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**German 'Science Policy' and the Economic Agenda for Greece:  
The *Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft* in Vienna and Its Activities, 1940-1944**

In 1940 Anton Reithinger, the *Leiter der Volkswirtschaftlichen Abteilung der IG Farben Industrie AG*, described the role Southeast Europe could play for the economy of the Reich, namely its war economy, saying that in the immediate future the most important economic area for Germany's interests could be exactly this territory.<sup>1</sup>

Having occupied France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, Germany was certain that its French and English rivals in the Balkans would be eliminated and the Third Reich could almost exclusively exploit the mineral resources as well as the agricultural production of the region. Wheat, corn, olives, oil, wood and other forest resources, minerals and textile fibers made up the Balkans' natural wealth, which was to prove essential for the Third Reich's economy. The region seemed to be important as an investment market that, after the end of the war, would secure Germany's export profits in the long term. In addition, Germany's investment of industrial capital in Southeast Europe, particularly in transportation roads, water and railway networks, would create the necessary technical preconditions for larger and cheaper exploitation of its raw materials. To this purpose contributed the newly

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<sup>1</sup> "Ein wesentlicher, ja, man wird ohne Übertreibung sagen können, für die nächste Zukunft der voraussichtlich bedeutendste Wirtschaftsraum in dieser kontinentalen Neuorientierung Deutschlands dürfte der Südosten werden.", in: Anton Reithinger, „Südosteuropa und seine wirtschaftliche Bedeutung für Deutschland“, Schriftenreihe der Finanzwochenzeitschrift *„Die Bank“*, H. 12, o. O. u. J., [1940] p. 21, cited in: WOLFGANG SCHUMANN, (Hg.): *Griff nach Südosteuropa. Neue Dokumente über die Politik des deutschen Imperialismus und Militarismus gegenüber Südosteuropa im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Berlin 1973, p. 9.

established Vienna institution in 1940, the “Southeast European Society” (*“Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft”* / SOEG) which developed activities in all the Balkans, including Greece.<sup>2</sup>

According to its founding articles, the role of the SOEG was “to cultivate, strengthen and foster Germany’s relations with the southeastern countries”.<sup>3</sup> In fact, what was hidden behind this declaration was the co-ordination of research in the east on ulterior motives, the unification and Germanization of the Balkan peoples and their economic exploitation, as the region was considered the “economic supplementary space” for Germany.<sup>4</sup> The organisation should be in close co-operation with all authorities, unions, institutes, societies and other similar institutions that were connected to the Balkan countries or aimed at establishing mutual economic or cultural relations. It was suggested that the SOEG should be engaged in the scientific preparation of the industrial activities in Southeast Europe. Therefore, a committee with economic-scientific competencies was constituted at the beginning of 1942.

The *Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft* was subjected to the Reich’s Ministry of Finance, operated under the auspices of its Minister and the President of the German Bank, Walter Funk.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the organisation was not to be attached to any state, party, industrial or other economic organisation, but to be autonomous.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it was to take necessary action to avoid conflicts and rivalries with other organisations. As President of the society the Reich Commissar of Austria’s Annexation to the German Reich, Josef Buerkel, was initially appointed and a year later the Governor and *Gauleiter* of Vienna, Baldur von Schirach, while the Reich Brigadier and Mayor of Vienna, Hans Blaschke became Vice President.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the scientific role the SOEG was called on to play, it did not run any scientific program of its own. It operated rather as a coordinating organization for numerous other institutions focused on southeastern issues, either engaging in theoretical science or in practical economy, without obstructing the execution of their projects.<sup>8</sup> Many of these programs conducted research on nutrition, export and import trade, industry and transportation. The practical issues the SOEG supervised were focused on two major areas: agriculture and industry. And Greece offered good material on both.

In 1940, a department dedicated to Greece was established in Vienna. The purpose of this department was to encourage the economic and commercial relations between the Reich and Greece, and in 1942, Karl von Hervay was sent to the country to represent the institution

<sup>2</sup> Editor’s note: the SOEG in Vienna ceased to exist in 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Undated document (presumably of 1941): „Satzung der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft”, paragraph 3 in: Bundesarchiv Berlin, BAB, R 63/1. See also: “Der Aufbau der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft” December 1942, Wien in: BAB, R 63/2.

<sup>4</sup> SCHUMANN, *Griff nach Südosteuropa*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Undated document (presumably of 1941): „Satzung der Suedosteuropa – Gesellschaft”, paragraph 2 in: BAB, R 63/1.

<sup>6</sup> „Tätigkeit und Aufbau der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft 01.03.1942“, in: BAB R 63/4.

<sup>7</sup> By 1944 two more vice-presidents were appointed, Karl Hermann Frank, who was the State’s Minister in the protectorate of Böhmen und Mähren and SS-Obergruppenführer, and the engineer Walter Rafelsberg, who was Gauwirtschaftsberater, Stadtrat, SS-Oberführer. See document on the structure of the SOEG, mid February 1944, in: BAB, R 63/2.

<sup>8</sup> Undated document (presumably of 1941): „Satzung der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft”, paragraph 3 in: BAB, R 63/1; Geschäftsführer of the SOEG, Heinrichsbauer, to the Sonderbeauftragten des Führers, General der Infanterie von Unruh on 25.05.1943, in: BAB, R 63/ 3; “Der Aufbau der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft”, December 1942, in: BAB, R 63/ 2.

and to report back to it. It was believed that the economic relations between the two countries would not be successful without the “*geistige Waffen*”, already known since the German isolation after the First World War. Therefore, on the initiative of the SOEG, a number of cultural activities took place between the two countries after 1939. These activities were organized by the Vienna branch of the German-Greek Society, which had been established a year earlier, in April 1938. The President of the branch was the E. Pistor, and its Vice Presidents were the big industrialist Baron Dr. Adolf Bachofen von Echt and the General Director of the Austria tobacco consortium, H. Rueff. Subsequent vice presidents were the University Professor of Archaeology, C. Praschniker, and the Bank Manager, Leonhard Wolzt. Two diplomats, Konstantin Dumba, who was of Macedonian-Greek origin, and the Greek A.A. Saktouris, were named honorary presidents, whilst Th. Petrocochino, prince E. Ypsilanti and two university professors, A. Wilhelm and E. Ziebarth were named honorary members. The latter also was the President of the German-Greek Society in Hamburg. The Vienna branch was the last one of a number of similar branches established in Dresden, Göttingen, Hamburg, Leipzig and Munich, whereas the central organization was located in Berlin. In Greece, two Greek-German Society branches had already existed in Athens and Thessaloniki. The creation of ‘Great Germany’ (*Großdeutschland*) was a product, according to the Nazis, of “Führer’s intelligence” and of a well organized interaction between science, technology, production, consumption, and the people’s welfare.<sup>9</sup> Within this framework, the aim of the German-Greek Society in Vienna was to promote the “intellectual and material exchange and friendship” – in other words, the cultural and economic relations between “Great Germany and *Ostmark*, on the one hand, and Greece and Hellenism, on the other”.<sup>10</sup>

Agriculture was the main sector of the Greek economy that interested the Third Reich, not only for its tobacco production, which was primarily exported to Germany. The Four-Year Plan prioritised Germany’s self-sufficiency in food, arms and currency, leaving little space for large imports of semi-luxury products, such as tobacco or raisins. Even before the entry of the German troops onto Greek soil, Germany was interested in the development of the Greek agriculture, particularly in fruit, wheat, corn and other basic products for the export to the Reich.<sup>11</sup> Before the war, apart from tobacco, sultanas and currants, Greece also produced grapes, figs, citrus fruit and almonds. According to some circles, Greece had the potential to become, under certain conditions, “Europe’s California”.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, iron, manganese, copper, chrome, bauxite, coal, liquid petroleum gas, and, above all, oil were the most important resources that Germany desperately needed after 1938 in order to buttress its war economy, and the Balkans could provide those materials. Manganese, for example, was among the most important minerals required for the production of iron and steel, whereas bauxite was significant for the fabrication of aluminium, a material used by the *Luftwaffe* for building planes. The aluminium economy in the Balkans was booming and therefore of great importance to Germany. In addition, the Italian exploitation of the Balkan bauxite deposits made German eagerness to gain a foothold in the region ever greater.

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<sup>9</sup> Undated document titled “Deutsch-Griechische Gesellschaft, Zweig Wien”, in: BAB, R 63/ 37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> „N.F. Außenhandel. Griechenland – Richtlinien zur Förderung der Landwirtschaft“, 21.05.1940, in: BAB, R 4902/ 2096.

<sup>12</sup> Fred Goecker (Deutsche Handelskammer in Griechenland) to Heinrichsbauer (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, Wien) 25.01.1944, in: BAB R 63/ 114.

In 1940, the German armament industry's need of aluminium amounted to 250,000 tons. Given that for the production of one ton of aluminium four tons of bauxite were needed, Germany turned to Yugoslavia, Hungary and Greece to exploit their bauxite resources.<sup>13</sup> Greece was a significant producer of bauxite and the *Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft* sent its official Karl von Hervay to Athens, in order to investigate the country's deposits and report back. By November 1942, Hervay wrote that some of the most important mines in Greece were, in one way or another, linked to the German interests, either because they had been purchased by Germans or because their production had been transported to the Reich. Greece was also relatively rich in other raw materials, such as arsenic, lead, chromium, iron, magnesium, nickel, silicon dioxide, emery and tin, which were necessary for the development of the country's chemical industry. The Greek chemical industry, which was largely represented by the firm "Chemical Products and Fertilisers", also known as "Oxea" or "Lipasmata", became vital for the country's agricultural production.

As autarky in food supplies was one of the major problems of the German war economy, the SOEG used a network of institutions that would provide it with all the needed information with regard to agriculture in the Balkans. Additionally, in 1941, the SOEG established the "Southeastern Agricultural Institute" (*Südost-Agrarinstitut der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft e.V.*), also based in Vienna. The institute was affiliated to the University for Agronomy (*Hochschule für Bodenkultur*). The *Südost-Agrarinstitut* should not be engaged in economic undertakings of any commercial enterprise, but it should carry out its own business, namely to consult the SOEG on a scientific level concerning the provision of supplies, as well as agricultural and forest exploitation issues.<sup>14</sup> Among the competencies of the new institute was also the so-called "space research" in the southeast. To this end, the institute planned to grant scholarships to young scientists of that region to study at the University for Agronomy in Vienna.<sup>15</sup> It also demanded co-operation with other scientific institutes that would support its main task on a cultural level, and if these institutes happened to have branches in the Southeast European countries, so much the better.

One such institution with which the SOEG developed close relations, particularly in organizing a series of lectures given by Greek and German specialists, was the *Deutsche Wissenschaftliche Institut* (DWI), which was established by and subject to the *Deutsche Akademie* in Munich. Since 1925, the aim of the Academy was to bring Germany's intellectual and economic forces together in order to promote and expand the appreciation of German culture worldwide.<sup>16</sup> During the Nazi regime the *Akademie* together with the "*Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung*" and the "German Academic Exchange Service" (*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* DAAD) supported the economic penetration, primarily but not only, to the Balkans and their exploitation by the Third Reich, with a number of cultural activities and

<sup>13</sup> SCHUMANN, *Griff nach Südosteuropa*, p. 10 and table 2, pp. 12 f.

<sup>14</sup> Undated document (presumably of June 1941), "Satzung des Südost-Agrarinstitutes der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft e.V.", paragraph 2, in: BAB, R 63/49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Undated document: „Akademie zur wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums. Deutsche Akademie. Einführung in der Plan der Deutschen Akademie“ [confidential (Vertraulich!)], in: BAB R 43 I/ 812.

above all with the policy of scholarships,<sup>17</sup> which was part of a broader cultural policy Germany exercised before and during the war.

Southeast Europe was the main target for the Reich's cultural policy plans. This cultural rapprochement was due to Germany's war-time economic and political interests in the region, which was regarded by the Nazis more or less as its future colony. The number of scholarships to students and professors as well as the visits by German scholars in the region was increased. In short, it seems that the involvement of the SOEG to Germany's foreign policy undertakings in Greece was as deep as the purpose of its creation dictated: Sometimes very evident, as it happened when the course of the war shifted the focus of research to projects of pre-eminent importance, such as agricultural research, and some other times more discrete or indirect by using the policy of scholarships for scientific exchange, lectures or summer-school university courses in Germany, which paved and preserved the way for economic exploitation.

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<sup>17</sup> ZARIFI, *Science, Culture and Politics*. Chapter 5, particularly pp. 257 ff. See also: KOUTSOUKOU, FEDRA, *Die deutsche Kulturpolitik in Griechenland in der Zeit der Nationalsozialismus (1933-1944)*. Metropol Verlag 2008, chapter 2.