GREECE’S RÔLE AS A BALKAN AND
MEDITERRANEAN POWER.¹

By A. MICHALOPOULOS, C.B.E., F.R.S.A., M.A. (Oxon.),
GREEK MINISTER OF INFORMATION.

DURING the last two days it has been my privilege to
address three meetings in Manchester, one of which was
to the workers in a vast factory turning out implements of war,
and I have been more than ever impressed by the strenuous
effort which is being made by all the citizens of this great indus-
trial centre towards winning the war and putting an end to
the disgraceful Nazi regime at present spreading the barbaric
tyrranny of its domination over the whole Continent of Europe.
It is the business of all of us at the present moment to concentrate
all our energies upon winning the war, but that does not preclude
the right, and indeed the obligation, which thinking people have
of discussing the future of the world after the victory has been
won, and I feel that as I am here among friends I should like to be
allowed to speak a little more intimately on the questions which
concern the future of my country and her policy as a member
of the family of civilized nations. But before doing so I should
like to say to you, my Lord Bishop (of Manchester), that I am
greatly honoured by your courtesy in taking the Chair to-day,
and that I have been very deeply moved by the stirring words in
commendation of my country’s effort and sacrifice, with which
you have just introduced me, and I also feel that it is my duty—
and a very pleasant duty—to extend the warmest thanks of the
Greek Government to Dr. Guppy for his great kindness in
arranging the course of lectures in honour of Greece, of which
this is the first.

I have been struck by one thing since I returned to England
last autumn, and that is that the thinking people of this country
have begun in good time to turn their attention seriously to the

¹ An address delivered in the John Rylands Library on the 6th of May, 1942.

126
problems of the peace. Everywhere individuals, societies and
groups such as your own, are discussing post-war problems. Many of the discussions may be premature. The evolution of
the war may be such that conclusions which seem reasonable
to-day may turn out to be inapplicable to-morrow. But the
essential thing is that the conscience of the civilized world is
alive to the necessity of ensuring a lasting peace, and if this spirit
had prevailed in the earlier phases of the last war, perhaps the
peace would have been drawn up with more foresight and de-
liberation, and the horrors of the present war thus avoided.

I shall discuss later the part that the nations of Europe, the
nations of South-Eastern Europe—and particularly Greece—
are destined to play in the re-making of a new world. But in
order to lead up to this subject I should like to put before you a
few considerations by means of which I hope to make more clear
the significance of Greece’s contribution to the war of the civilized
nations against Hitler’s neo-barbarism.

There are in the history of every people critical moments
when their national character is put to the proof, and the manner
in which they react determines the future course of their destiny.
As with individuals so with nations—it is not merely the strength
of their physique which constitutes their potential might. The
doctrine of force for the sake of conquest alone is a very ancient
one, and again and again it comes to the surface throughout the
ages, but it is a doctrine as fallacious as the principle which
prompts the burglar to break into a house on the assumption
that his tools and his weapons will overcome the inmates and that
his skill will prevail over the arm of the law.

The nations of the world, whether they like it or not, do form
a society. In the present lamentable condition of the world’s
affairs it is indeed difficult to believe that it is an organized
society, and the selfishness which has inspired individual nations
in peace time has made the task of organizing, even among the
free and peace-loving nations of the world, extremely difficult.
But in spite of this sad truth it remains a fact that flagrant
violation of the laws of common decency and humanity by Powers
whose only morality is based on force, brings upon them sure
retribution at the cost of great suffering to all.
Conversely it is true that nations with a strict sense of international morality and national integrity derive from these virtues a permanent strength so great that in spite of temporary adversities or even disasters they in the end reap the merited reward.

This is no mere theory; it is an historic fact. For throughout the ages the war between the powers of light and the powers of darkness—between the spirit and brute force—is waged relentlessly, and the progress of civilization is the result of the gradual prevalence of moral values over purely material strength. If in the present conflict the nations that are fighting under the banner of freedom and democracy are really convinced of the worthiness of their cause as such, and if the nations friendly to them are also convinced that this cause is worthy of an equal sacrifice on their part when they are called upon to defend it, then there can be no possible doubt of the issue.

If, on the other hand, the significance of this war were to be obscured in the minds of the democratic peoples by material considerations, and the titanic struggle which is now spreading the disastrous tide of battle over the whole world were to come to be accepted with complacency by these so-called freedom-loving nations, that would mean that the spirit of democracy and freedom has been broken, and that Hitler's claim to have instilled a new spirit of youth into the world would be in part at least validated.

The greatest enemies of Western civilization to-day are not the formidable German armies but a fatalistic tendency among the democratic peoples to take the war as an inevitable evil and to fight it as such with a belief in the eventual triumph of what they rightly consider to be a just cause, but often without that ardent, positive and creative faith that removes mountains.

I have seen to-day in the earnestness with which the working people in the factories of Manchester are applying themselves to the heavy tasks of making guns and war material, a proof that the spirit of the British people is still what it always was and that the positive and creative faith of which I have spoken ever exists in this country, and indeed it was alive in the stirring words with which the foreman of the workers received me as a representative
GREECE'S RÔLE AS A BALKAN POWER  129

of Greece, and in the enthusiastic acclamations of over six thousand men.

The real significance of Greece's contribution to this war is that she has proved to the world that she has this passionate faith, and that in the soul of the whole Greek people the love of freedom burns with a fire which no material force, which no sufferings, however intense, can put out.

It is not suggested that Greece's material contribution to the war should be minimized. Her victorious campaign for over six months against the Italians in Albania was a very serious setback for the Axis Powers. Had the enemy penetrated through the Pindus range in November of last year and succeeded in occupying Greece then, a base would have been provided for an Italo-German attack on Egypt at a time when the Allied forces were by no means prepared to receive it and a major disaster would have probably ensued. Germany would also then have been free to attack Russia in the early summer of this year as was her plan, and Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran would almost certainly, and in some cases perhaps willingly, have fallen into the clutches of Nazi domination. As a result, India and Africa would have come under the shadow of a direct German menace.

These crises were averted not only by Greece's resistance to Italy but also by her stubborn and determined fight against the Germans' overwhelming weight for seven more weeks; and to-day the situation in the Middle East—in Egypt, Abyssinia, Iran, Iraq and Syria is completely different, and Turkey, whose fate hung in the balance, feels the weight of the support of a strong counterpoise from the south to the German threat upon her northern borders.

By delaying the launching of Hitler's attack upon Russia for several weeks the Greek resistance on the mainland and in Crete, contributed in no uncertain measure to the disasters which Germany is now suffering at the hands of the Russians. But this material contribution, I maintain, was not the principal or the main vital contribution of my country to the cause of Great Britain and her Allies.

Her major contribution was her demonstration of faith and fortitude in the face of inevitable disaster. Even if she had not had
the fate of so many more powerful nations in Europe before her
eyes at the time of the brutal violation of her peaceful neutrality,
it would hardly have been reasonable to suppose that she could
have defeated Italy, a Power more than six times her size, nor was
the effective defence of Greece against invasion by the Germans
ever believed by anyone in the country to be a possibility, with
the Balkan States so lamentably disunited—with a treacherous
Bulgaria lusting after easy gain, with Yugoslavia in the throes of
internal disruption, with a friendly Turkey unable, owing to her
geographical and political situation, to implement her friendship
by active participation at that critical moment.

It was known that Great Britain would make an honourable
effort to help Greece but that the available forces were insufficient,
and, moreover, Greece did have before her tragic examples in the
fate of Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, Belgium, Denmark,
Norway—in fact of the greater part of Europe subjected to the
spreading might of unrelenting German domination. And yet
not for one moment did the Greeks hesitate because, in the words
of Herodotus, referring to a similar situation which occurred
twenty-five centuries ago:

"It was not possible for them to accept terms that would bring
slavery to Greece."

And so the nation fought: the whole nation—the armed
forces on land, on sea and in the air, and behind the armies the
women, the children and the older men exerted every sinew in
this unprecedented struggle against a force that could never be
overcome by their slender resources but has been in effect
vanquished by their indomitable spirit.

In estimating Greece’s moral contribution at its proper value,
I should like you to consider also that a great part of her material
interests militated in favour of her coming to an amicable agree-
ment with the Axis Powers. Owing to a negligence which it is
hard to understand and which was certainly not due to Greek
causes, trade between Great Britain and Greece, between 1925
and 1938, dwindled to almost one-third of its original volume.
German agents, middle men and commercial travellers, swarmed
in all the countries of South-East Europe. The firms they
represented had the full support of the German Government. Greek produce—tobacco in vast quantities, minerals, currants, fruit—were all bought up by Germany. The financing of these vast transactions was carried out by means of clearing arrangements, the result of which was that Greece, in order to further this valuable export trade, was obliged to order from Germany her industrial plant, machinery, chemical products, and many other goods which she would normally have bought from England or America. When business connections on so vast a scale are established between two countries, other ties, both cultural and political, eventually follow. I need not remind you that the British Empire was built up in the wake of private trading companies.

Now Greece, in defence of her liberty and in support of the moral principles which she considered honourable and right, was not influenced by the very important material considerations which I have just outlined.

Looking to the future in this connection, I should like to stress the vital importance for Great Britain, that her general lines of foreign policy, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean, should be co-ordinated with some sort of controlled trade policy, if your country is to retain her imperial prestige and the friendship of many small nations who in the past seem to have had to struggle against superhuman odds and against millions of miles of red tape in order to be allowed to offer it.

Now I will pass to the wider theme of a durable peace settlement. Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt, I think, rendered a signal service to humanity when at a timely moment they signed the historic Atlantic Charter and laid the broad foundation of eventual international agreement.

After the savage din of war has subsided and exhausted humanity has laid down its arms, there is no doubt that all the nations of the world, without exception, will be eager for real peace and concord. But at that moment we must guard against being overcome by indifference, which may well arise from a latent conviction in the minds of those who will negotiate the peace, that in their life-time at least it will not be possible for the nations to fight again. This kind of indifference is most insidious for it
might well lead to careless patchwork, whereas what the world needs is as much courage and determination in building up the world’s fabric as has been shown in preventing its total destruction by Nazi tyranny.

To my mind the principal crime which Hitler has committed is that by his nefarious system he has built up against the people of Germany and her associates such a wall of hatred amongst the nations who have temporarily become their victims, that to expect universal goodwill to follow the signature of peace would be an excursion into a Utopia of the most dangerous nature. And for this reason I consider that the German dictator has wantonly destroyed something very precious, and indeed sacred, in the relations of man with man and of nation with nation.

What are you going to do with Germany after the war? We have all of us turned this question over in our minds again and again no doubt, and when you give me an answer to it, I will give you the answer to the question—What are we going to do with Bulgaria?

For her savage hordes have come down into the northern provinces of Greece on the heels of their German masters and have assisted them most efficiently in establishing the New Order in Thrace and Eastern Macedonia. Seventy thousand Greeks have been driven out of their towns, villages and farms and sent to starve with the rest of Greece which is enjoying the benefits of Nazi rule in the south. Between ten and fifteen thousand Greeks have been massacred in the most ruthless manner by the Bulgars, for whom so much sympathy has been felt in some circles in this country that your Government hesitated to declare war on them and, in fact, did not do so when war was declared on Finland, Hungary and Roumania. The honour of this initiative was left to Bulgaria.

However much the men who will be at the head of Greece’s destinies when peace comes may realize the necessity for coming to an amicable and sincere understanding with her neighbours and former enemies, you must realize that it is going to be extremely difficult to heal the gaping wounds which brutal savagery on such a scale has opened.

I think, however, that you may count on Greece taking the
GREECE'S RÔLE AS A BALKAN POWER

initiative in a bona-fide attempt to arrive at a working arrangement in South-Eastern Europe. Her past record is a guarantee of this. And at a time when the great nations in the world were at sixes and sevens Greece, through the foresight of her great statesman Eleutherios Venizelos patched up her age-long quarrel with Turkey and came to an agreement with her, which has not only proved permanent but has been one of the stabilizing factors in that formerly explosive corner of the Mediterranean. It was Greece, too, that took the lead in promoting the Balkan Entente, which did everything in its power to include Bulgaria within its folds. It failed to do so because, as her Prime Minister, Monsieur Filov, has stated in his speech to the National Assembly, delivered on November 19, 1941—"Bulgaria is a small nation, but even so her action has without doubt wrecked the much-discussed plan of a Balkan bloc. It was because of Bulgaria's firm attitude that this bloc never materialized, and thus a scheme contrary to German interests was foiled."

After this war the teeth of the aggressor powers must be drawn. There is no doubt about that. When they have been drawn satisfactorily and a certain time has been given to the victims of aggression to recover from their injury, a modus vivendi, which will look to the future and to the promotion of lasting peace, must be found. Of that we are fully conscious.

Quite what form this modus vivendi will take it is impossible to forecast in any detail at the present moment. Many susceptibilities, both internal and external, in the various nations concerned, will have to be handled delicately, and it is hoped that the statesmen who will be responsible for this task will be equal to their mission in the broadest sense.

However, Greece and Jugoslavia have already taken one step forward which is of considerable importance, by signing the Greco-Jugoslav Agreement for a Balkan Union, in London on January 15, 1942. The significance of this Agreement is that Greece and Jugoslavia, friends and allies in the cause of liberty, democracy and civilization, are fully alive to their responsibilities, as pioneers in the Balkan Peninsula, to the need of post-war Europe for a lasting peace.

The Agreement marks a very great advance upon all previous
instruments of a similar nature in that both its scope and its appeal to mutual confidence and solidarity are much wider. The clause inviting the eventual adherence of other Balkan States demonstrates the constructive intentions of the signatories.

Here are the main lines of the Agreement: It provides for the closest political, military and economic collaboration between Greece and Jugoslavia, collaboration which goes far beyond the limits of any previous Balkan Entente. Its aim is to ensure the independence and peace of the Balkan States by affirming the principle of the Balkans for the Balkan peoples. The signatories declare that they would welcome the future adhesion to the Agreement of other Balkan States ruled by Governments freely and legally constituted, and set up permanent machinery for the constant collaboration of the statesmen, general staffs, economists, experts and parliaments of the member States. The Union is to act in a uniform manner on the international plane, to settle all disputes by arbitration, to co-ordinate commercial activities and to defend the European frontiers of the States of the Union.

Thus by the signature of the Agreement, Greece stabilises her position as a Balkan Power without jeopardizing her position as a Mediterranean.

It must not, however, be forgotten when we discuss Balkan problems, and indeed European problems, that the position of Russia after the war will have to be given far greater consideration than many are willing to suppose. Russia is not a small ally whose courage and whose services can be praised in glowing terms, and whose hopes and aspirations can be put on a shelf and locked within a cupboard whose key, if convenient, may be lost. Russia is a great Power with a definite policy, and she is governed to-day by statesmen whose philosophy is based on precision and realism. Russia's claims to a very big share in the control of the world's destinies at the end of the war are certainly not going to be locked up in any cupboard. And she will have her say in matters concerning the affairs of South-Eastern Europe, where she has always exercised considerable influence over her spiritual satellites, the Slav States. Possibly Russia may find the solution to the Bulgarian problem. She may manage to keep those
truculent tartars in order. She will certainly develop her affinities with the Jugoslavs.

From the Greek point of view I personally do not share the opinion that Russian influence across the northern boundaries of Greece will be a menace. It could not be a greater menace than that of the Central Powers during the last hundred years. It must not be forgotten that Russia has undergone a radical transformation since the bloody days of the Bolshevist revolution in 1918. Much theory has receded with bloodshed, and she is grappling with her problems in a practical way. From her revolution, which was a necessary one, she is emerging with the same strength as France emerged from the revolution of 1789, and though the spirit of the new Russia may not be pleasing to some of our die-hards who would like to go on living on the—alas! no longer existent fat of the land, it seems to be developing definitely on lines of progress coupled with strength. And so in the Councils of the peace John Bull and Uncle Sam will have to listen to quite a number of home truths from Uncle Joe, and they will probably have to lump them.

As regards Greece, I feel that our problem is two-fold: we have to establish a firm foundation of amity and understanding with our Slav neighbours on the north, who will come under Russian influence, in order to be able to develop as a Mediterranean nation, whose chief source of prosperity is on the sea; in this latter sphere we shall always come under British influence, and for this we should be thankful.

I do feel most strongly that the maintenance of the very close relationship between Great Britain and Greece which at present exists, should be solidly maintained. To us, a maritime power, it would obviously be invaluable, but to Great Britain also it would offer very definite advantages. I think the present war has demonstrated the truth of the French proverb: “On a souvent besoin d’un plus petit que soi,” and Greece can afford not only strategic advantages to her powerful ally, but holds the keys to the important air trade routes to Africa, India and the Far East.

I have thrown out all these random thoughts very tentatively; I do not claim for them that they are even mature. They are,
rather, food for thought, and this, I believe, is what we have come to seek here.

As regards Greece’s more individual aspirations, I may say that she is not seeking territorial expansion. She merely desires such adjustments to be made as will ensure that the whole Greece people will be included within her frontiers without prejudice to other peoples, and that their security will be guaranteed as far as possible against a repetition of the aggression of which she has been the innocent victim. If this principle is followed—it is a principle laid down by the Atlantic Charter—Northern Epirus with its Greek population and the towns of Argyrocastro and Korytsa will revert to Greece, whose right to this province was acknowledged by international instruments at the end of the last war. The Dodecanese will also revert to Greece, as well as another Mediterranean island—I hope—whose name for reasons of policy escapes me just now.

For the moment the discussion of these questions is premature. We entered the war without bargaining, because it was our duty towards ourselves to fight as we did. We are continuing in our war effort unceasingly without bargaining, and one has been brought up to believe that “virtue reaps its own reward,” and I have no doubt that it does.