

DANIEL PALMIERI AND IRÈNE HERRMANN

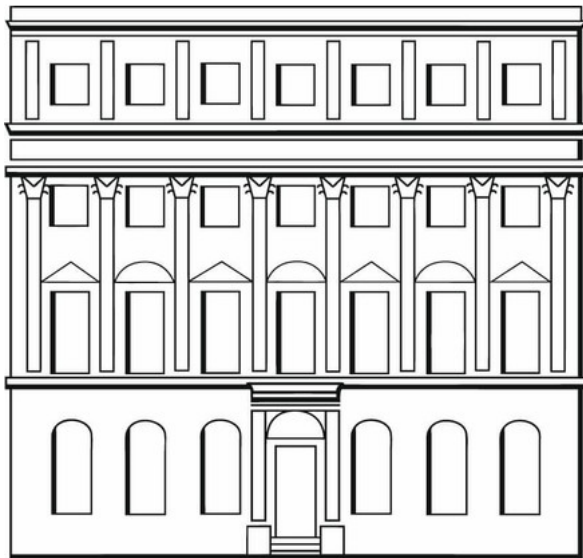
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in Greece during the Second World War

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## Two Crosses for the Same Aim? Swiss and Swedish Charitable Activities in Greece during the Second World War

DANIEL PALMIERI AND IRÈNE HERRMANN

During the Second World War, Greece, under occupation by the Axis powers, suffered one of the last major famines in Europe. According to Red Cross sources,<sup>1</sup> more than 250,000 people starved to death between summer 1941 and summer 1943. It was impossible for humanitarian actors, and in particular the Red Cross movement, to remain indifferent for long to the dire distress into which the Greek civilian population had been plunged. By August 1941 Robert Brunel, chief of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation in Athens, had realized that the situation was disastrous and, along with the Greek authorities and the Italian and German Red Cross societies, set up a facility for assisting Greek civilians.<sup>2</sup> After negotiating with the belligerents and the donor countries, the ICRC managed to provide food supplies for Greece from October 1941. This relief was only a meagre supplement to the paltry rations available to the Greek population. In the course of 1942 more extensive international co-operation was gradually organized under the Red Cross emblem in a Joint Relief Commission, in which the Swedish and Swiss Red Cross societies took part alongside the ICRC. Thanks to this humanitarian intervention the disaster was contained, and thousands of lives were

<sup>1</sup> *Ravitaillement de la Grèce pendant l'occupation 1941–1944 et pendant les premiers cinq mois après la libération: rapport final de la Commission de Gestion pour les Secours en Grèce sous les auspices du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge* (Athens, 1949), 625.

<sup>2</sup> This facility underwent several name changes between 1941 and 1943: ICRC Joint Relief Commission (Commission de gestion des envois de vivres du CICR) August 1941–September 1942; Joint Commission of the ICRC Delegation in Greece (Commission de gestion de la délégation du CICR en Grèce), September 1942–March 1943; Joint Relief Commission in Greece under the auspices of the ICRC (Commission de gestion pour les secours en Grèce sous les auspices du CICR), from March 1943.

saved by the distribution of hundreds of tons of food between 1941 and 1945.<sup>3</sup>

International co-operation of this sort was bound to cause problems among the members of the Relief Commission. Yet this aspect does not seem to have interested the researchers who subsequently worked on the famine in Greece. Although they do not omit to mention the difficulties encountered in these international relief operations, they place them in the preliminary stages, that is, during the discussions held among the belligerents on the *modus operandi* of the relief operations.<sup>4</sup> Only very few, such as Violetta Hionidou, mention the rivalry among the neutral humanitarian actors in charge of managing food aid for Greece, and even then only in passing.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is not a trivial issue. Hionidou writes, for instance, that the ICRC's dissatisfaction with the Swedes, which arose as soon as they arrived on the scene, subsequently grew and that the ICRC 'continued to be extremely dissatisfied with the Swedish delegation up to the last minute'.<sup>6</sup> What were the reasons for this dissatisfaction, and what do they teach us about international co-operation in the field of humanitarian action? This essay will show that humanitarian aid was densely entangled with national interests, not only on the side of belligerents—that is, Britain and Germany—but also among those offering relief. The original initiative for the relief operation in Greece had been driven by suspicion about certain interests. The actual organization was riddled with mutual suspicion at all levels between Swiss and Swedish members of the Red Cross movement. While Sweden's national interests linked to their international engagement were not very well hidden beneath the humanitarian surface, the links between the ICRC, the Swiss Red Cross, and the Swiss Confederation were less obvious but no less real. Our analysis will show the organizational and political consequences of the dilemma faced by relief organizations caught between pursuing humanitarian aims and national interests.

<sup>3</sup> To be precise, 712,000 tons, according to André Durand, *Histoire du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: de Sarajevo à Hiroshima* (Geneva, 1978), 432. Durand quotes *Ravitaillement de la Grèce*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dans la Grèce d'Hitler, 1941–1944* (Paris, 2002), 48, originally published in English as *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven, 1993); Marie Mauzy, 'Inter Arma Caritas: The Swedish Red Cross in Greece in the 1940s', in Richard Clogg (ed.), *Bearing Gifts to Greeks: Humanitarian Aid to Greece in the 1940s* (London, 2008), 97–112, at 102.

<sup>5</sup> Violetta Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941–1944* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 134.

*Humanitarian Rivalry*

The problems started at the very beginning of the co-operation between the Swiss and the Swedish humanitarian actors. In September 1942, even before the Joint Relief Commission officially took office, the head of the ICRC delegation in Greece had already complained about the behaviour of his future Scandinavian colleagues. According to Brunel, although they knew nothing about the reality of the situation in the country, 'the Swedes [were going to] come and strut around' and 'take all the praise',<sup>7</sup> letting the ICRC delegates do the work for them.

The tension between the two groups subsequently grew. In the autumn of 1942 the ICRC noted that, although co-operation had officially started, neither Brunel nor Paul Mohn, who was head of the Swedish delegation and also chaired the Joint Commission, had 'yet agreed on how their work should be organized'.<sup>8</sup> The ICRC noted that the Swede's policy 'consisted from the outset of setting aside everything that had existed before him' and then excluding the Swiss representatives from all political negotiations with the Greek or occupation authorities.<sup>9</sup> The same accusations came from the Swiss Red Cross, which judged that Mohn's behaviour was improper.<sup>10</sup> Nor were the difficulties smoothed out when officers on either side changed. Emil Sandström, new president of the Joint Commission (who replaced Paul Mohn in March 1943),<sup>11</sup> was also soon accused by the Swiss officers of the ICRC of 'lording it'<sup>12</sup> and behaving like a 'dictator'.<sup>13</sup> For Geneva, the president of the Joint Commission seemed quite simply to 'ignore the presence of the

<sup>7</sup> ICRC Archives (hereafter ACICR), B G 3/27c, Robert Brunel, ICRC delegate in Athens, to Carl Jakob Burckhardt, ICRC member, 1 Aug. 1942.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Marcel Junod, ICRC general delegate, to Max Huber, ICRC president, 11 Oct. 1942.

<sup>9</sup> ACICR, A PV, Commission mixte de secours: procès-verbal de la 21<sup>ème</sup> séance du Conseil, 9 June 1942.

<sup>10</sup> ACICR, O CMS D 197, Dr Friedrich de Fischer, chief of the Swiss Red Cross medical mission in Greece, to Paul Mohn, 14 Jan. 1943.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. ACICR, B SG II, Résumé de la conversation avec M. de Fischer, chef de la mission de la Croix-Rouge suisse et délégué du Comité international, 21 Dec. 1943.

<sup>12</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27c, Charles-Édouard de Bavier, Swiss consul in Athens, to Carl Jakob Burckhardt, 21 Aug. 1943.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Schéma de rapport général sur l'activité de la délégation en Grèce, 25 Aug. 1943.

ICRC delegate as regards all of the major issues'.<sup>14</sup> Far from being a quarrel just among bosses, the same friction occurred at a lower level, between ordinary Swiss and Swedish staff members, the former complaining of the unprofessionalism of their Nordic colleagues, who were not exerting themselves<sup>15</sup> although they enjoyed quite substantial financial benefits.<sup>16</sup> The Swiss also criticized the Swedes (who had been hired mainly because of their knowledge of the Greek language) for their lack of experience in social and humanitarian matters.

The leading élites in the humanitarian organizations displayed the same unwillingness to understand each other's points of view. The ICRC was behind the first operation to provide aid for the Greek population, which had been launched, albeit on a modest scale, in the summer of 1941, following negotiations with the German, Italian, British, and Turkish authorities in Ankara.<sup>17</sup> In December 1941 ICRC members went to London to speak in defence of the Greek civilian population and ask the British government to lift its blockade in the Mediterranean in order to provide food for Greece.<sup>18</sup> Having heard that Sweden wanted to launch an independent relief operation to assist Greece, but that Italy was opposing this move, which was thus unlikely to be successful, the ICRC then suggested including Swedish representatives in its own relief facility.<sup>19</sup> Although it was morally and politically in charge of the aid operation, the ICRC was nevertheless prepared to co-operate closely with the Swedish Red Cross,<sup>20</sup> provided that it complied with the obligations discussed in bilateral negotiations. It was thus decided that the Swedish members would work under ICRC contracts. Several weeks after the Joint Commission had been put in place, however, the Nordic representatives had still not

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., excerpts from Émile Wenger, ICRC deputy delegate in Salonika, to Dr René Burckhardt, ICRC delegate in Salonika, 18 July 1943.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Jean d'Amman, acting chief of the ICRC delegation in Greece, to Beat de Glutz, ICRC delegate in Geneva, 1 June 1943.

<sup>17</sup> ACICR, B G 3/40, Marcel Junod to Lucie Odier, ICRC member, 28 Sept. 1941; ACICR, B G 3/27a, Robert Brunel to Max Huber, ICRC president, and annexes, 17 Nov. 1941.

<sup>18</sup> ACICR, A PV, Commission mixte de secours: procès-verbal résumé de la 24<sup>ème</sup> séance du Conseil, tenu le 17 juin 1942, à 11h.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., procès-verbal de la 18<sup>ème</sup> séance du Conseil, tenue le 22 mai 1942 à 10h30.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., procès-verbal de la 20<sup>ème</sup> séance du Conseil, tenue le 3 juin 1942, à 16h30; see also ACICR, B G 003.50.2, Rapport du Dr Junod sur sa mission à Stockholm et à Berlin du 18 au 27 juin 1942.

formalized this agreement. The ICRC expressed its concern about the matter to Prince Carl, president of the Swedish Red Cross. He replied that he had given the Swedish delegates precise and detailed instructions before their departure, and that there was no longer any need for the ICRC contracts since these instructions 'now made them redundant'.<sup>21</sup> Geneva followed up the issue, but met with a polite but clear refusal on the part of Prince Carl.<sup>22</sup> De facto, the Swedish members of the Relief Commission were working independently, thus losing some of the privileges that ICRC contracts could have provided, especially in dealing with local authorities in Greece.<sup>23</sup> And when the Swedish president of the Commission was replaced, the ICRC heard the news through the Swedish press, since it was informed neither by the national Red Cross nor by the government in Stockholm.<sup>24</sup>

The political authorities, not least the British government, no doubt played a leading part in these tensions between the Swiss and the Swedes. Urged by public opinion at home and its American ally abroad, both perturbed by the plight of the Greek people,<sup>25</sup> Britain decided, *nolens volens*, to make a gesture and authorize the free passage of relief for Greece, despite Britain's economic blockade of Europe. In order to save face, however, the British government insisted that the credit for this initiative and its practical implementation be given to a neutral third party rather than to the Allied governments. Although the ICRC had been cited as a possibility for this task, Britain opted for Sweden. London distrusted the ICRC delegation in Greece, considering that it was 'on too good terms with the occupying powers',<sup>26</sup> and wanted to make the new relief facility 'much more neutral'.<sup>27</sup> The authorities in

<sup>21</sup> ACICR, B SG.11/S, Prince Carl to CICR, 23 Sept. 1942.

<sup>22</sup> 'Vous avez donné aux représentants suisses à la Commission de gestion des instructions, nous en avons donné, de notre côté, après nous être concertés avec des personnes qualifiées, aux représentants suédois' (ibid., Prince Carl to Carl Jakob Burckhardt and Jacques Chenevière, ICRC member, 13 Nov. 1942).

<sup>23</sup> ACICR, B SG 11, CICR to the Secretary-General of the Swedish Red Cross, 21 Jan. 1943. The loss of the ICRC identity card, which had been temporarily granted to the Swedish staff, created some tensions: ACICR, B G 3/27c, Jean d'Amman to Carl Jakob Burckhardt, 6 Apr. 1943.

<sup>24</sup> ACICR, A PV, Délégations: séance des délégations du mercredi 3 février 1943, à 10h.

<sup>25</sup> George Kazamias, 'The Politics of Famine Relief for Occupied Greece', in Clogg (ed.), *Bearing Gifts to Greeks*, 39–57, at 50.

<sup>26</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27c, Robert Brunel to Carl Jakob Burckhardt, 1 Aug. 1942.

<sup>27</sup> ACICR, A PV, Commission mixte de secours: procès-verbal de la 20<sup>ème</sup> séance du

Stockholm thus took over the project, conducting difficult negotiations with the parties concerned.<sup>28</sup> Italy was, in fact, unwilling to allow Sweden too much involvement in this operation. For Rome, Sweden's presence frustrated the interests of the ICRC ('non giovevole agli interessi del CICR'), as well as Italy ('gl'interessi del CICR corrispondono esattamente ai nostri'), as the Italian Red Cross representative in Greece suggested.<sup>29</sup> The ICRC, naturally, was not informed about the background to these discussions when reorganizing its relief work with the Swedes. These kept a low profile, but also played a double game during the initial discussions with Geneva.

While playing down the importance of the Swedish contribution in future humanitarian operations,<sup>30</sup> the Swedish government was still explaining to the ICRC that it had been obliged to take part, as it were, 'under the constant pressure of Anglo-Saxon distrust'.<sup>31</sup> Yet some days after Paul Mohn's arrival, the government in Stockholm also sent its minister serving in Sofia, Sven Allard, to Athens as the Swedish government's 'observer'. As the ICRC was soon to discover, 'Mr Allard . . . [was] actually the chief of all Swedish activity [and had been given] the direct mission by the Swedish government to monitor compliance with the commitments undertaken by the two belligerent camps'.<sup>32</sup> Minister Allard was the direct superior of Mohn, the Swedish president of the Joint Commission, who was not authorized to send his reports direct to the Swedish government,<sup>33</sup> but had to transmit them via Mr Allard. The minister annotated and commented on Mohn's documents before sending them to the Swedish foreign office. The Swedish Red Cross finally received

Conseil, tenue le 3 juin 1942, à 16h30. See also Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece*, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Alexandros K. Kyrrou, 'The Greek-American Community and the Famine in Axis-Occupied Greece', in Clogg (ed.), *Bearing Gifts to Greeks*, 58–84.

<sup>29</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27c, Guglielmo Arno to Luigi Cortese, Italian Consul-General in Geneva, 1 Oct. 1942.

<sup>30</sup> ACICR, A PV, Commission mixte de secours: procès-verbal de la 22<sup>ème</sup> séance du Conseil de la Commission mixte de secours de la Croix-Rouge internationale, tenue le 10 juin 1942 à 10h.

<sup>31</sup> ACICR, B Sg 11/II, Zenon Przybyszewski Westrup, Swedish minister in Switzerland, to Max Huber, 29 Aug. 1942.

<sup>32</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27a, Rapport du Dr Junod (n° 3) sur la situation et l'activité de la Délégation du CICR depuis l'arrivée de la nouvelle Commission de Gestion, 2 Nov. 1942.

<sup>33</sup> The ICRC sometimes exceptionally granted him this right. See ACICR, B Sg 11, Max Huber to the Swedish Red Cross, 28 Aug. 1942.

the reports directly from this authority.<sup>34</sup> In short, the neutral and independent relief work that was to be carried out under the auspices of the Red Cross was turning out to be a 'primarily Swedish' affair, as desired by the Allies, who were informed about the Greek situation on a daily basis by Allard and Mohn.<sup>35</sup>

Swedish government control of relief operations in Greece increased further after Stockholm decided early in 1943 to renegotiate the agreement that had been reached with the ICRC the previous year. The distribution of food supplies was, in effect, placed under the supervision of Minister Allard.<sup>36</sup> Once again, the Stockholm government explained that it had had to take the decision in view of its commitments to the Allied governments,<sup>37</sup> which wanted to remove the ICRC from any involvement in the management of the relief operations.<sup>38</sup> The ICRC decided to withdraw from the management of the relief operation it had launched in Greece.<sup>39</sup> It considered that neither the organization's tradition nor its statutes would allow it to subordinate its humanitarian work to any government. Under pressure and after the negotiation, in March 1943, of a new working Protocol under the auspices of the Italian government,<sup>40</sup> however, it agreed to continue co-operating with Sweden in practical matters so as not to prejudice the humanitarian activities under way. Shortly before, the British Foreign Office had confirmed that the initiative to change the set-up had come solely from Sweden.<sup>41</sup> London welcomed the changes, as it was more inclined to trust a national government than an international humanitarian organization.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>34</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27a, Rapport du Dr Junod (n° 3).

<sup>35</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27c, Marcel Junod to Max Huber, 11 Oct. 1942.

<sup>36</sup> ACICR, B SG 11, Projet d'un arrangement entre le représentant du Gouvernement suédois, M. le Chargé d'Affaires Allard, et le CICR, 24 Feb. 1943.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Christian Günther, Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Max Huber, 16 Feb. 1943.

<sup>38</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27c, Note de Jean d'Amman pour Carl Jakob Burckhardt, 14 May 1943.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Max Huber to Christian Günther, Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, 3 Feb. 1943.

<sup>40</sup> ACICR, B SG 11, Rapport concernant le ravitaillement de la population civile grecque et notamment les envois expédiés d'outre-mer par les bateaux suédois, 11 Mar. 1943.

<sup>41</sup> ACICR, A PV, Commission de coordination: séance du mercredi 17 février 1943 à 10h.

<sup>42</sup> ACICR, B SG 11, Procès-verbal de la séance concernant la délégation du CICR à Athènes, le 22 février 1943, à 16h; see also ACICR, A PV, Commission de coordination: séance du mercredi 24 février 1943, à 10h.



*International Relief Operations and National Interests*

Were the difficulties the ICRC encountered with the Swedes and the ensuing mutual dissension<sup>43</sup> due solely to this asymmetry between trust in a nation-state and in an international body? The difference in political weight between the International Committee and the Swedish government certainly played a part, tipping the balance in the latter's favour. Above all, it confronted the ICRC with two dilemmas. The first was how to manage relief operations which the ICRC perceived as international in terms of means and as universal in terms of purpose—that is to say, operations to assist suffering humanity—when it believed its partner was exploiting them and reducing them to an aspect of purely domestic policy. The ICRC delegation in Stockholm, in fact, had on several occasions observed the importance the national press attached to Sweden's relief work in Greece,<sup>44</sup> while generally omitting to mention the other humanitarian actors involved. The Swedish Red Cross, which normally should have shared the ICRC's charitable and universalist vision, followed the general trend and also regarded these assistance operations as 'a matter of essential national interest'.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, according to the ICRC delegate in Stockholm (Georg Hoffmann), the Swedish Red Cross was inclined to overemphasize the work of the Swedish team in Greece while minimizing that of its partners.<sup>46</sup>

This first dilemma gave rise to a second: how were victims to be assisted when the interests of the humanitarian organizations involved differed? As far as the ICRC was concerned, there was no longer any doubt that the Swedish delegates were working more for the benefit of their country than for Red Cross ideals. The ICRC president reckoned that the Swedes were 'doing business' with their boats,<sup>47</sup> which were supposed to be shipping food for

<sup>43</sup> Sweden also complained about the attitude of the Swiss staff; see ACICR, B CL 15.10.02, Zenon Przybyszewski Westrup to Baron Gustave de Geer, 17 May 1944.

<sup>44</sup> ACICR, B G 3/35a, Bericht 22a: Zur Griechenlandhilfe, 4 Feb. 1944.

<sup>45</sup> ACICR, A PV, Bureau: extrait PV provisoire n° 70 du Bureau, séance du 28 juin 1944.

<sup>46</sup> 'Die Tendenz zur Ueberwucherung des schwedischen Elementes vorhanden und die Tendenz zur Bagatellisierung der Bedeutung des Partners', ACICR, B G 3/35a, Bericht 33c: Zusammenarbeit mit den Schweden in Griechenland, 1 Apr. 1944.

<sup>47</sup> ACICR, A PV, Commission de coordination: séance du mercredi 24 février 1943, à 10h.

the Red Cross, by allowing them, for example, to provide transport for Swedish trade missions abroad.<sup>48</sup> In Athens, the ICRC opposed the Swedish president of the Joint Commission when he wanted to use the ICRC emblem in conducting a private survey on post-war reconstruction in Greece, at Sweden's request.<sup>49</sup> It came to the point where some people in Geneva began to reassess Sweden's entire humanitarian involvement during the Second World War as having been motivated by the sole aim of seeking market outlets.<sup>50</sup>

In the end, the ICRC had no alternative but to express to the Swedish foreign office its great concern that, despite the ICRC staff's efforts, the Joint Relief Commission did not seem able to assist all the needy areas in Greece.<sup>51</sup> The ICRC expected the whole Greek affair to end in a scandal owing to the devious intentions of the Swedish government,<sup>52</sup> which 'was aiming primarily to strengthen its position in relation to the British government for the post-war period', and was thus indifferent to the success or failure of the relief operations in Greece.<sup>53</sup>

At least on occasions, the work of the Swedish Red Cross in Greece and the political and economic ambitions of the Swedish government coincided. After all, were the Swiss partners (ICRC and Red Cross) not also defending the interests of their country in one way or another? This, at least, was how the ICRC's Swedish contacts saw it. They were therefore surprised when the organization explained that not only was 'the Swiss Red Cross independent of the ICRC',<sup>54</sup> but that 'the Committee [was] an international, and not a Swiss, organization', and that it had never, since its foundation, 'conducted its activities as the subordinate or under the control of

<sup>48</sup> ACICR, B Sg 11, Carl Jakob Burckhardt to Minister Westrup, 2 Feb. 1944.

<sup>49</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27c, Beat de Glutz to Professeur Alexandre Beck, ICRC adviser, 11 Aug. 1944.

<sup>50</sup> ACICR, A PV, Secrétariat central: résumé de la séance du Secrétariat général du 26 février 1946. As twice pointed out in a booklet published in November 1945 by the Joint Relief Commission under the title 'L'Aide de la Suède aux pays ravagés par la guerre', Sweden hoped automatically to benefit from a resumption of trade with these beneficiary countries by furnishing humanitarian assistance, but also financial credits, raw materials (wood, iron, steel), and equipment (such as machine tools), to countries affected by war: ACICR, O CMS C-053, 'L'Aide de la Suède aux pays ravagés par la guerre', 3, 9.

<sup>51</sup> ACICR, B Sg 11, Max Huber to Christian de Gunther, 31 Mar. 1944.

<sup>52</sup> Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece*, 134.

<sup>53</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27c, Dr de Fischer to CICR, 17 Feb. 1943.

<sup>54</sup> ACICR, B G 3/35, Rapport n° 8a) Swedish Red Cross, 13 Dec. 1943.

any state—either Switzerland or any other country’.<sup>55</sup> Despite these explanations, the ICRC was, of course, in close contact with both the Swiss authorities and the Swiss Red Cross. The head of the Swiss Legation in Greece, Charles-Édouard de Bavier, who was in fact related to several members of the ICRC, kept the organization informed confidentially about the Swedes’ movements.<sup>56</sup> The ICRC returned the favour by discussing relations between Switzerland and Sweden with the Swiss authorities,<sup>57</sup> calling on them in particular to improve their political position in relation to their Scandinavian rival. The ICRC entertained the same special relationship with the Swiss Red Cross Mission in Athens. Robert Brunel, for instance, in addition to his role as ICRC delegate, also worked on behalf of the Swiss Red Cross Mission to ensure that it played ‘a role that was bound to win favour with the [Greek] population and would thus be of great advantage for our country’.<sup>58</sup> In short, the Swedish Red Cross and the ICRC were pursuing similar goals, although one was acting more openly than the other: they were working to restore the prestige of their respective countries on the international scene. This strategy was directed primarily towards the countries fighting Nazi Germany.

*Regaining National Reputation through International Relief*

Despite their proclaimed neutrality, Sweden and Switzerland had both been criticized by the Allies for their pronounced economic connections with the Axis powers,<sup>59</sup> and their policy of arrangement with them.<sup>60</sup> It was thus essential for Switzerland and Sweden to restore their reputations on the international scene. Humanitarian

<sup>55</sup> ACICR, B Sg 11, Procès-verbal de la séance concernant la délégation du CICR à Athènes, le 22 février 1943, à 16h.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. ACICR, B G 3/27c, Charles-Édouard de Bavier to Carl Jakob Burckhardt, 21 Aug. 1943.

<sup>57</sup> ACICR, B Sg 11/1, Carl Jakob Burckhardt to Marcel Pilet-Golaz, Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, 13 July 1944. Burckhardt suggested that Greece could be supplied by the Swiss commercial fleet instead of Swedish boats. For Burckhardt, this policy would improve not only Switzerland’s position on the international scene, but also the ICRC’s inside the Joint Relief Commission: *ibid.*, Aide-Mémoire zur Besprechung von Herrn Bundespräsident Stampfli mit Herrn Carl J. Burckhardt, vom 7. Juli 1944, 13 July 1944.

<sup>58</sup> ACICR, O CMS D 196, Robert Brunel to Max Huber, 15 Jan. 1943.

<sup>59</sup> This was asserted by the ICRC delegate in London, Rodolphe Haccius: ACICR A CL 01.02.18, Rodolphe Haccius to Jacques Chenevière, 21 Nov. 1940.

<sup>60</sup> Paul A. Levine, ‘Swedish Neutrality during the Second World War: Tactical

action seemed to provide an effective means of achieving this. Switzerland had two major assets in these reinstatement efforts. As the cradle of the Red Cross and the host of the ICRC on its territory, it had been perceived as a humanitarian nation since the end of the nineteenth century. And to this the Swiss Confederation had added a second advantage since the end of the First World War: that of being a power that protected the interests of belligerent countries.<sup>61</sup> The Swiss Confederation therefore seemed better equipped than Sweden to rise to the challenges of the post-war period.<sup>62</sup> For all these reasons, Sweden appeared to be ill-disposed towards Switzerland, and even 'jealous' of it.<sup>63</sup> As it happened, thanks to a concurrence of events more favourable to Stockholm than to Berne,<sup>64</sup> Sweden had been helped back into the saddle by the Allies. It had thus succeeded in boosting its role on the humanitarian scene during the Second World War and hence in strengthening its reputation. As a former member of the British secret services ironically noted: 'Swedish humanitarian action during and after the war did much to erase the ignominy the country had suffered from the gymnastics of its neutrality policy.'<sup>65</sup>

There was similar rivalry between the Swedish Red Cross and the ICRC, which liked to point out that 'the Swedish Red Cross [had] always regarded itself as a sort of equivalent of the Committee'.<sup>66</sup> Since the First World War, the Swedish Red Cross, again moved by 'jealousy',<sup>67</sup> seemed to have constantly wanted to take over activities

Success or Moral Compromise?', in Neville Wylie (ed.), *European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents during the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2002), 304–30; Neville Wylie, 'Switzerland: A Neutral of Distinction?', *ibid.* 331–54.

<sup>61</sup> During the First World War the Swiss Government had received 36 mandates to defend the political interests of belligerent states in enemy countries.

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. Johannes Schneider, '"Un moyen précieux de maintenir de bonnes liaisons": la Suisse, puissance protectrice de l'Italie au cours d'une décennie tourmentée (1940–1949)', *Relations internationales*, 144 (2010), 37–49.

<sup>63</sup> ACICR, B Sg 11, Rapport sur des entretiens à Stockholm, 18 July 1944.

<sup>64</sup> Levine, 'Swedish Neutrality during the Second World War', 321, 326; Wylie, 'Switzerland: A Neutral of Distinction?', 342; Jean-Pierre Mousson-Lestang, 'La neutralité de la Suède pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 194 (1999), 61–78, at 72–3; Neville Wylie, 'Une évaluation du parcours de la Suisse en tant que puissance protectrice à "double mandat" pour le Royaume-Uni et l'Allemagne durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale', *Relations internationales*, 144 (2010), 3–20, at 8.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Tennant, *Touchlines of War* (Hull, 1992), 37.

<sup>66</sup> ACICR, A PV, Bureau: séance du mercredi 12 avril 1944 à 9h30. These words are from Max Huber, the ICRC president.

<sup>67</sup> ACICR, A PV, Commission des secours: 26<sup>ème</sup> séance vendredi 12 janvier 1945

devolving upon the ICRC, especially those connected with prisoners of war.<sup>68</sup> The Second World War and the strong support that the Swedish national society enjoyed from its government, which in this way seemed to compensate for its weakness as a protecting power,<sup>69</sup> exacerbated the tensions that already existed with the ICRC, since the latter, given the independence and neutrality it proclaimed, could not officially claim the same support from the Swiss government.

But these tensions might perhaps have been less marked had it not been for a third dilemma: how could a humanitarian organization fail to respond to the suffering of the victims? Directly confronted with the Greek population's distress, ICRC delegate Robert Brunel, who in the summer of 1941 was the only neutral humanitarian actor on the spot, had realized that rapid action was essential if disaster was to be avoided. The motive for his action was purely charitable; he was acting in an emergency without any political considerations and, indeed, without even consulting his superiors in Geneva. Brunel seized opportunities and mobilized support locally, irrespective of nationality. The irony of history was that his action had been caused in part by the British, who, just before the first relief supplies arrived, had launched a propaganda campaign on the BBC announcing that food was to be distributed to the Greek population. And this had awakened purely mercantile desires. It was in order to counteract any misappropriation of food for purposes of speculation that Brunel had been obliged to set up a relief structure involving those who could help him—that is, the Greek and occupation force authorities.<sup>70</sup> London subsequently accused the ICRC, and thus also Switzerland, of 'collaborating with the

à 9h30. According to Bent Blüdnikov, Sweden's animosity towards the ICRC was linked to the fact that this institution had entrusted the Danish Red Cross, instead of its Swedish counterpart, with responsibility for setting up an office for PoWs on the Eastern Front during the First World War: Bent Blüdnikov, 'Denmark during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24/4 (1989), 683–703, at 692.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. ACICR C G1 A 09-05, Conférence des Croix-Rouges russe, austro-hongroise et allemandes tenue à Stockholm en novembre 1915 sous le patronage de la Croix-Rouge suédoise; see also ACICR, A PV, Bureau: séance du mercredi 5 janvier 1944 à 10h. On the question of a possible Swedish Red Cross action on behalf of prisoners of war in the USSR see ACICR, A CL 08-007-008, Camps de prisonniers de guerre en URSS, 1942.

<sup>69</sup> ACICR, A PV, Bureau: séance du mercredi 12 avril 1944 à 9h30.

<sup>70</sup> ACICR, B G 3/27a, Rapport de Mr Robert Brunel, délégué du CICR, 3 Oct. 1941.

enemy'. This accusation prompted the British government to turn to another 'neutral' government, which was in fact no more neutral than that of Switzerland, in order to reorganize aid distribution in Greece. Once again, the concept of international co-operation was outweighed by purely national interests.

During the Second World War, the sometimes heightened competition between Switzerland and Sweden to relieve suffering Greece—through their respective 'Allies' on the ground, namely, the ICRC and the Swedish Red Cross—shows that humanitarianism may achieve other ends than humanitarian ones,<sup>71</sup> and also provide an instrument for neutral countries to prove their usefulness on the international scene, and, by doing so, defend their national integrity. In this sense, if humanitarian competition exists, it is because the utility of each actor shows itself to the detriment of the others. The true question, however, is how far this competition was of benefit to the victims. In the Greek case, because of a lack of information coming from the beneficiaries themselves, it is difficult to know whether the rivalry between Swiss and Swedish humanitarian actors helped to improve the way in which assistance was delivered or, on the contrary, resulted in a 'decrease of energy' in terms of time, means, and inventiveness, which was thus harmful to the victims. An examination of the documents left by the humanitarian actors suggests that the second possibility, paradoxically, is the more likely.

<sup>71</sup> See Johannes Paulmann's contribution to the present volume.