person and vision, dissolution of a flawed and allegedly unworkable party system, stability as an antidote to the paralysing upheaval of the preceding period, as well as promotion of a rhetoric of a more conventional kind of organic unity of the nation in close association with traditional pillars of Greek society that involved not only the monarchy but also the church and the military.<sup>16</sup> To put it simply, Metaxas fancied himself as a politician on a mission of forging a decidedly nationalist 'third way' in Greek politics as a remedy for the country's perceived decadence; but his own vision had largely been forged in the difficult

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<sup>14</sup> Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 122; Payne, S, G, *A History of Fascism, 1914-45* (London, 1997), 317-40; Andricopoulos, Y, "The Power Base of Greek Authoritarianism" in Larsen S U, Hagtvet B, Myklebust J P (eds), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø, 1980) 568-84. It is indicative that in Morgan Philip, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2002) there is still not a single mention of the Metaxas regime.

<sup>15</sup> Payne, *History of Fascism*, 468-9; Kallis, Aristotle, "The 'Regime-Model' of Fascism: A Typology", *European History Quarterly*, 30/1 (2000), 77-104

<sup>16</sup> Woodhouse Chris M, *Modern Greece: A short history* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 231ff

years of WWI and shaped under 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 regime which never ceased to oscillate 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.<sup>17</sup> The ‘4th of August’ regime, as I have argued elsewhere, remains a multiple paradox in the political history of interwar Europe.<sup>18</sup> 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<sup>19</sup> or those that adopt a more historical approach to the transformation of a ‘fascist’ party into regime.<sup>20</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. And 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.<sup>21</sup> 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 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

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<sup>17</sup> Kallis, “Regime-model”, 89, 94-5, 97; Andricopoulos, op. cit., 568-84. See also Linardatos, P., *I Tetarti Augoustou/The 4th of August* (Athens, 1975, 2nd ed), Ch. 2

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle Kallis (2003). “‘Fascism’, ‘Para-fascism’ and ‘Fascistization’: on the Similarities of Three Conceptual Categories”, *European History Quarterly*, 33/2: 219-50

<sup>19</sup> Roger Eatwell, “On Defining the ‘Fascist Minimum’: The Centrality of Ideology”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1/3 (1996), pp.303-19

<sup>20</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 Robert O, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004), largely based on his earlier “The Five Stages of Fascism”, *Journal of Modern History*, 70/1(1998): 1-23. Still, even in this approach, any reference to the Metaxas regime remains largely extraneous to the core debate on ‘fascism’

<sup>21</sup> Pelt, 167

or less successfully enclosed in notably less radical political containers that either limited its horizon or channeled it towards the attainment of more limited political goals. I do, however, identify a further matrix 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 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 élites 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).<sup>22</sup> [emphasis added]

Even this notion of ‘hybridisation from above’ is already problematic in the Greek case because of the absence of a native ‘fascist’ political constituency. However, the repositioning of the conservative right closer and 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.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kallis, “Fascistisation”, 230-1. For Salazar’s Portugal see the seminar monography by Costa Pinto Antonio, *The Blue Shirts: Portuguese Fascists and the New State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 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 Shlomo, *Fascism From Above. The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain, 1923-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)

<sup>23</sup> Blinkhorn, *Fascism and the Right* 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 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 living 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 *trans-national* influence - sometimes valorised and adapted by native ‘fascist’ constituencies but often imported (and again adapted or selected) ‘from above’, against (pre-emptively), or in the absence of, such constituencies.

The case of the Metaxas regime clearly fits the latter scenario; and there is a name for this kind of semi-authoritarian/semi-fascist regime that lacked either a genuine social dynamic or a ‘revolutionary’ ideological profile - what Roger Griffin called ‘para-fascism’. In his *Nature of Fascism* 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.<sup>24</sup> 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*.<sup>25</sup>

### **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 in the process highly receptive to specific ‘fascist’ themes that it then grafted on its distinct hybrid of radical(-ised and -ising) 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

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<sup>24</sup> Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 120ff

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle Kallis (2003). “‘Fascism’, ‘Para-fascism’ and ‘Fascistization’: on the Similarities of Three Conceptual Categories”, *European History Quarterly*, 33/2: 219–50



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, trans-national 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 broadly 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 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 earnestly planning for, some political and socio-economic novelties that pointed well beyond its alleged horizon of a return to the pre-National Schism *status quo ante* and towards certain trademark 'fascist' novelties.

Metaxas was no '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 an ordinary, patrician authoritarian. 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 by a "holistic, third-way" new brand of trans-class nationalist and populist rhetoric, and a highly ritualistic, emotive style of politics.<sup>26</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 personal aura as an 'outsider' intent upon marking a new beginning in the political history of the country. 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'<sup>27</sup>, which constituted one of the central ideological discourses for his own regime. In 1937 he hastened to communicate to the Portuguese

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<sup>26</sup> Souroulis G, *O Ethnikos Logos tis 4 Avgoustou* [*The Nationalist Discourse of the 4th of August regime*], (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Crete, 2001). For an analysis of fascism as a 'holistic third-way phenomenon' see Eatwell, Roger, *Fascism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995)

<sup>27</sup> Costa Pinto Antonio, *Salazar's Dictatorship and European Fascism* (Boulder CO: Social Science Monographs) Ch 4

dictator his admiration for, and interest in, his political ideas.<sup>28</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* [the translation of ‘New State’ in Greek], which was also the name given to one of the regime’s official periodicals. Mantzoufas, in particular, produced a summary statement for the ideological orientation of the ‘4th of August’, 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.<sup>29</sup> Metaxas now saw Greece aligned with the other (“totalitarian”, in his own 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 (and shared to a high degree) the realistic assessment that Greece’s strategic interests could not be served by antagonising the British empire, he also actively promoted unprecedentedly closer economic and military ties with Nazi Germany.<sup>30</sup> Even after the Italian attack in October 1940, he endeavoured to avoid political commitments that would alienate Hitler’s regime and strove to maintain a policy of equidistance vis-a-vis the two warring coalitions.<sup>31</sup> Even in his dealings with Fascist Italy, either in bilateral terms or through the Balkan Entente, he sought to express his desire for peaceful co-existence, in spite of his (and other Balkan partners’) growing alarm at Mussolini’s expansionist designs.<sup>32</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 Mussolini’s increasingly hostile attitude that pushed him into an alignment with Britain that he appeared to accept somewhat grudgingly. Therefore, Metaxas’s ambivalent, circumscribed, and often seemingly contradictory attitude

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<sup>28</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>29</sup> Koumaros Nikolaos, Mantzoufas Georgios, “The founding constitutional principles of the New State”], *To Neon Kratos*, 11 (1938), pp.761–818. For further information on the journal *Neon Kratos*, see Georgios Kokkinos, *The Fascistic Ideology in Greece: the case of the journal ‘Neon Kratos’* (Athens: Papazisis, 1989); Mantzoufas, “Ideology and orientations of the New State”, *To Neon Kratos*, 16 (1938), pp.1325–39 (all in Greek); and Constantine Sarandis, “The Ideology and Character of the Metaxas Regime”, in Higham, Veremis (eds), 147–77

<sup>30</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>31</sup> Pelt, 152–6, 162–6

<sup>32</sup> HAGFM, 8083/A/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...*”

to 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 was a lot of evidence that he also viewed what the two regimes represented politically as a source of inspiration in the context of his professed desire to re-structure Greece's allegedly broken political system and to revive its national spiritual élan.

Nevertheless, Metaxas and his regime's ideologues expended considerable intellectual energy in emphasising that the '4th of August regime' was a model rooted in Greek traditions and history – not an imitation of foreign ideas and practices.<sup>33</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?<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup> The core of this vision was inhabited by a strong reverence for religion – Orthodox Christianity – and the historic legacies of the Byzantine empire.<sup>36</sup> 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 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 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 modernising experiments. Thus, he turned to Orthodoxy as both the figurative moral guardian of the 'Hellenic soul' [*elliniki psichi*] throughout the

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<sup>33</sup> Metaxas Ioannis, *Logoi ke Skepseis, 1936–1941* (Athens: Gkovostis, 1969), Vol. I, Speech at Komotini, 7.10.1936, pp.53–5, in which he emphasises the Greek historical precedents of many of his (and, by implication, of even the 'fascist' regimes') current policies.

<sup>34</sup> LInardatos, 55

<sup>35</sup> Carabott Philip, "Monumental visions: the past in Metaxas' Weltanschauung", in Brown Keith S; Hamilakis Yannis (eds) *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003) 23–38

<sup>36</sup> Clogg Richard, "The Byzantine legacy on the modern Greek world: The *Megali Idea*", in Clucas Lowell (ed) *The Byzantine Legacy in Eastern Europe* (New York: Clumbia University Press, 1988) 253–81

centuries and a contemporary institution capable of assisting his project of forging a new collective spiritual conscience amongst modern Greeks.

According to Metaxas, church and state were united in a determination to safeguard the continuity of the nation from allegedly decadent contemporary influences. 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 the Orthodox religion *through* 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 and political standing. This tendency – symbolically represented by the constitutional unity of church and state in the modern Greek state<sup>37</sup> – allowed the Greek Orthodox Church to play a disproportionately influential role in Greek politics and popular culture, one that outlived Metaxas’s dictatorship and remains evident today.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, the conjunction of ‘nation’ [*ethnos/phyle*], ‘fatherland’ [*patris*] and ‘religion’ [*thriskia*] formed the ideological nucleus of the 4th of August regime. To be sure, it was by no means a hugely innovative ideological platform; now was the promise of national ‘regeneration’ that had more or less 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. Already in 1934 he had declared the liberal-parliamentary model not only hugely detrimental to the Greek national interest but superseded and made irrelevant by history itself. 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”.<sup>39</sup> By

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<sup>37</sup> Konidaris Ioannis M, “The Legal Parameters of Church and State Relations in Greece”, in Couloumbis T A, Kariotis T, Bellou F (eds) *Greece in the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 223-35; Mouzelis Nikos, *Modern Greece: Facets of Underdevelopment* (London: Macmillan, 1978)

<sup>38</sup> Kallis Aristotle, “Fascism and Religion: The Metaxas Regime in Greece and the ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’. Some Theoretical Observations on ‘Fascism’, ‘Political Religion’ and ‘Clerical Fascism’“, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8/2 (2007): 229-46

<sup>39</sup> Linardatos, 10

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 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 Metaxist 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 1915-17 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 1920-22 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 the 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>40</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).

### **National Youth Organisation (Ethniki Organosis Neoleas, EON): the laboratory of ‘fascistisation’**

In the context of this priority, the ‘4th of August’ 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<sup>41</sup>] 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 conscience. 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

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<sup>40</sup> Petrakis Marina, *The Metaxas Myth: Dictatorship and Propaganda in Greece* (London/New York: Tauris); Pavlidou Efthymia, *School and EON* (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University, unpublished MA dissertation, available at <http://invenio.lib.auth.gr/record/103021/files/gri-2008-1387.pdf>)

<sup>41</sup> Machaira Eleni, *The youth organisation of the 4th of August regime* (Athens: Historic Archive of Greek Youth, 1987 - in Greek); Kofas, 83-97; Rigos Alkis, *The Crucial Years 1935-1941* (Athens: Papazisis Publications, 1997; 2 vols - in Greek); Linardatos, 151-203

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>42</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; this 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>43</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.<sup>44</sup>

For different reasons, the king's entourage, church elites and the military leadership viewed this initiative with considerable scepticism. The plan entailed the forced dissolution of a number of prestigious, long-established groups, such as the Christian Brotherhoods (HAN, HEN), student organisations and the scout movement. Forcing the dissolution of the scouts, 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 appeared in the late 1930s or with the benefit of hindsight, they betrayed a justifiable unease with some of Metaxas's more radical and long-term goals. The initial disagreement with the Palace escalated into a real political row for 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 unabated 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's authority also came from within the ranks of the

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<sup>42</sup> Metaxas Ioannis, *Words and Thoughts* (Athens: Govostis, 1969): Address to the members of the EON Athens section, 31.12.1937, 312–13; and Speech to EON members, 29.12.1938, 435–7

<sup>43</sup> GNA, Metaxas Archive, F/119/003 (12.11.1940: Metaxas speech to members of the Greek Academy)

<sup>44</sup> Dimaras Alexis, *The Reform that Never Took Place* (Athens: Ermis, 1971), 189–90

government. The minister of education, Konstantinos Georgakopoulos, was known to have growing 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 turning point interpreted by the royalist establishment as evidence of Metaxas's unwavering position on the matter (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 parts agreed on a compromise: the palace accepted the 'voluntary' dissolution of all traditional youth groups and acquiesced in Metaxas's desire to see Prince Paul as 'General Leader' of EON (with the royal princesses leading the girls' equivalent organisations). But, contrary to 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 over the scout movement, Metaxas decided to incorporate also the regime's only real, autonomous para-military organisation - the Work Battalions - into the youth organisation.<sup>45</sup>

In the end, EON was conceived by Metaxas as a genuinely 'totalitarian' device for the social engineering of 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 polarising alignment of the majority of voters with the two main parties. By the end of the 1930s, EON still looked like a heavily stage-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 'charismatisation'. Little by little in the four years of its existence, it amassed further functions and jurisdictions: organisation of leisure; production of books, journals, and films; sport; voluntary work; para-military nuclei. Given that the leader of the '4th of August' regime shied away from organising a mass single-party even once in power, EON was conceived as much more than simple compensation for this lack; it was a mass social movement in-the-making, shaped through totalitarian indoctrination of a younger generation still 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<sup>46</sup>) by the outbreak of the war, EON was a truly 'totalitarian', heavily monitored by the regime and militarised institution that served as Metaxas' ultimate statement of purpose for his long-term ambitions regarding his envisioned 'transformation' of Greek society.

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<sup>45</sup> Petrakis, 24

<sup>46</sup> Lindardatos, 169

## Intentions versus limits: the ‘4th of August’ regime’s political horizon

There were further similar ‘statements of purpose’ that underline a conscious decision 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 conspicuously lacked any coherent ideological profile prior to August 1936 - and indeed capitalised on his allegedly ‘a-political’ provenance<sup>47</sup> -, as prime minister Metaxas quickly formulated a programmatic platform whose rhetoric carried an easily detectible ‘fascist’ hue. 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 betrayed the influence of the Italian Fascist experiments with corporatism.<sup>48</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 all but 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 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, ex-army officer Konstantinos Maniadakis, stated unequivocally that the goal of the ‘4th of August’ regime was two-fold: in the short term, “purging [society] from the ‘pests’ and ‘weeds’”; in the longer term, a decisive “handing-over of responsibility for the nation” to the generation forged in the ranks of EON.<sup>49</sup> The ‘purge’ was pursued with ruthless determination as a necessary precondition for a new, “fertile” as Maniadakis described it, national condition against the prospect of “falling down the precipice”<sup>50</sup>; 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”.<sup>51</sup>

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

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<sup>47</sup> Petrakis, Ch 2

<sup>48</sup> HAGFM, 13099/A/10/3 (report on the positive reception of Metaxas’ corporatist experiments in Fascist Italy)

<sup>49</sup> Petrakis, 78

<sup>50</sup> Carabott, 28

<sup>51</sup> Petrakis, 33



Portugal. The influence of Salazar's corporatist 'new state' has already been underlined. It is interesting, nevertheless, to note that as late as January 1941 the new ambassador to Lisbon, Kimon Kollias, was given explicit instructions to emphasise to both Portugal's president Carmona and 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>52</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 clamp-down on the organisations of the left. He initiated high-level contacts with German officials in order to promote co-operation in what he perceived as a Europe-wide 'anti-communist mission', including the then new Nazi Minister of the Interior Heinrich Himmler. Metaxas himself was in indirect contact with the Nazi regime ever since 1936, negotiating the extension of economic ties and Greece's tactful alignment with the German *Grossraumwirtschaft* bloc that was emerging in southern Europe. His German interlocutors recognised the delicacy of his position. As the German consul in Thessaloniki noted in 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>53</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 that he intended to emulate many of its facets in Greece.<sup>54</sup> 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 1938-39 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 vis-a-vis both the monarchy and the church.<sup>55</sup> In fact, 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>56</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 until - well in 1939-40 it had to be abandoned in the face of seismic international developments - the outbreak of the war and finally Italy's attack on Greece. Yet, it helps

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<sup>52</sup> HAGFM, 5548/A/13/2/3 (folder 22) (Kimon Kollas, 7.1.1941)

<sup>53</sup> HAGFM, 1600/A/11/6 (24.1.1939, Report by General Director of Foreign Citizens, Ap. Skouras)

<sup>54</sup> Pelt, 156

<sup>55</sup> Kallis, "Fascism and religion", 239-40

<sup>56</sup> GNA, Metaxas Archive, F30/038-41 (6/7.3.39: Ragkavis to Metaxas; 6.3.39: Metaxas to Ragkavis)

correct a conventional assessment of Metaxas' overtures to Nazi Germany as the result of pure opportunism and cynical political calculation.

As for the personality of the leader of the '4th of August' regime, the concerted efforts of all of propaganda institutions and organisations to promote the image of a 'charismatic' leader reflected the limits of his political qualities. His patrician style, lack of personal charisma, and limited appeal both to the conservative party elite and electorate had reduced him once more to a marginal, if vocal and uncompromising, figure of the anti-Venizelist camp. His own political party (*Eleftherofrones*, Free Believers) had repeatedly failed to approximate a considerable level of electoral support that would enable him to negotiate on equal terms with the leaders of the largest conservative group, the Popular Party (*Laiko Komma*). In hindsight, his failure to enter mainstream conservative politics in the period up to 1935 was a blessing in disguise 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 1933-5 but remained committed to his party's independence - even in the face of the disappointing performance of the Royalist Union headed by him in the June 1935 elections (14.8%). The political gamble did not pay off: although viewed as an 'outsider', untarnished by the political intrigue of the 1932-35 period, in January 1936 his party received a devastatingly low 5% of the national vote, a failure that brought him on the verge of giving up his political ambitions. He recovered, however, his determination to fight back for "[his] own solution",<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup>

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 re-unite a deeply fractured national society. 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' and exceptionality usually associated with 'charismatic' leadership. He was a competent but uninspiring orator, a calm and relatively

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<sup>57</sup> Metaxas, *Diaries*, IV, 3.3.1936

<sup>58</sup> See in general, Clogg Richard, *Parties and Elections in Greece: The Search for Legitimacy* (London: Hurst & Co, 1987) Ch 1

gentle but distant figure, betraying both bodily and psychological awkwardness in mass public rallies. What is even more interesting in his case was the almost total absence of a ‘charismatic community’ that recognised him as a leader or extraordinary qualities. The Mussolinian and later Hitlerian paradigms of ‘charismatic’ leadership provided an authoritative template of reference and inspiration for a generation of interwar political leaders, only some of whom (e.g. the leader of the Iron Guard movement in Romania, Codreanu) shared the ‘radical/revolutionary renunciator’ status of the Duce and the Fuehrer.<sup>59</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 ‘charigmatisation’ process that Mussolini and Hitler had so effectively pursued from below.

This kind of calculated use of ‘charigmatisation from above’ was qualitatively different from the charigmatisation of the Italian and German dictators by their own particular ‘charismatic community’. While in the cases of Hitler and Mussolini the extension of charismatic domination from the movement to the rest of the society came on a bedrock of – at least some degree of – popular mobilisation and support, as well as on a developed set of rituals that upheld and disseminated this relationship, the authority of people such as Metaxas had to be ‘charigmatised’ after they had assumed power, through the institutions and functions of the official state, without a set of precedents or at least some prior popular exposure to the discourse of ‘charismatic’ personality. The overwhelmingly state-induced nature of the cult in the category of leaders that included figures such as Metaxas, Dollfuss, Salazar, and even Franco 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 charigmatisation that rested on the extension of an already strong *Gemeinde* outwards, towards the rest of the population.<sup>60</sup>

### **Conclusions - or why Metaxas’ regime should interest ‘fascism studies’**

Thus, the image of Metaxas-the father of the nation, consumed by a total love for his country and his people, 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

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<sup>59</sup> Costa Pinto Antonio; Eatwell Roger; Larsen Stein Ugelvik (eds) *Charisma and Fascism* (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), whose contributions were originally published in a special issue of *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7/2 (2006). In particular, see Eatwell Roger, “The concept and theory of charismatic leadership”, 141-56; Dobry Michel, “Hitler, charisma and structure: reflections on historical methodology” 157-71; and Costa Pinto Antonio, “‘Chaos’ and ‘order’: Preto, Salazar and charismatic appeal in interwar Portugal”, 203-14

<sup>60</sup> Kallis Aristotle, “Fascism, ‘Charisma’ and ‘Charigmatisation’: Weber’s Model of ‘Charismatic Domination’ and Interwar European Fascism”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7/1 (2006): 25-43

national audience, encapsulated the essence of political compromise that sealed the short history of the '4th of August' *metavoli*. The regime's ideological and political hybridity cannot be understood outside 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 had functioned as the hub of inspiration for most radical nationalist movements and 'hybrid' dictatorial regimes across Europe, the late 1930s witnessed a mounting fascination amongst radical(ised) conservatives with the dynamism of Nazi Germany. While on the level of ideas and overall visions a comparison between Hitler and Metaxas is 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. 'Fascistization' 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*) *lead to one*. The fact that many theories of 'generic fascism' have focused mostly or at least heavily 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 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 that the more conventional tools of 'authoritarianism' cannot reach and the insights gained by the elaboration of the 'generic fascism' paradigm have deliberately excluded or marginalised.

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 introduced or was planning to phase in. To be sure, his death in January 1941 confirmed his fears as the 'New State' started to unravel even before the Nazi attack that put an end to any sense of sovereign Greek state during WW2. But the anxiety that underpinned many of his private confessions (mostly in his rather extensive personal diaries) betrayed a much wider horizon of intention than he ever confessed in public. His *'metavoli'* envisioned a cautious, controlled but determined 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 - aura of novelty and invincibility.

In the end, Metaxas represents a multiple heuristic paradox that transcends the conventional authoritarianism-fascism divide. Coming from the wrong 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 meaningful political 'third way' that set him apart from his political peers, even before he seized power. 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 and liturgical elements. The way in which he shaped his regime reflected an astute, personal reading of the 'fascist' political paradigm and gave rise to a growing political hybridisation that was neither slavish nor cynical but driven by genuine ideological convergence. The kind of political space that Metaxas came to occupy in 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. 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'.

