



## **MOST REVEALING CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURE OF THE GREEK PRIME MINISTER JOHN METAXAS, dated 30th October 1940**

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Κοινοποιήθηκε στους εξής: Δημόσια



MINUTES OF THE 30 OCTOBER 1940 MOST REVEALING CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURE OF THE GREEK PRIME MINISTER JOHN METAXAS, TO THE OWNERS AND CHIEF EDITORS OF THE ATHENS NEWSPAPERS, ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION, WITH RELEVANT DECISIONS AND PREDICTIONS.

### **Introduction**

John Metaxas, Greek Prime Minister 1936-41, declared since 1936 the governmental determination to:

- **Stand up at all cost to the even then foreseeable attacks of Germany and Italy, and**
- **Side once again with the Allies of WW I.**

At the same time he undertook speedily the necessary preparations, using Greek funds and means, while maintaining strict neutrality and avoiding any provocation

The Italian unprovoked attack came on the 28 October 1940, following an ultimatum, that was turned down by Prime Minister John Metaxas, who two days later, on 30 October 1940, gathered the owners and chief editors of the Athens newspapers and gave them in full confidence his assessment of the situation, together with his inner thoughts, aims, expectations, predictions and decisions.

The minutes kept of this off-the-cuff extraordinary and utterly revealing heartfelt disclosure, are given below in freetranslation. **Remarkable is his clear and accurate foresight and at the same time his stanch conviction for the final Victory of the Allies and the ultimate devastation of Germany.**

### **The first part of the officially kept minutes of the Prime Minister's words**

Having a censorship, I can have you write what I wish. However, at this moment, I need not only your pens, **I need you hearts.** I have therefore invited you here, to **open my papers to you. I will tell you everything,**

**even my innermost political secrets. I want you to know all about our national encounter, so you may write not according to my instructions, but inspired by your personal belief and knowledge of things.** Of what I tell you today, I strictly forbid anything to be passed on to any one else, for whatever reason. Any deviation from this directive will be traced and the culprit punished, even if the leak was unintentional and without malice, as it would be fit in moments such as these, of life and death for the Nation. I understand, of course, I have your word.

**Do not ever think the decision to say NO to the Italian ultimatum was taken on the spur of the moment. Do not ever imagine we entered the War unexpectedly or we did not spare every possible effort to avoid it.** From Easter last year, when Italy invaded and occupied our neighbouring Albania, the Italian intentions became evident. Since May last year I had told the Italian Ambassador to Greece E. Grazzi, that in case our sovereignty was tempered with, we would fight back **at all costs and with all means.** However, at the same time, all information coming from Rome, Budapest and Tirana, was pointing in the other direction.

On August 15, 1940, our warship ELLI was torpedoed by a submarine (while attending the religious celebrations on the island of Tinos). **It was revealed from the first moment, that the crime was committed by Italy.** However, we did not permit to be made known that we possessed material evidence about the nationality of the offender. At the same time I ordered our Destroyers, accompanying the passenger ships full of the returning from the island of Tinos religious pilgrims, to fight back if attacked in any way.

I shall now reveal that I had Berlin appropriately sounded. **I was advised on behalf of Hitler, to avoid anything that might be conceived by Italy as provocation.** Although from the very first moment I understood what Berlin's vague recommendation really meant, **I did everything possible to deny the Italians any obvious or even plausible excuse to complain against us.** You of all people know best what I have done to avoid giving an excuse to Italy to appear as having any kind of grievances against Greece. Due to your profession you have followed all the details of the endless Italian verbal, written and other provocations and the religious patience with which we pretended not to understand, limiting ourselves to journalistic rebuttals of the Italian accusations against us.

Faced with this terrible responsibility, I admit that, in order to save Greece from getting involved in such a War, I considered it my duty to see if I could by all means not compromising our national interests, to spare this country from such a predicament. **Having sounded the Axis, I was given to understand clearly that the only way out for Greece, would be to willingly join the "New Order".** Hitler, "lover of the Greek spirit", would have gladly welcomed such a siding. At the same time it was also suggested that prerequisite for such accession was the settling of all old differences with our neighbours. **This certainly entailed Greek sacrifices, which should be considered as "insignificant" in relation to the "financial and other benefits", the "New Order" in Europe and the Balkans, would bring to Greece.** Naturally, with every caution and informally, **I attempted in every way to find out what specific sacrifices were expected of Greece, as an indecent payment for its voluntary readiness to submit to the "New Order".** With an obvious effort to avoid clarity, I was given to understand, that Hitler's affection for the Greeks, was the safeguard that such sacrifices were to be limited as much as possible. **When I insisted for clarifications, as to what the "minimum" of these sacrifices could amount to, I was given to understand that they entailed some "satisfaction" with respect to Italy, by ceding Greek grounds western from the town of Preveza and possibly also with respect to Bulgaria, by further ceding additional Greek lands eastern of Alexandropolis.**

**In other words, in order to avoid War we had to willingly become slaves and to pay the "price", by giving Greece's right and left arms to be amputated respectively by Bulgaria and Italy. In such a case, it was not difficult to predict that the British, masters of the seas, following the enslavement of Greece by their enemies, would not fail to defend themselves by rightly cutting-off Greece's legs, i.e. at least the island of Crete, as well as some other islands. This conclusion was not only the result of simple logical considerations, but was also drawn from certain and sure intelligence from Egypt. The British had already decided their reaction, in case Greece were to be willingly or unwillingly drawn to the Axis, in order to deny the use of Greek islands to the Axis.**

**On the other hand I cannot deny that the Government of Greece would have wronged, by willingly submitting to the Axis, in order to protect the country and its people from War, because it would have**

**condemned Greece to a wilful enslavement, together with an amputation of national lands.** This supposed protection would have been detrimental for the future of the Greek race and even worse than the consequences of any War. **In case the Greek Government had acted in accordance with the recommendations of Berlin, would have been in the wrong.** The Greek people and the British would have been respectively right, in condemning the former their Government, and in protecting the latter their existence, by applying the measures they were understood to have pre-planned, with respect to the Greek islands.

In case Greece acceded to the Axis, the country would have consequently been divided not in **two**, as in 1916, but in **three** “Greeces”:

- The first, being the “official Greece”, governed from Athens, which in order to avoid War had fallen to the disgrace of becoming willingly slave, having paid this price and having on her own accord amputated herself, by giving away lands with purely Greek populations, more so than in any other part of the country.
- The second, being the “real Greece”, i.e. the unanimous public opinion of the Greek Nation, which would never willingly accept its enslavement accompanied by the loss of Greek lands, something equivalent to utter disgrace and future nullification of the of Hellenism, with its ideals and substance. Such nullification would be firstly moral and secondly material. The Nation would never forgive the Greek King and the Government for such policies.
- The third being one more Greece, formed by Greeks under a democratic pretext and under the protection of the British Fleet, encompassing the island of Crete and other islands. This “democratic” Greece would have on her side the National Right, as well as the prompt British protection. Britain would have attained the right to protect these islands; while at the same time could also safeguard her own interests in North Africa. The moral power of this third Greece would fatefully absorb the first “official Greece”, because the third Greece would possess the unqualified approval and the support of the unofficial second “real Greece”, expressing the unanimous National public opinion.

Gentlemen, I have lived in the days of our national discord, created in 1916, when from that situation ensued **two** “Greeces”; one with its capital in Athens and the second with its capital in Thessaloniki. **The danger of a new split of Greece, resulting from the Second World War, as the previous division had resulted from the First World War, i.e. a new and more tragic partition, which as I have outlined, will culminate in the trisection of Greece.** I consider this danger for the nation and its future, Gentlemen, incomparably worse than War; even if this war may result to the **temporary** occupation of Greece. I say **temporary** occupation, because **I believe unswervingly that the Victory will eventually be on our side, since the Germans will not win; they cannot win;** there are many obstacles.

**Greece is determined not to provoke anyone in anyway, and at the same time not to succumb in any manner. In particular, Greece is firmly decided to defend her territories, even if she has to fall.** This policy has already given our people the most inestimable in value advantage, which constitutes the greatest factor of our strength: **Absolute unity in spirit and nationwide accord.**

Today there are some additional factors determining **our final Victory.** Turkey is not, as she was in 1916, an ally of Germany. She is with the British. Bulgaria is laying in wait now, as she was then, but in any case at the moment she does not dare. **Time is not with the Axis. Time is with the other side.** Victory for Germany can only be achieved in connection with her world domination, an opportunity definitely lost in Dunkirk. **The Axis lost the War from the moment England declared: “We shall fight even alone, we shall fight them everywhere and we shall fight to the final Victory.”** Furthermore, we Greeks should **know that we do not only fight for Victory, but we fight for Glory.**

I do not know if someone present here today is an opponent of the late Prime Minister Venizelos, (an advocate in WW I of Greece’s deviation from her then neutrality, as supported by King Constantine and her unconditional siding with the Allies.) *One from the audience replied affirmatively and then Metaxas went on:* Let us understand each other. As I have amply explained to you, I have so far in this War followed the policy of the late King Constantine, i.e. that of strict neutrality. **I have done everything possible to keep Greece out of the conflict of the Big Powers.** After the unjustified Italian attack on Greece, I am following the policy of the late Prime Minister Venizelos. With this policy **the fate of Greece coincides with that of Great Britain**, for both of which the sea is not an obstacle, but a bridge. It is true in our recent history we did not always have reasons to be grateful to England. After all the British policies following WW I and in particular those in the most recent years, are policies with great historical responsibilities. These policies

England is now discharging, with the proud determination of her great People. **England preserves the liberty of the World and of Civilisation. England is a natural friend of Greece. England has proven many times to be our protector and at certain instances our only protector.**

**Victory will be ours, and nothing but ours. It will be the Victory of the Anglo-Saxon world, against which Germany was is not up to this date able to achieve a determining blow and thus Germany is doomed to be devastated. From now on the prospects for Germany are not going to be bright, not even in the East, and the East is always full of mysteries. We shall finally win. I want you, leaving this room, to take with you my absolute certainty that we will win. However, I shall repeat what I most solemnly have declared from the very first moment: Greece is not fighting for Victory, is fighting for Glory, and is fighting for Honour. Greece has the responsibility towards herself to remain worthy of her past.**

Italy is a Great Power. When two days ago we were for the first time subjected to an air offensive, I was surprised to realise that the attacking warplanes were only Italian. This suffices to give you to understand my thinking for entering the War. **There are times when People that want to remain great, should to be able to put up a fight, even without any hope of Victory; only because the People have to.** I know that the free and un-distracted Greek People cannot accept anything else at this time, since there was no chance for their minds to be obscured through vulgar noises and destructive campaigns.

**We did whatever was possible to avoid being in the wrong. We shall pursue the same tactic.** I have some papers on the table. They contain all the evidence of the Italian premeditated trap. When I finish you can look at them. It is not necessary for you to keep notes. You will find these documents in the White Paper I have issued instructions to be prepared in the shortest possible time.

**I cannot hide from you that the situation is extremely serious. Grave predicaments lay ahead of us.** In order to avoid giving a much wanted by the Italians excuse for our vilification, I was obliged to take an extremely crucial decision, i.e. to avoid accepting the strong and repeated recommendations of our General Staff for an early mobilisation. Thus at least for the first days the when the Italians attacked, they found very weak Greek forces defending our borders.

Your role today is very important and official. Do not loose your courage, no matter what happens, or else it will be impossible for you to prove worthy of our People and your duty, which is to maintain the sacred flame of the Greek People, support the fighting Forces and stand by the Government, irrespective of what you think of her. You have at first to convince yourselves, before you can disseminate your believes to the public, although **this time we can all take courage from the unsurpassed bravery of our people, instead of giving them strength.**

**I want to add something. I know Greece will suffer from this ordeal. I also know for sure that Greece will come out at the end not only glorious, but also greater. You have certainly noted Mr. Churchill's telegram, which was published in today's press, as released by the Ministry of Exterior. I want to underline the following: Those who do not see in this telegram a written confirmation in black and white and a consent for the integration of the Dodecanese islands with Greece, they cannot read between the lines.**