

# 6

## Border-Crossing Electrons: Critical Energy Flows to and from Greece

*Aristotle Tympas, Stathis Arapostathis, Katerina Vlantonis,  
and Yiannis Garyfallos*

### **"A major geological surprise": From the 1995 earthquake to a transnational history of electric power infrastructure**

"Dance of the Richters," read the title of a half-page article in the May 12, 1995 issue of the popular Greek newspaper *Nea* (News). "There have been 30 earthquakes of over 4 on the Richter scale in the last 40 days in many areas of Greece... the intense seismic activity of recent days has caused uneasiness, but the seismologists reassure us that it is not an unusual phenomenon and that there is no risk."<sup>1</sup> The earthquake that hit Greece the following day was unusual on many levels. *Makedonia* (Macedonia), the newspaper with the largest circulation in Northern Greece, called it "a major geological surprise."<sup>2</sup> The 6.6 Richter quake had its epicenter at one of the few areas in Greece that was not considered seismogenic, near the city of Kozani. This was the largest city in the western part of the Greek region of Macedonia.<sup>3</sup>

The newspaper reminded its readers that the Kozani area was also "the energy heart of Greece, with 70 per cent of the country's electricity produced there."<sup>4</sup> According to *Nea*, "the preparedness of the Public Power Corporation (PPC) prevented a major blackout." More precisely, instead "of lasting several hours... [it] was limited to a few minutes of service interruption at many points in northern Greece and other areas of the country." These short blackouts were attributed to "anomalies" in power switches at the Kozani Energy Center and the High Voltage Center at Kardlia. According to the Public Power Corporation there was no permanent damage to the four hydroelectric stations of the Kardlia Energy Center. To cover "the loss of 950 MW from this interruption, three hydroelectric units were immediately put in operation." This journalistic account of the blackouts concluded by emphasizing that "Automatic machines and technicians had previously checked the safety of the installations and the dams, which is what they do on a permanent basis as well."<sup>5</sup> The Greek power system had functioned well and there was no further danger.

While confirming that the 1995 earthquake did not result in a devastating blackout, engineers from the Greek Public Power Company's (PPC) Departments of Production and Transmission Studies diverged from journalists in explaining why the Greek electric power network withstood the shock of the earthquake so