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TURKS, SWEDES AND FAMISHED GREEKS. SOME ASPECTS OF  
FAMINE RELIEF IN OCCUPIED GREECE, 1941-44

In the course of the first months of the Axis occupation of Greece, it became evident that the country was headed for a major emergency related to the availability and distribution of foodstuffs. The reasons for this emergency—soon to develop to a full-scale, widely-spread famine—are manifold and beyond the scope of this paper. What is aimed at here is a first presentation of the two major schemes by which the parties involved interacted to face the emergency. The term ‘parties involved’ is defined as the authorities in Greece—Axis authorities and collaborationist government—and abroad—the Greek government-in-exile, the British and United States governments and to a lesser extent the Swedish, Turkish and Swiss governments—; also included are non-governmental actors (e.g. the Greek-American community of the United States, the International Red Cross et al.) that also played a role in the crisis. The result of the interaction of the above actors was a series of relief efforts of different scale and effectiveness (for a list of these, see p. 294 Table 1, below). Some of these only brought a small amount of food into the country while some never went beyond the stage of planning.

This paper aims at looking at two of these efforts, which also happen to be the largest scale, most effective and best known such. Its sources are, mainly, such evidence as is provided by the British files deposited at the Public Record Office (PRO) and the U.S. government files at the United States National Archives; other sources, published and unpublished, are also used. It also seeks to establish the attitudes of both belligerents but mainly of the British side towards relief and the crisis created by the naval blockade in Greece. More specifically, it attempts to ascertain the adequacy of the two major plans proposed and / or put into effect; the key arguments involved in these two initiatives; the steps taken until a satisfactory solution to the problem had been reached; and the compatibility of this solution to the established blockade policy.

TABLE 1

*The Relief Efforts and related schemes*

Abyssinian Scheme: August - November 1941**
Vatican's approaches: September - November 1941
Turkish Relief Scheme: October 1941-August 1942*
Evacuation Scheme: November 1941 - February 1942**
Surreptitious deliveries: November 1941 - February 1942**
ELLA - TURK: November - December 1941*
Turkish Professional bodies contributions: Autumn-Winter 1941*
Swiss milk consignments: July - October 1942*
Swedish Scheme: March - August 1942 - November 1944*

\*Operated

\*\* Plan; not put into effect.

*1. The initial response of the British Government to the Greek famine:  
The "Turkish Scheme"*

Early in autumn 1941, a proposal was made to provision Greece from neutral Turkey. In official Whitehall circles of the time and in the relevant papers, it was often referred to as "the Turkish scheme"; it also was the first relatively large scale relief effort to be used in Greece. Its conception and overall operation bore the stamp of the dual approach adopted by the British government towards the blockade (on which more later). It was a scheme devised, supervised and, to a considerable extent, run by the Foreign Office; the opinion and concurrence of the Ministry of Economic Warfare that should have been responsible, appears to have been sought but in the circumstances its importance seemed rather limited. Being, as it was, within the confines of the strict blockade rules, set down by the Ministry of Economic Warfare, the plan appeared to be beyond its jurisdiction; therefore its co-operation was not essential.

The scheme was essentially an attempt to provision Greece with food coming from a country within the blockade area, namely Turkey<sup>1</sup>. In the cir-

1. See e.g. PRO FO 837/1222, tel. no. 628 ARFAR, from MEW to Angora, 7th September 1941: 7. We gladly countenance and encourage the sending of food from Turkey. Turkey is within the blockade area and the food in question could be bought by the Germans if it were not bought for the Greeks. Consequently, at the worst no absolute gain for the enemy results; ...

cumstances, Turkey, having a common land (as well as sea) frontier with Greece was allowed to export surplus food there. However, this process was not as straightforward as it might initially appear.

The scheme was primarily operated from Ankara. Food was purchased in Turkey by the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation (usually abbreviated to U.K.C.C.), acting as an agent for the Greek government-in-exile and the Greek War Relief Association (G.W.R.A.)<sup>2</sup>. It was the G.W.R.A. that provided most of the capital needed for the purchases: the remittances were channelled from the United States, via London, to the British Embassy in Ankara<sup>3</sup>. The activities of the U.K.C.C. were overseen by the British Embassy in Ankara, which supervised the scheme, and played a crucial role in the handling of the whole affair. It was especially active vis-a-vis the Turkish government, which it often had to pressure for a number of matters, among them vital export licences, permits for the ships to sail etc. Safe conducts for the ships were also arranged through this channel, which regularly reported to the Foreign Office and the London headquarters of the U.K.C.C. on the progress of the scheme.

The food was sent to Greece by sea: s/s 'Kurtulush', an old, small steamer of 2.720 tons, was used. It made its first journey on 13 October 1941 and continued until 20 January 1942, when it sank during a storm in the sea of Marmora. Then, three more journeys were made by another small steamer, s/s 'Dumlupinar', of 2.800 tons, before Turkey stopped all exports<sup>4</sup>. This

2. Also called the Vanderbilt Committee from its honorary Chairman, Harold Vanderbilt. This was an organization formed by the Greek-Americans on 8 November 1940, two weeks after the Italian attack against Greece. Its real president was the film industry magnate, Spyros Skouras, also president of National Theatres Inc. (and of Twentieth Century Fox). The organization was very successful in organizing and collecting funds: within months of its formation, 964 local chapters had been formed and by April 1941, \$ 5.25 million had been collected. See Saloutos Th., *The Greeks in the United States*, Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. 345-6. 349 and passim).

3. See e.g. PRO FO 837/1232, no. 77 ENCOM, from Istanbul (Constantinople) to UKCC, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 5 November 1941: We anxiously await funds for Greek relief having spent already 10.001.000 lire. 2. Please send immediately £ 200.000 and arrange for further £ 200.000 to be available for remittance at our request. ... Also, FO 837/1232, tel. no. 169 ENCOM, 27th November 1941, UKCC to Istanbul: "We have received \$ 300.000 from Greek War Relief Association in partial reimbursement for funds already expended by you...". The FO files also contain very detailed accounts of food bought and sent, together with the charter expenses and other information relevant to this relief effort.

4. See Kitsikis D., "I Peina sta Hronia tis Katohis, oi Politikes Sinepeies" (Famine during the Occupation, the political consequences), in *Hellas kai Xenoi* (Greece and foreigners), Athens (: Estia), 1977, pp. 176, 178.

was the result of restrictions on the foodstuffs that could be exported, that had been put into effect in early December 1941 by the Turkish Government; a decision to stop altogether the relief supplies to Greece had been taken on 26 December 1941. It was not enforced because of pressure brought to bear on the Turkish government by the ambassadors of Great Britain, the United States and even Germany<sup>5</sup>. However, less and less food was by then available for sale in Turkey, while prices of foodstuffs were rising. The coup de grace to the Turkish scheme was the decision of the Turkish Government on 2 February 1942 to forbid the export of all major foodstuffs. The reason for this action was a shortage of foodstuffs in Turkey itself. Further pressure by the Allies gave the scheme a further reprieve<sup>6</sup>; however, the supplies were drying up. The effect of this gradual drying up of supplies was obvious in the cargoes of the relief ship: in its penultimate journey the cargo of the *Dumlupinar* had been reduced to such food as could be purchased; it was mostly raisins, dried figs, walnuts, hazelnuts and olives. The steamer left Constantinople for its last journey to Piraeus on 10 August 1942, loaded with 1800 tons of beans and 300 tons of potatoes<sup>7</sup>. The amount sent is shown to be pitifully small when compared to the actual needs of foodstuffs normally imported by Greece. A 1942 Red Cross report, gives the annual average imports of Greece at some 590.000 tons and 700.000 head of cattle<sup>8</sup>. During these eight months between October 1941 and August 1942, the eight voyages were made by the two steamers brought a total of 14.031 tons of foodstuffs into Greece none of which was wheat or cereals badly needed<sup>9</sup>. Small in itself, this number was even well below the estimated (and authorised by the British authorities) target amount of 50.000 tons<sup>10</sup>, set when the scheme began. The

5. See PRO FO 837/1237, tel. no. 1497, Angora to FO, 12 August 1942; also Kitsikis, "I Peina...", p. 177.

6. See e.g. U.S. Department of State papers, 868.48/3289, telegram U.S. Embassy in London to Secretary of State, A-154, 24 September 1942.

7. See Kitsikis, "I Peina...", p. 178.

8. See PRO FO 837/1236, Red Cross report, "Relief for Greece". The actual figures are 450.000 tons of wheat, 30.000 tons of rice, 68-70.000 tons of cereals, 20.000 tons of dried vegetables, 20.000 tons of fresh and tinned fish, as well as smaller amounts of sugar, condensed milk, coffee and tea. This same report states that Greece is only self-sufficient in raisins, tobacco and olive oil.

9. See PRO FO 837/1236, report from Angora.

10. See PRO FO 837/1232, tel. No. 675 ARFAR, from Angora to Ministry of Economic Warfare, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 16th October 1941, also PRO FO 837/1232, letter No. W13415/49/49, Eden to Tsouderos, 18th November 1941.

same was true for the number of trips completed: the original estimate was that it would probably make two trips per month<sup>11</sup>.

The goods were shipped to Athens, under the auspices of the Turkish Red Crescent (the Turkish equivalent of the Red Cross), accompanied by two observers from this organization. In Athens an International Red Cross Committee was responsible for their distribution<sup>12</sup>. This was effected mainly by use of the municipal and welfare organisations' soup kitchens. From the description of the above facts, the nature of this relief effort emerges. Turkey was chosen as the country of origin of the relief because it was the only neutral country in the area, because of its proximity to Greece, and also because of the common land frontiers the two countries share. The rules of the blockade, as interpreted by the British government, permitted transport of foodstuffs by land within the blockade area; this was of course realistic: control of this form of traffic by the Allies was virtually impossible. On the contrary, submarines, surface vessels and aeroplanes made the traffic on the sea lanes surrounding the Axis-occupied Europe (and therefore also those between Greece and Turkey) controllable to a large extent. Thus the blockade was mainly a naval affair.

However, very little, if any, use was made of the land route from Turkey to Greece in the shipment of relief supplies, thus breaking at a very early stage the principle of the blockade. A point should be made clear here concerning the choice of transport: it is possible that the sea route was not so much chosen, rather than imposed: it could be that it was the only practicable way to send anything to Greece at the time. The disruption to the rail links was at the time extensive, due to the heavy fighting of April 1941, between the retreating Allied forces and the German Army<sup>13</sup>. The overland route was unusable (either because of damage to it or because its use had been denied

11. See PRO FO 837/1232, tel. No. 675 ARFAR, from Angora to Ministry of Economic Warfare, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 16th October 1941.

12. See PRO FO 837/1232, tel. No. 675 ARFAR, from Angora to Ministry of Economic Warfare, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 16th October 1941, explaining the terms and conditions of the operation of the scheme.

13. See PRO FO/837 1222, Tel. no. 594 ARFAR, 10 September 1941, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, from Angora to Ministry of Economic Warfare, relating a meeting between the Secretary of the German Legation and the Director of Turk-Ellas: ... 2. In the course of their conversation the Germans laid particular stress on the necessity of land communications between Turkey and Central Europe but added that owing to their commitments in Russia where they had to reconstruct thousands of bridges, work in the Balkans was being delayed.

by the authorities) until the end of April 1942; the condition of the roads apart, lorries were scarce<sup>14</sup>. In any event, the effect of the resulting action remains the same: the Turkish relief scheme broke the essence if not the letter of the blockade.

Despite its advantages, however, this plan had inherent, insurmountable weaknesses. First, Turkey was, in accordance to Blockade rules, allowed to export surplus indigenous food but not food imported to the country. This had a pre-emptive value for the Allied war effort: Turkish produced food sent to Greece would no longer be available for sale to the Axis Powers. It also meant however that, as Turkey was herself an importer of wheat, this commodity could not (even if it was available) be exported (or re-exported) to Greece. However, wheat was the commodity needed most in Greece. Quantities of wheat were sent from Allied stocks to Turkey, but re-export of any of these was forbidden. A letter Eden sent to Tsouderos, the Prime Minister of the Greek Government-in-Exile, makes the above facts quite clear:

...there is a shortage of wheat in Turkey itself and it is precisely for this reason that Turkey is importing wheat from abroad. ... Moreover, the Turkish Government have only been able to import this wheat by giving an undertaking that it is for home consumption and not for re-export<sup>15</sup>.

The surplus goods that Turkey could therefore export were confined to other types of foodstuffs. These were varied, but always in small quantities: potatoes, onions, chickpeas, eggs, salted boars' meat, dried and fresh fish, dried fruit, etc. were among the food sent<sup>16</sup>. The total estimated quantity of

14. See PRO FO 837/1237, "General Report of the International Red Cross Committee on The Supervision of The Distribution of Food Relief Shipments From Overseas and Neutral European Countries", p. 5. On the condition of the roads and the scarcity of lorries see Margaritis G., *Apo tin Itta stin exegersi, Ellada anoixi 1941 - fthinoporo 1942* (From defeat to rebellion, Greece, spring 1941-autumn 1942), Athens (: O Politis), 1992, pp. 59-63.

15. See PRO FO 837/1232, letter No. W13415/49/49, Eden to Tsouderos, 18th November 1941, p. 1. The same point is made in a letter sent by W. A. Camps (of the Ministry of Economic Warfare) to J. Balcon in the U.K. headquarters of the UKCC in 8 November 1941: "... I think I should mention that the Angora [Ankara] Embassy has instructions that dispatch of wheat to Greece by the U.K.C.C. would not be compatible with the blockade because Turkey is also importing wheat. ... I thought it as well to explain this point, lest you at this end should draw false inferences from our silence". See PRO FO 837/1232, letter, Camps to Balcon, confidential, 8 November 1941.

16. See e.g. *The Times*, 6 October 1941, 3c, "Turkish Food Ship For Greece - Departure

the supplies that would become available were about 50.000 tons; as it was, the actual supplies sent fell well short of this target.

Shrewd as its design may have been, this operation did nothing, however, to uphold another aspect of the war effort, the blockade. According to the British "Statement on the Blockade policy" of 10th March 1941,

The blockade is not a food blockade or an oil blockade, but a blockade directed against the whole economic war-machine of the enemy. It is intended to deprive him of imported goods, to drive him into using in uneconomic ways goods which he possesses or produces, to aggravate his transport facilities and to render as costly and burdensome as possible distribution of supplies within the areas which he controls ... Every import of food-stuffs into an occupied territory conflicts directly with one or other of these objectives. [...] ... it [the blockade] must extend over the whole range of countries overrun by the enemy<sup>17</sup>.

It may be observed that in comparison to the above statement, even the first agreement secured from the Ministry of Economic Warfare for a relief shipment, violated the principles of a complete blockade. A further step in this direction was taken when the shipments began by sea. These moves, undertaken by the Foreign Office, may very well be interpreted as shrewd and far reaching; the Foreign Office through the embassy in Ankara, had almost complete control over the quantity and quality of food sent through the blockade to Greece. This enabled it to monitor and control the traffic between the two countries, not to mention the fact that this whole effort provided an easy way of verifying the information received from other quarters about Greece, especially the food situation (but also other areas such as the morale of the people) in that country. In addition to this, the flow of relief supplies could be stopped at practically any moment. This must certainly have been an added means of bringing pressure to bear on the German occupying authorities in Greece; any false move by the Germans could stop the flow of supplies, obliging them (theoretically at least) to send supplies of their

this week". This article also reports 50.000 live goats among the cargo of s/s Kurtulush; goats however do not appear to have been sent at any stage of the relief effort, and do not appear in the detailed lists of goods sent that are to be found in the PRO files.

17. See PRO FO 837/1221, W6503/49/49, "Statement on the Blockade Policy of the British Government: communicated by the Washington Embassy to Ministry of Economic Warfare. (Received May 29), dated Washington, March 10, 1941.

own to the country. Allied control, however, created an added dimension: it raised the question of moral responsibility of the Allies for the course of the famine from this time on. Once the blockade was lifted, the Allies in a sense accepted that this was the cause of the famine — or at least one of the causes contributing to it. From this point onwards, further deterioration and deaths somehow became — semi-officially — Allied responsibility.

Finally, the overall approach to this scheme reflects the legalistic way of thinking adopted by the British government during this period. It appears that the realism shown when agreeing to the Turkish scheme stopped there. As the answers given by the Minister of Economic Warfare to parliamentary questions from this point onwards show, the Ministry of Economic Warfare (M.E.W.) (acting as a Government spokesman in blockade matters) appears to have entrenched itself within the limits set by the rules and practice of economic warfare and the international conventions. It then proceeded to engage in a war of words with the Foreign Office, Parliament, the Greek government-in-exile and any other quarter interested in the relief of the Greek food situation. The fact that the principle of the blockade as defined in the Ministry of Economic Warfare declaration had been set aside and the actual rapid deterioration of the situation in Greece, although weighing (often heavily) upon Ministry of Economic Warfare minds, did not appear to be serious enough to bring the Ministry out of its ensuing negative attitude towards further action.

## 2. *The Swedish Scheme (March 1942-November 1944)*

As soon as it had been decided that the blockade was to be lifted for Greece, consideration of alternative schemes, as well as the problems they presented, began. A quantity of some 15,000 tons of wheat per month was made available as a free gift of the Canadian Government to the Greek Government in exile<sup>18</sup>. This gift was originally to be part of the Canadian con-

18. See e.g. U.S. State Department papers, 868.48/3320, Letter from the Second Secretary of the British Embassy to Mr. Foy Kohler of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, Washington, 18 September 1942, SD-44 also printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942*, United States Printing Office, Washington 1962, vol. II, pp. 780-781. Also Foreign Economic Administration, Liberated areas Division, in collaboration with the State Department, *A Survey of Greek Relief, April 1942 to December 1943*, March 1944, National Archives of the U.S., 868.48/5325, p. ii.

tribution to a planned central pool of foodstuffs for use in Europe after its liberation; eventually, however, it was made available to Greece for consumption during the Occupation.

The plan was presented as a Swedish initiative, for reasons of tact and security: if the Axis authorities were officially informed of the origin of the relief, it was likely that their co-operation would be refused. The origin of the wheat arriving in Greece was in the beginning left vague; however, both British and United States press releases on the subject did eventually mention the origin of the donor (Canada and later Argentina); radio broadcasts from outside Greece did the same, a fact that created some hazards for the operation<sup>19</sup>. Regardless of official declarations the origin and funding of the relief operation was well known to the Axis and the Greeks in occupied Greece.

As far as logistics were concerned, it appears that the major obstacle confronting the planners was the availability of ships. In the words of a memorandum to the War Cabinet: "In any case, the quantity to be supplied under the scheme ... must be governed by the shipping available"<sup>20</sup>. The Allies were at the time still fighting the battle of the Atlantic, with serious monthly losses in tonnage. On the other hand, there was a considerable amount of Swedish tonnage lying idle in the Baltic. Approaches were made to the Swedish government in order to ascertain whether these ships could be made available to carry wheat from Canada to Greece. The initial approaches were successful: both the owners of the ships and the Swedish Red Cross expressed interest in the scheme. The Swedish Government then undertook to approach the German Government.

According to Foreign Office estimates<sup>21</sup> there would have to be at least six ships of 5.000 tons gross each, needed to transport the 15.000 tons of wheat per month that Canada supplied to Greece. These were to leave the Baltic and travel to Canada; there, they would take their cargo of wheat and travel in unescorted convoys following pre-arranged routes to Greece. They were to sail under Swedish and Red Cross flags and were painted white with special markings and colours<sup>22</sup>.

19. See e.g. Mohn P., *Inter Arma Caritas, Anamniseis apo tin Ellada stin Katohi*, Nicosia, 1968, p. 88.

20. See PRO FO 837/1231, W. P. (42) 80, 14 February 1942, War Cabinet, Greece: The Blockade.

21. See PRO FO 837/1231, W. P. (42) 80, 14 February 1942, War Cabinet, Greece: The Blockade.

22. They had two red crosses and the ships name and the word Sweden painted on their

The Swedish Red Cross originally chartered eight Swedish ships totalling some 54.000 tons gross tonnage. As time went by and the amount of supplies allowed into Greece grew, more ships were needed. Logistics dictated that ships totalling three times the tonnage of goods to be transported had to be available; that was necessary in order to maintain an uninterrupted flow of supplies into Greece. The one way passage from Canada to Greece normally lasted three weeks; account then had to be taken of the time needed to load or unload the ships and of imponderables as well; this added up to three to four weeks. As a result, the return journey to Canada for any one ship lasted up to three months or more. For these reasons, the number of ships chartered to the Swedish Red Cross grew until eventually it doubled<sup>23</sup>.

For the initial period August to December 1942, the charters were paid by the Greek Government and the GWRA. In July 1942, however, a Lend-Lease agreement was signed between the United States government and the Greek government-in-exile<sup>24</sup>. Under the terms of this agreement the United States undertook to pay (among other things) for the expenses of the charters of the relief ships, as well as for some 3.000 tons of medicines, dried milk powder and beans that the Greek government had been sending on the same ships each month<sup>25</sup>. The expenses were very considerable and it is probable that it was this agreement that made it financially possible for the scheme to progress<sup>26</sup>.

decks, another two red crosses, and vertical lines with the Swedish colours on their sides; this was decided after consultations with both belligerents and on the whole proved an effective protection against attacks. See Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 18.

23. See Mohn P., *Inter Arma...*, p. 18.

24. The British Government communicated to the U.S. government its views on the subject on 18 September 1942: We should warmly welcome anything which contributes to the success of the scheme and if the Greek Government were having difficulty in finding the necessary funds and the United States Government were willing to assist them, we should be happy to see an arrangement concluded for such assistance. In our view any such arrangement should be made directly between the United States Government and the Greek Government, to whom this matter has not yet been mentioned. See U.S. State Department papers, 868.48/3320, Letter from the Second Secretary of the British Embassy to Mr. Foy Kohler of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, Washington, 18 September 1942, SD-44, also printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942*, United States Printing Office, Washington 1962, vol. II, pp. 780-781. The agreement itself was signed on 10 July 1942, with the Lend-Lease Administration taking over charter payments from January 1, 1943. See 868.51/1675, letter, The Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, Washington, April 26, 1943, also printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943*, United States Printing Office, Washington 1962, vol. IV, pp. 174-175.

25. See Kitsikis, "I Peina...", p. 172.

26. Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 18, gives a figure of "over ten million dollars" for the total

The journeys of the ships were not uneventful; one of them (the s/s Eros) sunk in the Aegean during a storm; another (the s/s Bardaland) developed engine problems and had to be replaced; two ships (the s/s Kamelia and the s/s Fenia) were either damaged or sunk by mines; the s/s Wiril was mistakenly bombed and sunk in the harbour in Chios by a British plane<sup>27</sup>, while the s/s Stureborg was sunk by an Italian seaplane while at sea<sup>28</sup>. Despite these problems, however, the relief effort continued unabated. Upon arrival in Piraeus the ships unloaded their cargo; there a mixed Swedish-Swiss committee took over. Its role was to distribute the supplies. Originally the main target of the relief was the population of Athens. Soon afterwards, Salonika, was included as well as parts of mainland Greece and some of the islands of the Aegean Sea, mainly Samos, Chios, Mitilyne and Icaria. These latter had suffered badly during the winter of 1941-42 and from an early stage shiploads of supplies were diverted to them. This practice was continued until the end of the Occupation, expanding in order to provide supplies for a number of other islands<sup>29</sup>, as well as for larger parts of Greece; eventually the relief scheme covered most of the country. There were however a number of dif-

expenses incurred for the charters and covered by the U.S. government. Kitsikis, "I Peina...", p. 172, note 82, quoting the *Dept. of State Bulletin*, 16, annex, 4 May 1947, p. 873, gives a figure of 1 million dollars a month for the original eight Swedish ships chartered; the resulting cost would be at least 22 million U.S. \$. The same source gives 81.500.000 U.S. \$ as the total amount of aid received by Greece during the war. According to either of the estimates however, the expenses were considerable. The figure of \$900,000 to 1,000,000 a month is given also in State Department Papers, 868.51/1668, memorandum by the adviser on Political Relations, Washington, December 3, 1942, also printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943*, United States Printing Office, Washington 1962, vol. IV, p. 167, and 868.51/1675, letter, the Secretary of State to the Greek Ambassador, May 4, 1943, in FRUS, 1943, vol. IV, pp. 175-176. A 1944 State Department source gives the sum of \$11.5 million for the year 1943 with an estimated expenditure of \$11.75 million for the first half of 1944. See, Foreign Economic Administration, Liberated areas Division, in collaboration with the State Department, *A Survey of Greek Relief April 1942 to December 1943*, March 1944, National Archives of the U.S., 868.48/5325, p. ii.

27. On this incident see Glykas Antonis, "O vomvardismos toy Wiril", *Chiaki Epi-theorisis*, V: 13 (1967) [Glykas Antonis, "The Bombing of the Wiril", in Greek].

28. See Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 20.

29. For example the food situation deteriorated in the Dodecannese during the period following the surrender of Italy and the failed attempt of the Allies to capture the islands. As a result, in January 1944 a Swiss Red Cross representative arrived in Leros to organise a committee for the distribution of foodstuffs. These were carried there from Smyrna on small kaiques. This information was kindly supplied by Mr. J. Kastis in a letter dated 11/4/89.

facilities, outside Athens: Salonika was supplied by rail, that was not always operating. The islands close to the mainland (Aegina, Spetses, Hydra, Salamina) were supplied by small boats (caiques); for a few months in spring and summer 1943 and again in 1944 the islands of the Dodecanese and the Islands of the Eastern Aegean were supplied with small boats sailing from Smyrna in Turkey<sup>30</sup>; in Epirus and the Ionian islands distribution could not be supervised and therefore did not take place. The same applied for the Sporades (which was forbidden territory), and Thessaly, which was considered 'unsafe' by the Occupation forces due to guerrilla activities<sup>31</sup>.

The Swedish-Swiss Committee was also in charge of organising a network of local sub-committees to carry out the distribution of supplies locally. This network expanded rapidly until about three thousand such committees were operating all along the width and breadth of Greece<sup>32</sup>. By 1945, over 5350 local committees were operating<sup>33</sup>.

The Swedish-Swiss committee was distinct from the earlier Commission of the International Red Cross (see above). After some initial friction, a *modus vivendi* was reached: the I.R.C. assumed responsibility for the relations with the occupying authorities while the Swedish-Swiss committee took charge of the distribution, supervision and administration side of the relief effort. This committee was composed of seven Swedish representatives and an equal number of Swiss, with a Swedish President<sup>34</sup>.

A considerable number of problems had to be solved. They ranged from transport arrangements for the supplies to tyres and spares for the trucks that carried the supplies for their distribution within Greece, to milling arrangements<sup>35</sup>, to an elaborate rationing scheme for the population. In the words of Paul Mohn, first president of the Committee,

30. Supplies were sent to Smyrna on one of the Swedish ships from Canada and were there transhipped to small boats that transported them to the islands. See Foreign Economic Administration, Liberated areas Division, in collaboration with the State Department, *A Survey of Greek Relief, April 1942 to December 1943*, March 1944, National Archives of the U.S., 868.48/5325, p. iii. Also, 868.48/3723, enclosure in Stockholm dispatch No. 48 (E.W.) of 6 March, 1943, Greek Relief.

31. See Foreign Economic Administration, Liberated areas Division, in collaboration with the State Department, *A Survey of Greek Relief, April 1942 to December 1943*, March 1944, National Archives of the U.S., 868.48/5325, p. iv.

32. See Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, pp. 55-56. Also, for the island of Leros, J. Kastis, letter.

33. See Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. kn' (Introduction).

34. Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 15.

35. For several reasons it was not practically possible to send flour to Greece, although this would have solved many practical problems; wheat was sent instead, which was then

"...we were inundated by problems legal, social, industrial, commercial and of the national economy, diplomatic, maritime, psychological and a host of other such. Unfortunately, they did not appear one by one, but simultaneously"<sup>36</sup>.

The Committee employed a considerable number of people —over 1300 in Athens alone—<sup>37</sup> and handled over 18,000 tons of supplies per month. It had under its control three mills with a combined capacity of some 680 tons of flour a day and over 1000 employees<sup>38</sup>. A motor pool of over 27 cars and 35 lorries, served its needs in transport; these were either brought to Greece for the exclusive use of the Committee on the supply ships or acquired locally<sup>39</sup>. Spare parts and fuel for the cars and lorries of the Committee had to be found (usually imported through the blockade) as well as for the cars and lorries used by it, and also for the mills; all sorts of equipment had to be found for the administration; matters that would normally be considered trivial had to be carefully resolved: the sacking for the flour for example, had to be monitored as the blockade on textiles was always very severe. Materials and equipment needed were often only be found outside the blockade; this only spelt additional problems that had to be solved, often in cooperation with both belligerents. This fact by itself could only bring about more delays, as high level talks were held through Stockholm. Such was the volume of work there, that the Swedish Foreign Ministry had to create a special section, dealing with problems arising from negotiations connected with Greek relief<sup>40</sup>. The organisation that resulted to combat all the ensuing problems was indeed impressive as well as functional.

The details of the terms acceptable to the British Government for the operation of this scheme were set down in an official document, and communicated to the Swedish Red Cross, the Swedish Government and the Axis Powers. According to this, the Axis could not use or export any amount of

milled in Greece. See Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 29. Also, State Department Papers, 868.51/3662, memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, Washington, February 6, 1943, also printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943*, United States Printing Office, Washington 1962, vol. IV, p. 171.

36. See Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 26.

37. Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 74. The Salonika Branch of the Committee employed also several hundred people.

38. Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 28.

39. Mohn, *Inter Arma...* pp. 65-66.

40. Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 16.

foodstuffs imported as relief to Greece, unless consent was given by the British Government; the distribution of the supplies was the duty of the neutral commission, and it had to ensure that no preferential treatment was given to persons working in the interests of the Axis<sup>41</sup>. Safeguards had to be provided to this end.

While Greek relief was regulated by the Allies, at the same time, the work of the Committee was entirely dependent on the goodwill of the Axis. The Committee had to be very careful to avoid friction and misunderstandings with the Occupying powers, so that it would be left unhindered to continue its work. Despite efforts to this end, misunderstandings did occur, coming mainly from the Italian side<sup>42</sup>. These were however not serious enough to threaten the actual operation of the relief.

The Swedish-Swiss Committee continued its work until after the liberation of Greece. Extensive talks on the question of wider post-war relief had started well before that time. For Greece itself the Foreign Office was in favour of preserving the Swedish-Swiss Committee; the contrary opinion of the United States eventually prevailed. The United States, despite an initial positive response, eventually decided against it: all relief work in Greece was gradually taken over by United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA), and the Swedish-Swiss Committee was disbanded.

The Swedish scheme seems to have been the only relief effort (and probably one of a very small number of agreements in general) to have been reached among the belligerent nations while hostilities were still taking place; it was also the only one to have successfully operated for a period of several years during the second world war<sup>43</sup>. This achievement may only be credited to the work of all the people involved in the relief effort.

The importance of this scheme for Greece was inestimable. Without it, post-war Greece may well have been reduced to the state that the 1941 Foreign Office report visualised: a small nation, with its population reduced by famine and its health ruined<sup>44</sup>. The operation of the scheme, on the other hand, re-

41. See PRO FO 837/1231, W.P. (42) 80, 14 February 1942, War Cabinet, "Greece: The Blockade", Annex.

42. Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 15. The Italians also had long delayed negotiations on previous occasions.

43. Mohn, *Inter Arma...*, p. 16.

44. "... or can we view with equanimity a Greece with a population reduced to five

quired of the Allied side a major (in terms of policy, if not in terms of actual tonnage) concession in the Blockade policy. It is also possible that the Greek crisis may have led to a reconsideration (or to some rethinking) concerning the role and importance of economic warfare within the overall framework of Allied War strategy. This hypothesis is beyond the scope of this paper.

million the reduction of the Greek population by famine, its health, particularly in the case of children, ruined...". The words "a Greece with a population reduced to five million" are crossed out in the original. See PRO FO 371/29480: R 7038/96/19, memorandum signed by Edw. Warner of the Foreign Office, 11/7/1941.