

*Announcement of Prime Minister, Ioannis Metaxas,
to the owners and chief editors of the Athenian Press,
at the General Headquarters, on 30 October 1940*

Gentlemen,

I have censorship and I can force you to write only what I want. However, at this time, I do not want only your pen; I want your soul as well. For this reason I called you here today to talk to you openly. I will tell you everything. I will even tell you my big political secrets. I also want you to know everything related to our national undertaking so that you write, not only complying with my wishes, but inspired by your faith and personal knowledge of the facts.

I forbid you to reveal anything related to this matter to anyone. Absolutely and for no reason. Any violation of this order will have for the person responsible – and be certain that the person responsible will be found – the consequences that the betrayal of a great secret on which the life or death of our nation depends, even if this happened due to naiveté and without malice. I naturally have your word on this.

Do not ever think that the decision of saying “NO” was taken lightly. Do not imagine that it was a snap decision to enter the war, and do not think that everything possible that could have been done to avoid the war was not done.

Since the occupation of Albania at Easter last year, it (the Italian intentions) became obvious. Last May I clearly stated to Mr. Grazzi that if our sovereign national rights were attacked we would resist with every means possible and through every sacrifice.

However, simultaneously the information I was receiving from Rome, Budapest, Tirana and elsewhere was pointing in the opposite direction. On the 15th of August (our warship) “ELLI” was torpedoed. You are aware that from the first moment, it was established that the crime was committed by Italy. In spite of that, we did not let it be known that we had the physical evidence proving the nationality of the offender. At the same time, however, I ordered the escort destroyer - of the ships transporting the worshipers from Tinos after the offense - that if they were attacked by airplanes or in any other manner, they were to immediately make use of their weapons.

I will reveal to you now that I then sounded off Berlin appropriately. I was warned by Hitler to avoid any means possible that could be interpreted by Italy as provocation. I did everything possible to avoid giving the Italians not only cause or reason but not even a plausible excuse to complain against us, even though I understood at once what the veiled warning from Berlin meant. You know better than anyone that I did everything possible to avoid giving Italy even the appearance of having reason and cause to complain. Because of your profession you have followed in every detail the endless Italian provocations, the Christian patience we kept as we pretended that we were not aware, limiting ourselves to only refuting the Italian accusations in the press.

I admit that facing the terrible responsibility of Hellas' involvement in such a war, I resolved that it was my duty to see if it was possible to protect our country in any way possible which would be consistent with the more general interests of our Nation. In related overtures by the Axis, I was made to understand that the only solution would be the voluntary accession of Hellas to the "New Order." This accession would be accepted with great pleasure by Hitler as he was "a lover of the Hellenic Spirit." At the same time, however, I was made to understand that the accession to the New Order presupposed the preliminary lifting of all old differences with our neighbors, and even though this would naturally entail some sacrifices for Hellas, the sacrifices would be viewed completely "insignificant" compared to the financial and other advantages that the New Order would give to Hellas in Europe and the Balkans. Naturally, I discretely and unofficially resolved to find out what those sacrifices would be by which Hellas would pay its disgrace by aligning itself to the New Order voluntarily. With obvious avoidance of clearly defining what those sacrifices entailed, I was made to understand that Hitler's affection toward Hellas was the guarantee that those sacrifices were limited to very little. When I insisted that we be informed how much this "little" would be, I was finally made to understand that this consisted of some concessions in favor of Italy (by ceding Greek grounds) in the west up to Preveza, and perhaps for Bulgaria (ceding additional lands) to the east up to Alexandroupolis.

In other words, in order to avoid War we would have to become willingly slaves as well as to pay the "price" by extending the right arm of Hellas to be amputated by Italy, and the left by Bulgaria. Naturally it was not difficult for one to foresee that in that case the English, it would also cut off Hellas' legs. And they would be within their rights. Having always been masters of the sea, they would not hesitate, defending themselves after such enslavement of Hellas to their enemy, to seize, at the very least, Crete and other islands. This conclusion was not only the result of simple logic, but from reliable and certain intelligence from Egypt as well, according to which such action had been studied in advance and anticipated where it would have to happen, namely the seizure of Hellenic islands, as the natural consequence of any voluntary or non-voluntary cooperation of Hellas with the Axis, and in such occasion to impede the Axis from using them.

On the other hand, I have to admit that in such a case justice would not be with the Government of Athens, and I have to acknowledge that a nation would justifiably side against the Government, a government which in order to protect them from war would condemn them to voluntary subjugation and national mutilation.

This supposed protection would be disastrous for the future of Hellas and with the worst consequences of any War. Justice then would not be with the Government of Athens, if the latter were to act according to the demands of Berlin which I mentioned. Justice would be with the Hellenic People, who would rightly condemn it, and with the English, who defending their existence also with justification, would apply the measures they had considered and pre-planned if this were to happen, responding as well to the criticism of the Hellenic People.

If Hellas were to accede to the Axis it would be divided not in two, as it happened in 1916, but in three Hellas. The first one would be "The Official Hellas of Athens" which in order to avoid War would have been disgraced by consenting to become a willing slave. And indeed she would have paid the price of mutilating herself very tragically, having surrendered to slavery the populations of pure Hellenes, and indeed I can say the purest of Hellenes. "Second Hellas" would have been the Real Hellas. Namely the

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unanimous opinion of the Nation, which would have never accepted the voluntary subjugation, paid as a matter of fact with the unbearable national mutilation, tantamount to certain degradation equal to the future annihilation of Hellenism, as a concept and as an entity - first ethical annihilation and second material annihilation. Never would the Nation allow such a policy by the King and the National Government of the 4th of August. Finally a third Hellas would ensue, a Hellas that the democratic Hellenes, of course, would not exclude to create by invoking Democracy under the protection of the British Navy on the island of Crete and other islands. The third Hellas, "the Democratic" one would have on its side not only the eager support of England, to whom Hellas would grant the right to cover our islands, this Hellas, supported also in North Africa, would also have on its side National justice.

Its moral strength then would absorb inevitably the official Hellas, because this third Hellas would have at its disposal the unconditional approval and support of the unofficial "Second Hellas," of the national public opinion in its unanimous vote.

Gentlemen, I lived the period of the National Division created in 1916, when from that situation two Hellas resulted, that of Athens and the other of Salonica. I consider the danger, resulting from a division of Hellas as a consequence of the Second World War, a great deal more tragic, because as I explained it would not be a division, but rather a tri-sectional division of Hellas. I consider this danger for our Nation and its future unimaginably worse than the war, even if this war from which Hellas very likely will come out temporarily enslaved. I say temporarily because I firmly believe that at the end victory will be with us. Because the Germans will not win, they cannot win. There are many obstacles for this to happen.

Hellas is determined, on the one hand, not to provoke anyone, and on the other not to succumb to anyone. Above all, Hellas is determined to defend its territories, even if it were to fall. Already this decision and policy, resulting from the unprovoked attack against us, gave our country and our people the most valuable possession and the greatest element of their power.

This policy gave our Nation absolute spiritual and nationwide unity.

In addition, today there are also a few other factors that predetermine our final victory. Turkey is not, as in 1916, an ally of the Germans but an ally of the English. Bulgaria, of course, lies in wait now as it did then, but in any case, at this time, and for the time being does not dare to ambush. Time is not in favor of the Axis. It is in favor of its allies. In any case, for Germany this victory would have been possible only with world domination.

However world domination for Germany became irrefutably impossible in Dunkirk. The war was lost to the Axis the moment that England declared "We will fight even if only on our island, and beyond the seas, we will fight until we are victorious."

Furthermore, the Hellenes must know that we are not only fighting for Victory, we are fighting for Glory as well.

Now then, listen so we can understand each other. I, gentlemen, as I amply explained to you, have kept until today the policy of the late King Constantine, namely the policy of strict neutrality. I did everything possible to keep Hellas away from the battle of the giants (the Great Powers).

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Already, after the unjust attack of Italy, I followed the policy of the notable Venizelos. Because this policy that has Hellas throwing its fate with England, for which the sea has always been, as is the case for Hellas also, not the obstacle that divides but rather the bridge that unites. Of course in our Recent History, we did not only have reasons and cause for gratitude toward England whose post-war policy, especially of the most recent years, has been a policy of enormous and historic English responsibilities.

England today attributes these responsibilities to the proud determination of a great nation, undertaking the responsibility of saving the freedom and the civilization of the world. For Hellas, England is the natural ally and has repeatedly proven to be a protector, sometimes the only protector. Victory will be and it will only be England's. It will be a victory of the Anglo-Saxon world, opposite to which Germany, who has not up to now succeeded a decisive victory, is destined to be crushed. Because from now on the Horizon must not be considered by the Axis bright, not even toward the East, because the East has always been, but today even more so, the East is filled with the unforeseen, the mysterious. In the end then, we will be victorious. Also, leaving this room I want you to take with you my absolute certainty that we will win. However, I must repeat what I officially declared from the first moment: Hellas does not fight for victory. She fights for Glory! She fights for her Honor as well. Hellas has the obligation to remain worthy of her History.

Italy is a great power. When I was informed the day before yesterday that the first air raid took place, I admit I was surprised to realize that the warplanes were Italian. This is enough for you to understand what my thoughts were when I entered the war.

However, there are moments during which a nation is required, if it wants to remain great, to be able to fight even without any hope of victory. Only because it must! I know that the Hellenic People would not be able to accept anything else at this moment. Because the Hellenic Nation is free and unwavering with sound judgement and pride, since there was no occasion for its judgement to be blurred by "sales pitch" or and misleading expeditions. We did everything possible to avoid doing even the least wrong. And we will continue the same policy to the end. I have set on the table some documents. They are all documentary evidence of the premeditated Italian ambush. When I finish you may look at them. There is no need to take notes. They will be entered very soon in the White Book which I ordered to be published as soon as possible.

Gentlemen, I do not hide from you that the situation is extremely difficult. Great hardships await us. In order to avoid cause for slander I was forced to make an extremely difficult decision. When a while ago the General Staff of the Army requested, and continued to request, the mobilization order, I did not comply.

The Italian force was then met with weak Hellenic forces for at least the first days of the attack. Your role today is great and very official. Regardless of what might happen, do not lose your courage. Because otherwise it will be impossible to be worthy of your people; your duty which is to preserve the holy flame of the Hellenic People, to help the fighting army, to be collaborators of the Government, regardless of what your feelings might be towards it. You, yourselves must believe so that you can transfer to your public your faith; although this time we all have to take from the Hellenic People their indescribable courage and not to give it.

I moreover want to tell you something. I know with certainty that Hellas will suffer terribly from this hardship. I also know with certainty that we will come out not only glorious but greater as well. You will notice Mr. Churchill's telegraph which was published in the newspapers today, made public by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So I wish to stress this to you. Those of you who do not see the written assurance of the unwritten agreement for the Dodecanese do not know how to read between the lines. I have to say something else also. "The Dodecanese foresee..."

(With these dots ends the typewritten text that was found in the records of I. Metaxas).

****The preceding speech was delivered by Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas two days after the commencement of the Greco-Italian War. The show of heroism by the Greeks, and the victory they claimed, is remembered as a major victory of the Allied forces during World War II. The original transcript of the speech can be found, in Greek, in "The Diary of Ioannis Metaxas." Special thanks to Katina Kreatsoulas for the English translation presented herein.*

