

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM

Interview With

HON. CONSTANTINE TSALDARIS

Athens, Greece

May 4, 1964

by Philip C. Brooks, Director
Harry S. Truman Library

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EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

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DR. PHILIP C. BROOKS: When President Truman made his speech on March 12, 1947, announcing the Truman Doctrine, were you surprised? Had you expected him to take such a vigorous stand?

MR. CONSTANTINE TSALDARIS: I was sure that he was going to do this, because of what he said to me, as well as Byrnes, and Acheson, and the other people of the State Department. We had a very long conversation in December of 1946.

BROOKS: You were in Washington then, weren't you?

*Mr. Tsaldaris was assisted by his long-time aide, Mr. John A. Phrantzes.

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I went to Washington the fourth of December to ask them to give aid to Greece, because English aid was going out. It was finished. This is a matter which you must take into consideration. I was supported in doing this by English policy.

BROOKS: You knew for a long time that the British were going to withdraw their aid?

TSALDARIS: Yes, we knew that six or seven months before. At the beginning of November of '46, I met the English Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris.

BROOKS: Mr. Bevin?

TSALDARIS: Mr. Bevin, yes. He did his best to persuade me to go to America, and to ask aid from America. And he said, "If you go, I am going to help you." When I went to the States in December, the

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opposition in Greece, King George, and all the people were against my travelling to the States, because we were still submerged by the Communist invasion. Of course the Communists were opposed but also all the other parties because the situation here was terrible. We were almost bankrupt. We had no money, we had no army, nothing. After the liberation, we had only seven or eight thousand men in the army, and we were obliged to have two hundred thousand at the end. In the meantime, we did our best; we used mostly American help to have enough of an army so as to be capable to maintain Greece as a free country. When I went to America in December of 1946, I had two aims. One was to go to the United Nations and to ask them to send a committee here to supervise the frontier.

BROOKS: And that you accomplished, did you not?

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TSALDARIS: That I accomplished. President Truman spoke about it in his address. My other aim was to work for the possibility of American aid, and I had the long talks, and I insisted as much as possible, sometimes in a very vigorous manner. On the 23rd day of December 1946 I left Washington, where I was a guest in Blair House. When I left, a communique of the State Department said that Tsaldaris had been there; that he had had long discussions with American officials; that he met Mr. Paul A. Porter who was going to Greece to study economic questions, and it was necessary that something be done immediately. That communique was issued in December 1946 and in June 1947 we signed with your representative here.

This is the story of my part in this. America wanted to give aid to Greece. But they wanted to be covered in the public opinion

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of the world. Because you must remember that at that time Russia was the rage. And Russia was behind the Bulgarians, the Yugoslavs and the Albanians, where all the Communists were in and out in military activity. America, as I told you, wanted to be covered. As you know, your Senator Vandenberg added very much to Greek aid.

In the meantime, the Communists occupied nearly all of Greece, and the situation was really impossible. General Montgomery in December 1946 came here to rebuild the Greek Army. They began and they enrolled 90,000 men in the Army. But day by day, we needed more army. We were asking an army of nearly 200,000. I remember a conversation I had with Mr. Bidault, who was Premier of France, who said to me, "Mr. Tsaldaris, you have nearly 25,000 rebels in Greece, and you are asking for an army of 200,000."

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I said, "Yes, because it is necessary."

Years after that, when I went to Paris and I met with Bidault, I said, "How many rebels do you have in Algiers?" He said about 25,000 but they had there four or five hundred thousand troops.

Well, you have asked me if I was sure that I was going to get the aid. I was sure. This is the reason that I went to America, personally.

BROOKS: Did you talk to Mr. Truman at that time?

TSALDARIS: Yes, and also this year when he came here in Athens.

BROOKS: Mr. Tsaldaris, did you consider the Truman Doctrine primarily as one of defense against the Communists or as a means of economic development?

TSALDARIS: The American communique of December 23,

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1946, spoke about both of these things, reconstruction and the aid to maintain Greece as a free country.

BROOKS: And so did Mr. Truman in his speech, but some people in the United States Congress were willing to support economic reconstruction though they were not so favorable to military aid.

TSALDARIS: I think the Vandenberg amendment dealt with these questions. You know better than I that Vandenberg was a Republican and not a Democrat. That's why I told you at the beginning of the session here that Senator Vandenberg was a very great aid. And the Marshall speech at Harvard University was a very logical statement of our problem -- it was like a lesson. What must people do to be helped, but not only to be helped -- the people of Europe should work

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together and install an equilibrium between agrarians and other citizens. Marshall and I were very good friends.

BROOKS: Were there different points of view, Mr. Tsaldaris, representing the agrarian people and the business people and the other people in Greece or was everybody agreed on this?

TSALDARIS: Yes, all the people agreed. Of course, I did not tell you that when I came back to Greece I did something which was not quite democratic. I resigned, in 1947, although I had the majority, and put in a new government in which all parties took place except Communists, and except a branch of the Liberals known as the Sofoulis Party. Now, I remember that Mr. Loy Henderson was the head of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs of the State Department and was later an Ambassador. He came here in

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1947 to give me advice on changing the government, and if possible having the leaders of the old liberals in the Government. But when he came here I was finished with the sessions with the heads of the liberals, and I remember I went to the American Embassy and Henderson was there. I told him, "Don't say anything, tomorrow I bring you the new Government." America would not intervene. People complained of intervention, but it was not intervention; it was interest in common. This interest between people of Greece and USA was common, and we wanted to do something historical. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which was nothing more than the realization of ideas of Truman, were a lesson on how America was thinking in the world realization. In that moment USA was going up, as the strongest country in free Europe.

BROOKS: I wondered if the Greeks thought that England

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had done everything it could?

TSALDARIS: Yes, I think that England did the best it could do. England had been the greatest power in the world for years and years before that. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were really supported by England. Now through USA aid Europe is again strong and she is aiming towards unification through various organizations. The Common Market is one.

BROOKS: Mr. Tsaldaris, the success of the European Recovery Program, depended very much on cooperation among the European nations. Did you think at that time it was feasible? In 1947, did you think the European countries could and would work together?

TSALDARIS: I thought they could, and they did. I believed from the first in the union of Europe, because I thought that union was necessary, not

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only politically but especially economically. This was an aspect of the Marshall Plan. Step by step we are going to see Europe unified economically and politically. This is a continuation of the Truman Doctrine, and it will be done.

I would just like to say that the whole idea was a scheme which I had in my head. I say with great assurance that Greece was the key which opened the door in December 1946 to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, and all the continuations which they have had in Europe. I worked for the Common Market and the union of Europe. This spirit, this direction begins with the American policy on the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. UNRRA was not a political thing, but the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were political.

BROOKS: Did you think that UNRRA had done its job well?

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TSALDARIS: Yes, I suppose so. But you cannot imagine what the condition of Greece was then. It was terrible.

BROOKS: Mr. Tsaldaris, most people in America thought of the Truman Doctrine as the Greek-Turkish Aid Program, but was the Turkish problem a different thing from the Greek problem?

TSALDARIS: Not only it was very different point of view, but Turkey came into the Truman aid program, to facilitate its political realization, but don't forget that Greece was then seen as a fascist country. Your people of America and many people of the other European countries thought that we were building a wall against democracy.

Mr. Sofoulis, the leader of the Liberal Party, whom I brought to the Government in September 1947, spoke up at that time stating

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that his people were persecuted by my Government, in the Government he changed his opinion. This was the spirit I think. I am sure that Turkey then was necessary to the Truman Doctrine, and the Marshall Plan because Turkey was not seen as a monarchist Government.

BROOKS: You mean that in the public opinion of the United States, Turkey was needed to balance Greece?

TSALDARIS: To balance Greece, not quite. The Turkish aid, let us say, was needed in the American policy to make it clear that it was not just doing something for the monarch of a fascist country, but rather for all of this part of the eastern Mediterranean.

BROOKS: Well, was there any objection on the part of Greece?

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TSALDARIS: No, no, I spoke with the Ambassador of Turkey in Paris, and also with the Foreign Minister to urge a close consultation with me. I was for this idea then.

BROOKS: What did you consider the greatest need of Greece at that time in the way of aid from the outside? Would it have been funds for the importation of goods, or food, or military aid?

What was the most necessary thing?

TSALDARIS: The first need was food because we had no bread. Then step by step we entered into the reconstruction -- import, export, and investment of aid in new industry.

BROOKS: Some people at that time, Mr. Tsaldaris, thought that all the aid programs should be administered by the United Nations. They should be all UN programs. Now you were closely

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associated with the UN...

TSALDARIS: The association was needed, and the United States wanted to have the support of the United Nations in the aid program. The proof is that after the beginning of '47, America did nothing without having a report of the United Nations Commission of Investigation. They were waiting for a report of the Committee from Salonika and on the basis of this report, the Americans were giving aid. It was easier to deal with the United Nations of '52, when you could do something, than now when we have 110, with the new nations that have joined. You are not always very satisfied and very sure to have a decision by the United Nations. Then in 1947, 1948, 1949, we still could.

BROOKS: Some people thought, Mr. Tsaldaris, that all the money should be given to the United Nations

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and then all these aid programs conducted, all the funds given out by the UN. Would that have worked?

TSALDARIS: I don't remember, Mr. Brooks, that they spoke about that then. But at that time I never felt that the distribution could be by the UN. You see they were only recently organized. Really, I don't remember if there were people then saying that the distribution should be made by the United Nations.

BROOKS: I wanted to ask you if people in Greece felt that the British, or the French, or the Americans exerted too strong leadership in the Franks Committee at Paris in 1947?

TSALDARIS: That wasn't so important. With Italy, I know the subject better because I signed the treaty between Italy and Greece. I can follow better the questions about Italy, which was also

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an enemy in the war. About Germany, we had nothing to do with them, because the whole question of Germany was postponed.

BROOKS: There was a great argument, you remember, about whether Germany should be allowed to recreate its industry. The French and the British argued a lot about this.

TSALDARIS: This was a great mistake of the allied nations, because Germany has reconstructed a new industry which is producing much better than the other peoples. It was nearly like the situation after the first war. England did not know how Germany could produce more than England could. Of course England had old machines and Germany had new machines.

I don't like to enter into philosophical discussions, but the policy of our countries on the whole, the Western countries, I am afraid,

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is based more on economical than on social problems.

BROOKS: I wanted to ask you, Mr. President, if you have any particular memories of your dealings with Mr. Truman, or your conversations with him?

TSALDARIS: I met Mr. Truman in 1946. At that time I met Acheson and Marshall. In December 1946 I went to America as a Greek to talk to Mr. Truman as an American, to begin the creation of aid, systematic aid.

BROOKS: And you did see him when he was here this spring at the funeral?

TSALDARIS: Yes. We spoke about those times. The American people then, as I told you, were not kindly disposed towards Greece. The people, I mean, not the political leaders. And it was

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difficult for Truman to go in a way different from the view of public opinion in America.

Well, I am going to tell you an incident. When in December of 1946, I left Greece to go for aid in America, I was persuaded that I would achieve it. I went to Paris. Our Ambassador in Paris said to me, "The American Ambassador asked to see you, Mr. President." That was Jefferson Caffery. He came to the Greek Embassy and we had a very long conversation. He wanted to go deeper into what I intended to do. In a moment, he said to me, "You know, Mr. President, I asked to see you because I wanted to suggest that your arrival at the United Nations in New York should be postponed." He said to me, "It would be better if you didn't go to the States." They were afraid, as I told you, about Greece, being represented by me whom they thought of as a

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monarchical fascist.

I said, "All right, Mr. Ambassador, I am not going to the United States." I said very calmly, "All right, I am not going to the States, but I am going to the United Nations, which is not a state." He was very pleased by the answer and he said to me then, "All right. The only thing I want to suggest now is that when you arrive at the airport you have a talk with Mr. Austin. He will give you some information which is going to be very useful to you."

I went to the United Nations a week after this suggestion was made by Mr. Jefferson Caffery, and I was made a citizen of New York. I have a diploma there. I tell you that, because that means

something. It meant that America wanted to give aid. Mr. Caffery was afraid that a President of the country, Tsaldaris, who was a royalist (that meant a monarchical fascist)

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could not really help in view of the public opinion of the States.

I arrived in New York the 16th of December, and ten days after my arrival I was made an honorary citizen of New York, with great pomp.

BROOKS: Were the people of Greek descent in the United States very active in this?

TSALDARIS: Yes, they were. After I was proclaimed an honorary citizen of New York, the Greek population there, one million, were for me, as the representative of Greece.

BROOKS: But they weren't so active before that?

TSALDARIS: Well, Mr. Brooks, you are making it very difficult. Because the Greeks in America -- there were nearly one million of them as I told you -- before the war they did not feel themselves very happy to say that they were

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of Greek origin. But after the war they were very proud to be Greek. And they recognized a Greek soldier who died in the First World War. That was the famous monument erected in Hines, Illinois, to a Greek descendant who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. That is the answer to your question. They felt then that they were really happy to be Greeks.

BROOKS: By the way, weren't the Greek-Americans involved in erecting the statue of Mr. Truman here in Athens?

TSALDARIS: Oh yes, they put it up. Mr. Truman did not like that, because like he said, a statue of a living person is not a good idea.

BROOKS: He's quite a person. He has his office in the Library building. We see a great deal of him and he frequently says that kind of thing.

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TSALDARIS: Excuse me for asking, you are a Democrat?

BROOKS: I am, but I wouldn't have to be to have my job. It is a Civil Service job. I didn't know him before I was appointed Director of the Library.

TSALDARIS: I didn't know that you were in the Civil Service.

BROOKS: He often says that you can't judge a man's greatness until 50 years after he is dead. You shouldn't put up statues to a living person.

MR. PHRANTZES: In regard to the American opinion of Greece in 1946, the people there thought that this was a monarcho-fascist country with a monarcho-fascist leader. They were completely misled.

BROOKS: Do you think that that situation still exists?

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PHRANTZES: Oh, no.

BROOKS: When do you think it began to change?

PHRANTZES: When the Truman Doctrine started working.

TSALDARIS: When I went to the United States in December 1946 and when the American citizens saw Tsaldaris, whom they had considered a monarcho-fascist, then most of them began to understand. But it was very difficult for public opinion. I remember asking them to have publicity for Greece. Some American people did not know where Greece was.

BROOKS: Mr. Truman spoke of knowing you and asked me to give you his regards.

TSALDARIS: Yes, I have a very friendly feeling for him. Mr. Truman is a man of the people. In all our problems and conversations, he always found the good way. Acheson, at the beginning of our

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conversation, was very stiff, because he was a lawyer. He was not like Truman, a man of the people. But I understood that they were very good friends. I remember that I told him once, "Mr. Acheson I cannot speak with you because you are very stiff." [laughter] After several conversations we became very good friends, indeed, and Mr. Harriman. Acheson is a very clever man.

I was in Washington in a moment of tension. December of 1946 is historical -- for Greece, and even for America, because it gave the opportunity to form a new policy, to put aside the Monroe Doctrine and begin a new policy.

BROOKS: At that time James Byrnes was Secretary of State. Was he cordial and interested?

TSALDARIS: Very interested. He speaks about me in his book. I remember once being in Paris with

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Byrnes. He was staying at the Meurice Hotel and I went there to speak with him about our problem -- there was always this question of aid, and Russian communism. He took me by the hand and led me to the window. Then he asked me, "What do you see there?" "Trees," I said. "All right, what color?" I said, "Green." "The Russians would say that they are red." [laughter] They were a little red, because it was autumn.

BROOKS: Would you say then the basis of this new American policy was laid before Marshall became Secretary of State?

TSALDARIS: Yes, certainly. Marshall became Secretary of State...

BROOKS: In January 1947. He went to the Moscow Conference in April 1947.

TSALDARIS: I wanted to show you these photographs...

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Here you have Mr. Churchill...and Mr. Truman...

BROOKS: Mr. Truman is going to have his birthday next Friday. He'll be 80 years old. He is about your age?

TSALDARIS: I had my birthday a week ago.

BROOKS: Many happy returns.

TSALDARIS: Thank you. Would you like to return to Greece?

BROOKS: Yes, we are enjoying Greece very much. Athens is a beautiful place.

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