

*Airlift Greece-Switzerland*

## ATHENIAN SMUGGLERS IN ACTION

### *An airplane crashed..*

**A** storm forced a plane flying from Switzerland to Athens to make an emergency landing on the island of Lefkas on October 16, 1948. The Greek citizens and policemen who rushed to the site were surprised when they saw the wreckage of the plane surrounded by gold coins and gold watches. This accident was the beginning of the revelation of the biggest smuggling scandal in Greece's history. It began with the arrival of **Aris Nyad**, who arrived in Athens two years ago as a member of the U.S. aid mission to Greece. In these few years, **Aris Nyad** has earned the merit of now being referred to as the Greek Al Capone.

**Nyad** sought collaborators among the highest ruling circles in Athens. They were diplomats, police commissioners, civil servants and descendants of wealthy families. In order for **Nyad's** plans to succeed, it must be said that he did not have to teach his Greek companions how to smuggle gold and embezzle government funds. These Greek capitalists and diplomats have long been true masters when it comes to these practices. **Nyad** only organized their activities, and under his personal leadership, the proverbial American business of smuggling emerged as the biggest conspiracy in this post-war world. For almost two years, 1947 and 1948, the conspiracy worked without a hitch. These practices were carried out on a large scale. A fleet of ten aircraft was used to transport gold and dollars between Greece and Switzerland. The planes were flown by Swiss pilots, who were involved in the conspiracy and every journey they made brought "diplomatic tourists" to Athens. They came from the republics of San Domingo and Bolivia and were always accompanied by their "secretary" Yvonne Neury. At first Jos Juarez traveled back and forth, later it was the business representative of San Domingo in Bern, Caesar Rubirosa. These diplomats filled their suitcases in Athens with thousands of dollars bought on the black market. The diplomats were not burdened by customs on their way back to Switzerland, that was the advantage of their position.

The dollars were converted into gold sovereigns and gold watches in Switzerland, which were sent back to Athens to be sold for dollars. Conspirators made huge profits from the price differences between the two countries and at the same time helped Greece to get rid of its dollars. There was no danger involved. Every link in the chain had well-paid employees. High officials in the ministries of commerce, finance and foreign affairs received bribes.

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**O**ne of the leaders of the conspiracy was the young captain of the port police, Bakopoulos, who is employed by the Ministry of Merchant Navy. His family belongs to the richest and best circles of Athens, which were horribly nationalistic and anti-communist. The young Bakopoulos already demonstrated his skills before that. At the age of 23, he worked for the port police in Piraeus. During the fighting of December 1944, he entered the store of Papamihail and Gatsos. He stole clothes with a value of 42,000 guilders. Bakopoulos was seized, but the case was covered up. He was not fired or punished. On the contrary, in 1945 he was appointed head cashier of the State Council for Coastal Shipping. Who would dare to denounce Bakopoulos? Bakopoulos, who had friends in the highest circles, gave dinners to former prime ministers and political leaders, and whose uncle was minister in the last Sofoelis government?

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The plane crash accidentally brought this whole affair to light. Incriminating letters were found in the wreckage and instructions from the Swiss members of the conspiracy to their Athenian colleagues. That's how the case got rolling.

According to the preliminary investigation, this group smuggled at least 3,200,000 dollars from Greece, but more comes to light every day and this sum increases as the circle of accomplices is further investigated.

However, the forces protecting the smugglers are so influential that leaders such as Nyad and Bakopoulos have been able to escape, apparently with the knowledge of the authorities.

The former minister of merchant shipping, Chrysostomou, wrote in the Greek press on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January that the Greek Embassy in Bern had prevented the arrest of Bakopoulos. It was established that the first secretary of this embassy was involved in the conspiracy.

Meanwhile, the investigations in Athens have established that A. Kanellopoulos, the director of the fertilizer factory in Piraeus and one of the largest industrialists in the Balkans, a mainstay of Greek fascism, played a leading role in this conspiracy. In 1936 he was appointed "Father" of the fascist youth (EON) by dictator Metaxas. He smuggled an estimated \$1,700,000 from Greece. Smuggled and earned at least \$510,000.

THE Athenian government was already aware of this gold smuggling in the summer of 1947, when a former finance minister, Varvaessos, openly pointed out the existence of a smuggling conspiracy to Switzerland. The government replied to his statements depicting them as "lies" that were "products of an overactive imagination." Yet it took place for two years, with the knowledge of several ministries. Now, however, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance and the Merchant Navy are fiercely blaming each other for Bakoloupos escape.

The Athenian liberal newspaper Vema wrote on January 16 in sadness: Now that we have sunken this low, the best thing we can do is to ask America to drop an atomic bomb on us or we must beg Bakopoulos to return to Greece to govern our country." The fact is, under American and English leadership, Athens has become a paradise for criminals.