

# **The Participation of Greece in the San Francisco Conference for the creation of the United Nations (1945) and its first participation in the Security Council as a non-permanent member (1952-1953)**

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The Greek contribution to this part of the conference will be based on the research that was conducted in the Service of Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the preparation of a DVD, an electronic publication, on the participation of Greece in the San Francisco Conference for the creation of the United Nations in 1945 and its first participation in the Security Council as a non-permanent member in the years 1952 and 1953. All documents referred to in this paper come from the Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As mentioned in the first part of this Conference, the Service of Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which I have the honour and privilege to serve and its Director Mrs. Photini Tomai-Constantopoulou, decided to produce the above mentioned DVD at the beginning of this year, as a tribute and a solemn contribution of the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of the participation of Greece, for the first time since 1953, in the UN Security Council for the years 2005 and 2006.

The documents retrieved during the research indicate that Greece was invited to the San Francisco Conference through a letter sent to the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Ioannis Sofianopoulos by the then Ambassador of the United States to Athens Lincoln MacVeagh on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1945, on behalf of his government as well as of the governments of the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China. Foreign Minister Sofianopoulos, on behalf of the Greek government replied a few days later, on March 10<sup>th</sup> <sup>2</sup>, accepting of course the invitation to the Conference and announcing that he personally would lead the Greek Delegation.

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<sup>1</sup> Scientific Counsellor, Service of diplomatic and historical Archives.

<sup>2</sup> See document with Prot. Number 2587/10.03.1945 in the File KY 1945/84.4

The Conference was scheduled to begin on April 25<sup>th</sup>. On April 4<sup>th</sup> Sofianopoulos, just before his departure from Athens, announced the rest of the members of the Delegation that was to travel to San Francisco. According to that initial list (which by the end of the Conference had undergone a few changes), apart from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as delegates were also appointed the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs George Melas, the Governor of the Bank of Greece Kyriakos Varvaressos, Ambassador John Politis and the Greek Ambassadors to London and Washington DC Athanassios Agnides and Kimon Diamantopoulos respectively. The Delegation would also include three more diplomats of lower rank, two legal advisers, one economic adviser, two military advisers, three members of the Press Office, two attachés and six experts on different economic sectors, in total 25 persons, notwithstanding the Press correspondents from the Greek newspapers that followed the Delegation. Of course, when the Delegation arrived in San Francisco a few new members were added, mainly auxiliary personnel (typists, drivers, translators etc). One of them was invited to be the later Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou who at the time served in the US Navy and the Greek Delegation wished to have him as translator<sup>3</sup>.

The first stop of the Delegates who left Athens on their way to San Francisco, was London, and while there on April 8<sup>th</sup>, the Greek government back home resigned and Prime Minister Nikolaos Plastiras was replaced by Prime Minister Petros Voulgaris. Nevertheless, since the Delegation had already left Greece, it was deemed necessary not to change its Head and therefore Foreign Minister Sofianopoulos, was reappointed, thus becoming, thanks apparently to the Conference, the only Minister of the previous government who maintained his place in the new one, until his return to Athens in July 1945 after the end of the Conference.

As it was natural, the talks and negotiations among the Delegations present in San Francisco during the more or less two months that the Conference lasted, did not concern exclusively the creation of the Charter of the United Nations. Bilateral talks between the governments and the first talks about the terms of the peace treaties after the war that was about to end, took also place. Greece was very much interested in these talks as one of the victorious states that had fought hard and was severely damaged during the war. Opportunities for financial and technical assistance for its reconstruction that Greece could obtain from these negotiations was of course of special interest.

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<sup>3</sup> See letter from Alexis Liatis to John C. Bell, Secretary of the San Francisco Conference, dated 16/5/1945 in the File KY 1945/76.2

The UN Charter was signed on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1945 and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ioannis Sofianopoulos was the one who signed it on behalf of the Greek government declaring that *“Greece, which for no less than three and a half years with courage endured the sufferings of war and of a triple enemy occupation, hails today with joy this great historic event”*<sup>4</sup>.

A few days later the Greek Delegation returned to Athens after a short stop in Washington DC that allowed Sofianopoulos to meet with the President of the United States and other officials.

And thus the first part of the project was concluded.

The second part refers to the first Greek membership of the UN Security Council in 1952 and 1953.

The research of course did not start by studying directly the 1952 and 1953 records. It also included the records of 1950 and mainly 1951, which contained the preparation for submitting the candidature to the UN General Assembly and all the negotiations and deliberations that followed until the election of Greece in December 1951.

The period of the negotiations proved to be even more interesting than the period of the membership itself, at least as far as the records existing in the Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs are concerned.

Greece had unofficially expressed its willingness to participate in the Security Council already since the time of the San Francisco Conference in 1945. Its request was not satisfied at that time, but by the beginning of the 1950s the Greek governments of the time believed that the international situation was favourable for the election of Greece as a non-permanent member of the Council for two years. At the beginning it seemed that Greece was going to try to be elected in the seat that Turkey would leave after its mandate for the years 1951 and 1952 was over. But by the end of 1950 there were more and more discussions about whether Greece should apply for the vacancy that Yugoslavia would leave after its mandate would be over at the end of 1951.

By April 1951 the Greek government started contacting other governments on the issue, starting from the permanent members of the Security Council, trying to assure their vote and assistance. The United States' government was the first to be approached, already in April 1951, through a letter by Prime Minister Sophocles Venizelos to the American Ambassador in Athens John E. Peurifoy<sup>5</sup> The main arguments that the Greek government used in this and all

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<sup>4</sup> See discourse of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 26/6/1945 in the File KY 1945/76.1

<sup>5</sup> See letter from Prime Minister S. Venizelos to Ambassador John E. Peurifoy with Prot. Number 30030/OHE/B5/12.04.1951 in the File KY 1951/127.1

the subsequent letters to persuade its interlocutors, were a) that the criterion determined by the UN Charter that there should be an “equitable geographical distribution” of the seats of the non permanent members was covered, since Greece would occupy the seat of its neighbour Yugoslavia and b) that Greece “*had the right to participate in the Security Council because it was among the countries that had, right from the beginning, and even more obviously since the Korean affair, tried their best to enforce the letter as well as the spirit of the Charter*”.

The United States, on which depended heavily for its election, seemed to be in favour of the candidature from the very first minute. The reports coming to Athens from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations in New York Alexis Kyrrou, a very important Greek diplomat, indicated that by May 1951 the American government had already taken the decision to support the Greek election, although the official reply of the US Embassy on June 1st to the Greek Prime Minister’s letter was more or less neutral.

On the contrary, China on the relative letter on August 8<sup>th</sup>, announced to the Greek government that it had decided immediately to support the Greek candidature.

The candidature was officially announced through an official letter to all the members of the Organisation on September 12<sup>th</sup> 1951<sup>6</sup>.

By October it was apparent that the only major problem for the Greek candidature was the British opposition to it. The United Kingdom believed that the election of a country of the western block to replace a country of the eastern block would be a provocation to the Soviet Union and this had to be avoided. The French government also followed the same tactics at the beginning of the voting rounds, but later during the rounds that took place in December it supported the Greek candidature.

Thus, in the first rounds of the voting that took place in Paris in November 1945 Greece did not manage to acquire the 2/3 of the votes in the General Assembly as it is required by the Charter in order to be elected. Nevertheless, the American government reassured the Greek representatives that at the end Greece would be elected over Byelorussia, which was its main opponent, proposed for the vacant seat by the eastern block<sup>7</sup>. Apparently there were thoughts in some officials in Athens that after having failed to be elected immediately, Greece had to withdraw in order to avoid humiliation.

Fortunately for Greece, these officials did not prevail and finally on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1951 it was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 1952-1953, as

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<sup>6</sup> See letter by Ambassador Alexis Kyrrou with Prot. Number 5254/12.09.1951 in the File KY 1951/127.1

<sup>7</sup> See letter by Ambassador I. Politis to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Prot. Number 467/6.12.1951 in the File KY 1951/127.1

the UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie officially announced to the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Sophocles Venizelos on that same day<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, Greece held a seat in the Security Council from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1952 until 31<sup>st</sup> December 1953.

During these two years the Security Council held 84 meetings (42 in 1952 and 42 in 1953), a number that, according to the Greek Permanent Representative at the UN Alexis Kyrou<sup>9</sup> was not satisfactory at all, compared at least with the 73 meetings held in 1950, or the 62 in 1949 and 168 in 1948.

Nevertheless, the issues discussed in these meetings were quite important for the maintenance of peace around the globe at the time.

In 1952 the Security Council dealt with the following issues:

1. The India-Pakistan question over the Jammu and Kashmir area.
2. The question of Tunisia.
3. The question of an appeal to states to accede to and ratify the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the prohibition of the use of bacterial weapons.
4. A request for investigation of alleged bacterial weapons.
5. The application of 14 states for UN membership.
6. The dissolution of the Commission for Conventional Armaments.

In 1953 the issues that were included in the agenda of the Security Council were:

1. The appointment of a new UN Secretary-General.
2. The election of a new judge of the International Court of Justice.
3. The question of Morocco.
4. The Governor of Trieste.
5. Conflicts on the Israel – Jordan borders.
6. A protest by Syria against Israel concerning work on the west bank of the River Jordan in the demilitarized area.
7. The applications of states to become parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.

During these 84 meetings, only 7 Resolutions were adopted by the Security Council (2 in 1952 and 5 in 1953), while several more were rejected and consequently no relative decision

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<sup>8</sup> See letter by the UN Secretary General Trygve Lie Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Venizelos with Prot. Number SCA.GA.295/1/02/20.12.1951 in the File KY 1951/127.1

<sup>9</sup> See Report entitled “General conclusions from the two-year mandate of Greece in the Security Council”, Prot. Number 6490/31.12.1953 in the File KY 1954/Director General-General issues

was taken, at least within these two years (ex. the admission of new members, the question of Tunisia etc).

In all these occasions, Greece always voted in favour of the positions of the other countries of the Western bloc. More precisely, the Greek vote was identical with the one cast by the United States, including in the cases of procedural vote (adoption of agenda etc). It is worth noting that Greece aligned with the US even in questions concerning the decolonisation process (ex. Tunisia), where one would expect that Greece would align with smaller countries.

The only exception to this almost identical vote record between Greece and the United States was the three votes during the discussion of the question of Morocco, in which case Greece voted in favour or abstained in procedural issues (inclusion in the agenda, appearance of other member-states before the Security Council during the discussion of the question), while the United States voted against in all cases. Let us note that these votes took place in September 1953, only 7 months before the Greek Government appealed to the UN for the Cyprus question, another issue of decolonisation.

The connection between the two questions was admitted by Alexis Kyrrou, the Greek Permanent Representative at the Security Council, in numerous documents before the voting took place on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1953, when the Greek government tried to form its final stance regarding Morocco. And it is even more clear in the Kyrrou's report on the results of the vote. In that document he explains that the Greek stance "...was, undoubtedly I think, the one that it should be in order not to offend our ally, France, not to collide with our Arab friends' sensibility, and not to appear that we close, by ourselves, the way to the United Nations for the possibility to appeal in the future regarding the Cyprus question<sup>10</sup>".

In conclusion, that first participation of Greece in the UN Security Council was deemed interesting and useful. Alexis Kyrrou, again in his final report after the end of the Greek mandate, he concluded that, although the Security Council "... is not – and it would not be possible to be – an almighty global directorate, it remains nevertheless the most important international institution, which is capable of affecting indirectly or even in a negative way the actions of the Great Powers and the policy of the smaller countries<sup>11</sup>". According to Kyrrou, the smaller countries by participating in the Security Council "... acquire many opportunities

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<sup>10</sup> See Report entitled "The Morocco question before the Security Council", Prot. Number 4218/3.9.1953 in the File KY 1953/Directorate C-UN Department/The Morocco and Tunisia questions-Z11-46

<sup>11</sup> See Report entitled "General conclusions from the two-year mandate of Greece in the Security Council", Prot. Number 6490/31.12.1953 in the File KY 1954/Director General-General issues

to consolidate their prestige and to promote perhaps their special interests, as long as they are elementarily cautious and act in a diplomatically smart way.”

When Greece first thought of applying for membership in the Security Council, doubts were expressed by many politicians and journalists on the necessity of such a move, primarily because it would bring the country to a difficult position to “judge” friends and allies. Kyrrou thought that a policy of not participating in institutions and not being active in international relations would be “... of an obvious castrating nature... not realistic in today’s international conditions”. For Kyrrou and for Greece it was obvious at the time, as it is also today when the country participates again in the Security Council, that “Life contains undoubtedly many risks, but the triumph of victory comes to those who are alive and to those who are fighters. The Greek people, after all this struggle and all these holocausts, deserves a diplomatic service that is alive, vigorous, modernized, bold, a diplomacy which is not stuck to the comfortable but barren motto ‘don’t deal with whatever is already bad’<sup>12</sup>”.

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<sup>12</sup> See Report entitled “General conclusions from the two-year mandate of Greece in the Security Council”, Prot. Number 6490/31.12.1953 in the File KY 1954/Director General-General issues