

Two-years of NO₃ radical observations in the boundary layer over the Eastern Mediterranean

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Abstract. This is the first study that investigates the seasonal variability of nitrate (NO₃) radicals in the marine boundary layer over the East Mediterranean Sea. An extensive data set of NO₃ radical observations on the north coast of Crete for more than two years (June 2001–September 2003) is presented here. NO₃ radicals follow a distinct seasonal dependency with the highest seasonally average mixing ratios in summer (5.6±1.2 pptv) and the lowest in winter (1.2±1.2 pptv). Episodes with high NO₃ mixing ratios have been encountered mainly in polluted air masses originating from mainland Greece, Central and East Europe, and Turkey. Ancillary measurements of ozone, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and meteorological parameters have been conducted and used to reveal possible relationship with the observed NO₃ variability. The acquired NO₂ nighttime observations provide the up-to-date most complete overview of NO₂ temporal variability in the area. The data show correlations of the NO₃ nighttime mixing ratios with temperature (positive), relative humidity (negative) and to a lesser extent with O₃ (positive). As inferred from these observations, on average the major sink of NO₃ radicals in the area is the heterogeneous reaction of dinitrogen pentoxide (N₂O₅) on aqueous particles whereas the homogeneous gas phase reactions of NO₃ are most important during spring and summer. These observations support a significant contribution of NO₃ nighttime chemistry to the oxidizing capacity of the troposphere.

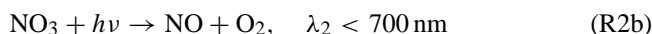
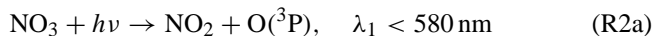
1 Introduction

The self-cleaning efficiency of the troposphere is important for air quality, and depends on the oxidation and deposition of trace constituents. The most important oxidants in the atmosphere are the hydroxyl radical (OH) during daytime, the nitrate radical (NO₃) during nighttime, and ozone (O₃) during the entire day.

In the presence of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and ozone (O₃), NO₃ radicals are formed in the lower troposphere mainly via Reaction (R1):



During daytime NO₃ radicals do not build up to measurable levels (ca. 1 pptv) because they have a short lifetime of about 5 s (Orlando et al., 1993) due to the radiation absorption in the visible band of the solar spectrum (maximum absorption at 662 nm) and consequent photodissociation to NO₂ and to a lesser extent NO (Reaction R2b).

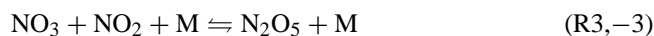


NO₃ radicals also react rapidly in the gas phase with NO to form NO₂. In polluted areas this reaction might dominate the sink of NO₃ during daytime. At night, NO levels are low, especially in areas far from primary NO_x emissions. This in addition to the absence of light, which dissociates NO₃ radicals, allows the build up of significant NO₃ mixing ratios during night.

Besides its role in the formation of NO₃ radicals, NO₂ also acts as a transient sink for NO₃ to form N₂O₅ via the

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temperature dependant equilibrium (R3,-3) (Atkinson et al., 2004):



The equilibrium (R3,-3) depends strongly on temperature and therefore N₂O₅ can act as a reservoir or as a sink for nitrate radicals and subsequently the nitrogen oxides (NO_x=NO+NO₂) depending on ambient temperature. Gas-phase N₂O₅ might contribute to nitric acid formation via reaction with water vapor, a process that is probably slow though uncertain (Wahner et al., 1998; Atkinson et al., 2003). Most importantly, N₂O₅ undergoes heterogeneous reactions with water on aerosol or/and in clouds to form HNO₃ and nitrate (NO₃⁻) anions, thus leading to a net loss of NO₃ and NO_x. Reported uptake coefficients of N₂O₅ (the ratio of the number of gas molecules removed by the condensed phase divided by the number of gas molecules colliding with the particle) $\gamma_{\text{N}_2\text{O}_5}$ on different aerosol surfaces vary from 2×10^{-4} to 0.04 depending on temperature and surface composition with the lowest values observed for aerosols containing organics (Schutze et al., 2002; Zetsch et al., 1992; Hu and Abbatt, 1997; Badger et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2006).

The direct hydrolysis of NO₃ radicals is slow with γ_{NO_3} equal 4.4×10^{-4} at 273 K (Rudich et al., 1996) In the aqueous phase NO₃ can also react with anions like Cl⁻ to produce NO₃⁻ anions with $\gamma_{\text{NO}_3} \geq 2 \times 10^{-3}$ at 293 K (Thomas et al., 1998).

The NO₃ radicals undergo gas phase reactions with Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) (Atkinson, 2000) and form peroxy (RO₂) and hydroxyl (OH) radicals (e.g. Platt et al., 1990; Carslaw et al., 1997a, b; Salisbury et al., 2001). They also contribute to the conversion and subsequent removal of NO_x to reactive nitrogen (Allan et al., 1999) forming nitric acid (HNO₃) and particulate nitrate (NO₃⁻) during night (Brown et al., 2004; Vrekoussis et al., 2006).

Although for most VOCs, the rates of reactions with NO₃ are lower than those with OH (Atkinson et al., 2004), there are several VOCs that are very reactive towards NO₃; for example, dimethylsulfide (DMS), isoprene, monoterpenes, some alkenes and some aromatics. NO₃ reactions with VOCs proceed either via H-abstraction, forming HNO₃ (e.g. with aldehydes, higher alkanes and DMS) or NO₃ addition, forming nitrated organic peroxides, which is the case of alkenes and other unsaturated VOCs. During night NO₃ mixing ratios can be 10–100 times higher than of hydroxyl radicals during the day. In these cases NO₃ radicals can be the main atmospheric oxidant for species with similar reactivity towards NO₃ and OH radicals (for instance various pinenes, Atkinson et al., 2004). Therefore, atmospheric processes driven by NO₃ radicals, involving both gas phase and heterogeneous chemistry, may be of importance for the oxidizing capacity of the atmosphere and for nutrient nitrate formation. To our knowledge only two studies have addressed the role of NO₃ on a seasonal basis (Heintz et al., 1996; Geyer et al., 2001a). Seasonal NO₃ radical measurements are challenging

because of the low mixing ratios and high spatial and temporal variability involved.

The present study aims to investigate the seasonal variability of NO₃ radicals and the controlling factors in the marine planetary boundary layer over the East Mediterranean Sea. This region attracts attention as it is a cross point of various air masses of different origin. Depending on the wind direction, polluted air masses with important loading of NO_x and anthropogenic aerosol are alternate with cleaner air originating from the Atlantic Ocean and Sahara, e.g. with low O₃ and significant dust loading (Mihalopoulos et al., 1997; Kouvarakis et al., 2000; Lelieveld et al., 2002).

2 Location of the station and experimental setup

Nitrate radicals were measured by a long path differential optical absorption spectroscopy (DOAS) instrument (Platt and Perner, 1983) along a 10.4 km light beam at Finokalia station (35.3' N, 25.3' E) on the island of Crete in the East Mediterranean for more than two years (June 2001–September 2003). The sampling station characteristics and the experimental device used for NO₃ measurements have been described in detail elsewhere (Mihalopoulos et al., 1997; Kouvarakis et al., 2000; Vrekoussis et al., 2004). NO₃ radicals are detected via their two significant absorption bands at 623 and 662 nm in the visible region of the solar spectrum. To eliminate influences such as water bands, NO₂ and lamp structures, the corresponding reference spectra are fitted simultaneously to derive the NO₃ signal, as described by Martinez et al. (2000) and Vrekoussis et al. (2004). Finally, the optical density of NO₃ is quantified through the 662 nm peak using the absorption cross section reported by Yokelson et al. (1994). The integration time ranged from 10 to 30 min depending on the visibility through the light path. Note that a single measurement is the average of several individual absorption spectra over a long optical path in the atmosphere of 10.4 km, thus reducing the influence of small-scale variability. The detection limit (signal to noise ratio S/N=3) for the NO₃ radicals has been estimated to 1.2 pptv.

Nitrogen dioxide has been measured in parallel with NO₃ by changing the region of the light spectrum between the visible (VIS) for NO₃ and the ultraviolet (UV) region for NO₂ detection. NO₂ quantification has been achieved by using the optical density of the 405 nm peak and the cross section provided by Yoshino et al. (1997). Unfortunately, the NO₂ data set is not as extended as the NO₃ observations due to the increased noise in the UV region caused by a malfunction of the Photo Diode Arrays. Only good quality spectra (signal to noise ratio larger than 3) are used for the present analysis. The mean detection limit for NO₂ mixing ratios was 0.18 ± 0.04 ppbv.

Short path UV absorption instrument (Dasibi – 1008) has been used for the continuous 5-min O₃ measurements during these two years. The instrument has a detection limit equal

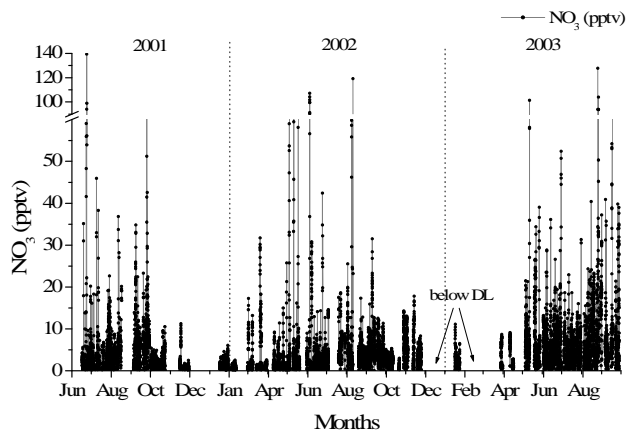


Fig. 1. NO₃ observations (in pptv) at Finokalia during 2 years of sampling (June 2001–September 2003).

to 1 ppbv as indicated by the manufacturer. An extensive 5-min O₃ record since 1997 has been reported and analysed by Kouvarakis et al. (2000, 2002) and Gerasopoulos et al. (2005, 2006). Nitrogen monoxide is experimentally determined by a Thermo Environmental Model 42C high sensitivity chemiluminescence NO_x analyzer equipped with a molybdenum converter that in addition to NO and NO₂, allows detection of PAN, nitric acid, and organic nitrates. The radioisotope Radon-222 has also been measured for this study with a 2-h sampling time and detection limit better than 1 mBq/m³, and is used as a tracer of continental air masses (see details in Gerasopoulos et al., 2005). The meteorological parameters (temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and direction and solar irradiance) have been measured by an automated meteorological station and then averaged over 5 min intervals. Local time (LT) is used for the presentation and the discussion of the results hereafter.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 NO₃ variability and impact of transport

Measurements were performed during a total of 392 nights from June 2001 to September 2003. During 336 nights, NO₃ radical mixing ratios were above the detection limit of 1.2 pptv (Fig. 1) and in 8 cases exceeded 100 pptv. The maximum observed NO₃ value was 139 pptv (June 2001) and the nighttime monthly mean value of the 2-year period was 4.2 ± 2.3 pptv (arithmetic average \pm standard deviation).

As shown in Table 1, the monthly or seasonally averaged NO₃ observations compare fairly well with data reported earlier for various locations and similar time periods. However, the random peak levels of NO₃ observed at Finokalia mainly during summer exceed by 40% earlier reported maximum NO₃ values in the continental (100 pptv in autumn, Brown et al., 2003) and in the marine boundary layer (98 pptv in

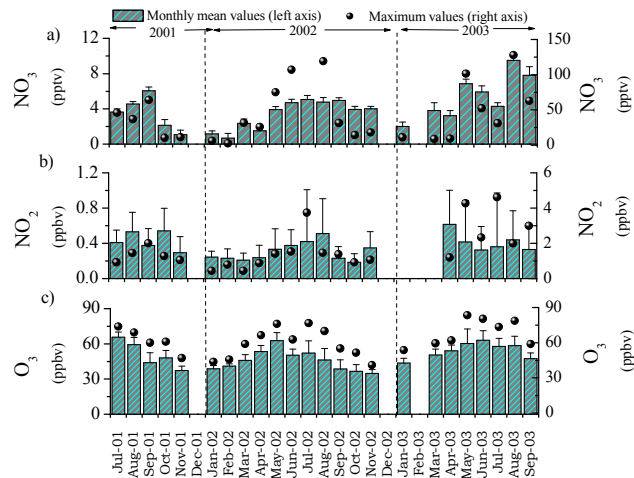


Fig. 2. Monthly mean mixing ratios (left axis) of (a) NO₃, (b) NO₂ and (c) O₃ and their standard deviations (nighttime observations only). Black squares, circles and triangles depict the maximum values per month (right axis) of NO₃, NO₂ and O₃, respectively.

spring, Heintz et al., 1996) and are significantly lower than those recorded by Platt et al. (1980) in Riverside, California (up to 300 pptv). Our values are lower than those reported by Sebastian (2004) for Finokalia during July 2000, period during which the area has been affected by exceptionally high biomass burning events.

Since O₃ and NO₂ are precursors to NO₃ radical formation (R1), examination of their levels and variability is essential for understanding the chemistry of NO₃. Figures 2a–c show the monthly mean (and maximum) nighttime mixing ratios of NO₃ radicals, NO₂ and O₃, observed during the studied period. NO₃ radical levels are high in spring (seasonal average 3.7 ± 0.9 pptv) and summer (5.6 ± 1.2 pptv) and low during winter (1.2 ± 1.2 pptv), and follow those of its precursors, NO₂ and O₃ and of NO₃ lifetime depicted in Table 2 (see discussion in Sect. 3.3.2).

The NO₂ data series acquired with the DOAS instrument and presented here (Fig. 2b) provides the most complete overview of NO₂ temporal variability at a coastal area in the Eastern Mediterranean since only few NO₂ measurements have been reported in the literature for the area (Kourtidis et al., 2002; Vrekoussis et al., 2004). The individual NO₂ measurements range from below the detection limit (0.18 ppbv) up to 5 ppbv. The annual mean NO₂ mixing ratio based on observations above the detection limit is 0.31 ± 0.13 ppbv. The lowest monthly average of 0.24 ppbv was observed in winter and the highest (about 0.60 ppbv) in spring and summer.

Similarly to NO₂ and NO₃, O₃ minimum levels were registered in winter (seasonal average value equals 37 ± 6 ppbv) while the highest levels were observed in late spring–mid summer (summer seasonal average of 56 ± 10 ppbv) (Fig. 2c). For the studied 2-year period, the annual mean mixing ratio

Table 1. NO₃ radical measurements for different environments and seasons reported in the literature. L: total path of the used DOAS instrument.

Location	Latitude-Longitude	NO ₃ Average (pptv)	NO ₃ Max (pptv)	L (km)	Time/Season	Year	Ref
Continental Boundary Layer							
Lindenberg, Germany	52°13' N–14°07' E	4.6	85	10	Feb–Sep	1998	Geyer et al. (2001a)
		5.0	–	10	March–April	1998	“
		5.7	–	10	May–Sep	1998	“
Pabstthum, Germany	52°51' N–12°56' E	–	70	12.6	July–Aug	1998	“
Boulder, Colorado, U.S.	40°6' N–105°16' W	–	100	–	Oct–Nov	2001	Brown et al. (2003)
Riverside, California, U.S.	33°56' N–117°23' W	–	288	–	Sep	1979	Platt et al. (1980)
Marine Boundary Layer							
Kap Arkona (Rügen Island), Germany	54°30' N–13°30' E	7.8	98	7.3	April 1993–May 1994	1993/94	Heintz et al. (1996)
Izana, Tenerife, Spain (2003 m)	28°40' N–16°05' W	8.0	20	9.6	May	1994	Carslaw et al. (1997a)
		–	20	9.3	June/July	1997	Allan et al. (2000)
Wayborne, England	52°57' N–1°08' E	9.7 SP*	–	5	Winter (4 nights)	1994	Allan et al. (1999)
		10.0	25	5	Spring (4 nights)	1994	Carslaw et al. (1997b)
		6 CL*	–	5	Summer (4 nights)	1995	Allan et al. (1999)
		11.1	–	5	Autumn (1 night)	1994	Carslaw et al. (1997b)
Mace Head, Ireland	53°19' N–9°54' W	1–5 CL*	40	8.4	July/August	1996	Allan et al. (2000)
		1–40 SP*	–	–	–	–	–
		1–5 CL*	40	8.4	April/May	1997	idem
		1–40 SP*	–	–	–	–	–
		3 CL*	25	8.4	July/August	2005	Saiz-Lopez et al. (2006)
		13 SP*	–	–	–	–	–
Helgoland, island	54°2' N–7°9' E	P	40	3.6	October	1996	Martinez et al. (2000)
Finokalia, Greece	35°30' N–25°7' E	4.5	37	10.4	July/August	2001	Vrekoussis et al. (2004)
		20.8	307.7	8.2	July	2000	Sebastian (2004)
		5.6	139.3	10.4	Summer	2001	This work
		3.4	64.1	10.4	Autumn	2001	“
		1.0	6.0	10.4	Winter	2002	“
		2.9	75.2	10.4	Spring	2002	“
		5.3	119.2	10.4	Summer	2002	“
		4.7	31.5	10.4	Autumn	2002	“
		2.2	11.1	10.4	Winter	2003	“
		5.1	101.4	10.4	Spring	2003	“
7.2	127.7	10.4	Summer	2003	“		
7.8	62.9	10.4	September	2003	“		

* CL=Clean conditions; SP=Semi-polluted conditions; P=Polluted conditions

of O₃ is 48±9 ppbv with the 5-min observations ranging from 23 ppbv to 83 ppbv. Details on the seasonal variation of O₃ at Finokalia are given by Gerasopoulos et al. (2005).

The impact of the air mass origin on the levels of NO₃ radicals and other chemical species of interest for the present study has been investigated for the 2-year period. The rose diagrams shown in Figs. 3a–f have been constructed by averaging within each 10 degrees of wind direction interval all data acquired during the 2-years of the study. They have to be interpreted in conjunction with the various source areas that surround Finokalia station, notably mainland Greece, central Europe (N, NW), east Europe, Turkey (NE, E), Italy and the western Mediterranean region (W), and Africa (SW, S, SE). Note also that during winter air originates mainly from the Atlantic region and during summer from polluted Europe and Turkey (Lelieveld et al., 2002). The wind speed and Radon (Figs. 3a, b) highest values were associated with the

northwest sector, indicative of air mass transport from polluted continental areas. High levels of ozone (Fig. 3c) were observed for wind directions from the north-west (Greece and central Europe) and north to north-east (east Europe, Turkey). NO₂ (Fig. 3d) was also slightly enhanced when the air masses originate from the northwest sector, compared to southerlies. As shown in Fig. 2e, NO₃ radicals were 50% higher when the air masses are of north-westerly origin in comparison to all other source regions.

This dependency of the NO₃ mixing ratios on the wind direction has been further analysed for all NO₃ levels exceeding 30 pptv (in total 32 cases) during the period June 2001–September 2003 (Fig. 1). Back trajectories of the air masses reaching the sampling location, calculated by the HYSPLIT program (<http://www.arl.noaa.gov/ready/hysplit4.html>), are used to characterise the origin of these peaks. A high percentage (90%) of these elevated NO₃ cases is related to

air masses from the northwest-northeast sectors, while the remaining 10% has a local-mixed origin. For these 32 cases, the observed NO₃ radical mixing ratios per wind sector average 64 ± 37 pptv (northwest), 50 ± 38 pptv (north), 55 ± 24 pptv (northeast) and 48 ± 13 pptv (local and mixed).

To examine the importance of the individual chemical and meteorological factors for NO₃ radicals in detail, two characteristic cases of high NO₃ levels have been selected. Each of the 32 high NO₃ episodes observed during this study can be classified within one of these two categories (12 in case one and 20 in case two shown below).

3.1.1 Case 1: intrusion into the boundary layer

During the night of 4–5 June 2002 a rapid increase in NO₃ levels has been observed from 3 pptv to 102 pptv within 2.5 h (Fig. 4). Shortly before the NO₃ increase, the relative humidity dropped from 75 to 55%, Radon declined by about 0.8 Bq m^{-3} while ozone and NO₂ increased by about 7 ppbv and 0.2 ppbv, respectively. These observations support an intrusion event during which dry air from the free troposphere subsided into the nocturnal marine boundary layer, as identified by the trajectory analysis (Fig. 4). The air masses originated from polluted continental areas in Central Europe. The enhanced NO₃ radical mixing ratios in the free tropospheric subsiding air masses, may result from the high levels of NO₃ precursors in conjunction with depressed NO₃ losses, in particular via the N₂O₅ reaction with water vapour.

3.1.2 Case 2: transport from pollution sources

During the night of 11–12 May 2003 NO₃ radicals mixing ratio increased from 4 pptvs to 104 pptv within less than 1.5 h (Fig. 5). This rise was associated with the progressive increase in wind speed and changes in the wind direction. The back trajectory analysis reveals that these air masses had crossed the south-west coast of Turkey before reaching the sampling station. Note that under these conditions the station is receiving air masses rich in NO₂ and Radon. The relative humidity in this case did not change but remained at rather low levels (20–30%); in parallel the temperature was almost constant decreasing by only 1°C throughout the night.

The clear anti-correlation observed between O₃ and NO₂ indicates titration of O₃ by NO leading to NO₃ production. Therefore, in contrast to the earlier case when air was transported in the free troposphere and then penetrated into the boundary layer at Finokalia, in this case the air mass originated from the polluted boundary layer and was transported at lower altitudes.

3.2 Correlations between NO₃ radicals and related species-statistical analysis

Single and multiple regression analyses have been deployed to investigate the specific role of each of the factors that control the levels of NO₃ radicals such as NO₂, O₃, Radon-222,

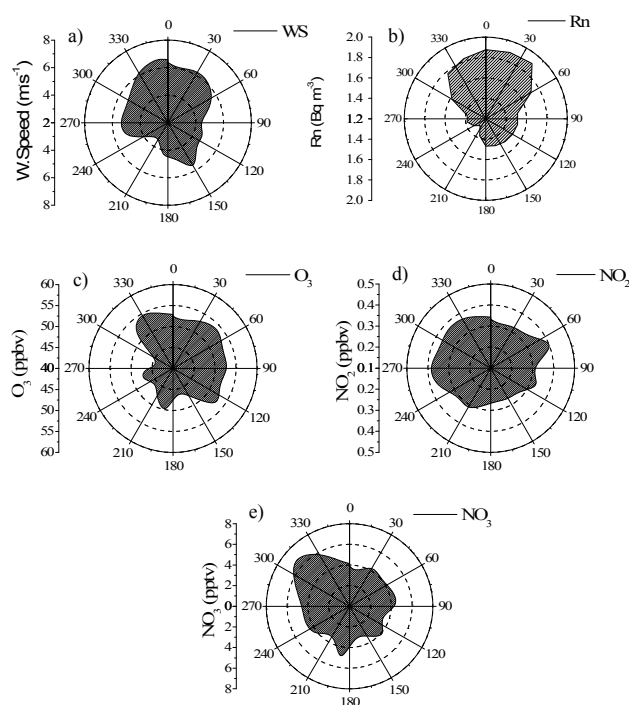


Fig. 3. Rose diagrams of the (a) Wind speed, (b) radon-222, (c) O₃, (d) NO₂ and (e) NO₃ as a function of wind direction at Finokalia, based on all nighttime observations integrated per 10 degree intervals of wind direction.

temperature (T), relative humidity (RH), wind direction and wind speed. The analysis is confined only to nighttime hours during which NO₃ radical mixing ratios exceed the detection limit. Specifically, more than 11 000 data points were used for the following analyses. A moving average has been additionally applied to the data series in order to subtract the seasonality (where existed) thus removing possible covariance between variables, which is due to their seasonal dependence.

3.2.1 Single regression analysis

Linear regression analysis revealed significant correlations at the 99% confidence level between NO₃ radicals and O₃ ($R=0.12$, $N=9844$), temperature ($R=0.23$, $N=9736$), relative humidity ($R=-0.19$, negative correlation, $N=9736$) and wind speed ($R=0.04$, $N=9736$). No significant correlation was found between NO₃ and NO₂. The scatter plots of NO₃ mixing ratios as function of O₃, temperature and relative humidity are shown in Figs. 6a–c. The averaged data (blue circles) for O₃, temperature and RH with the corresponding NO₃ averages do help the easier visualization of the existing relationships and fit well with the regression lines drawn (red lines) from the whole data set, obscured at first glance by the increased scattering of the values. A significant part of both O₃ and temperature correlation with NO₃ radicals is due to

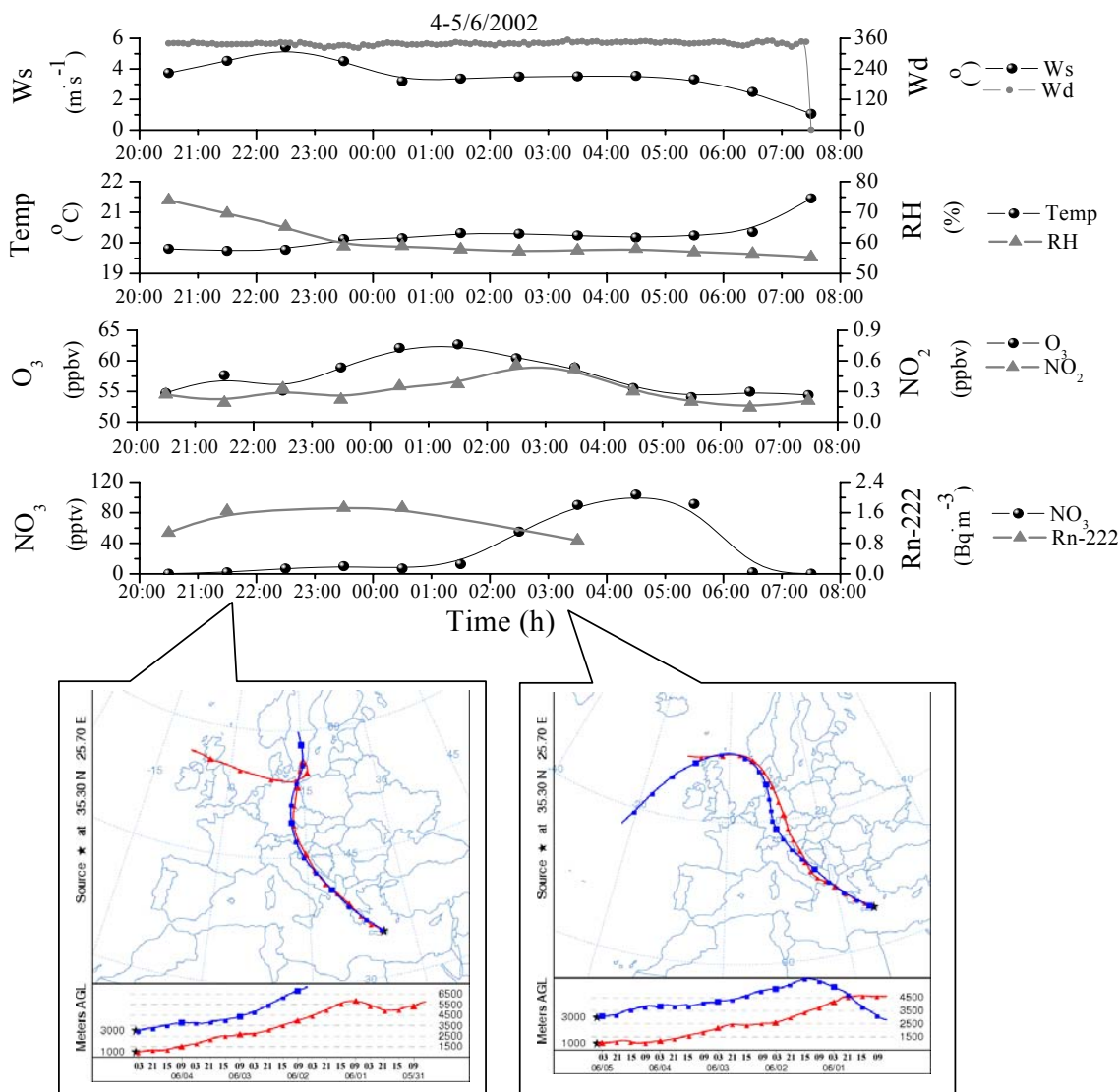


Fig. 4. Variation of wind speed, temperature, O₃ and NO₃ radicals during an intrusion of free tropospheric air masses associated with a decrease in Radon and relative humidity and increases of O₃ and NO₃ radicals (time expressed in local time), and 5-day back trajectories of air masses arriving at Finokalia on 4 June 2002 at 21:00 LT and on 5 June 2002 at 03:00 LT.

their common seasonality. This is supported by the fact that when the residuals of the ozone and temperature are used for the correlations with NO₃ (residuals derived by subtraction of the annual cycle of the series simulated by fitting the sum of a sine and its first harmonic to the data), the correlation coefficients are lower and equal 0.08 and 0.17, respectively.

3.2.2 Multiple regression analysis

To evaluate the relative importance of each parameter for the NO₃ mixing ratios a multiple regression analysis has been performed. Based on the single regression analysis results, O₃, T, RH and wind speed have been chosen as individual variable-parameters. Among them, wind speed has

been rejected by the model at the 95% confidence level ($\alpha=0.05$). The analysis has been repeated with O₃, RH and T, after eliminating the outliers. These outliers have been identified via residual analysis between the predicted and initial NO₃ values with the criterion of the ± 2 sigma. The derived linear correlation that expresses the NO₃ variability is:

$$\text{NO}_3 = (1.2 \pm 0.4)10^{-5} \cdot \text{O}_3 + (0.18 \pm 0.01) \cdot \text{T} + (-0.030 \pm 0.003) \cdot \text{RH} + (-48 \pm 3) \quad (1)$$

where NO₃ in pptv, O₃ in pptv, T in K and RH in %, regression coefficients are accompanied by their respective standard errors.

The R² (0.072, N=8943) indicates that 7.2% of the variability of NO₃ radicals can be explained by the above 3

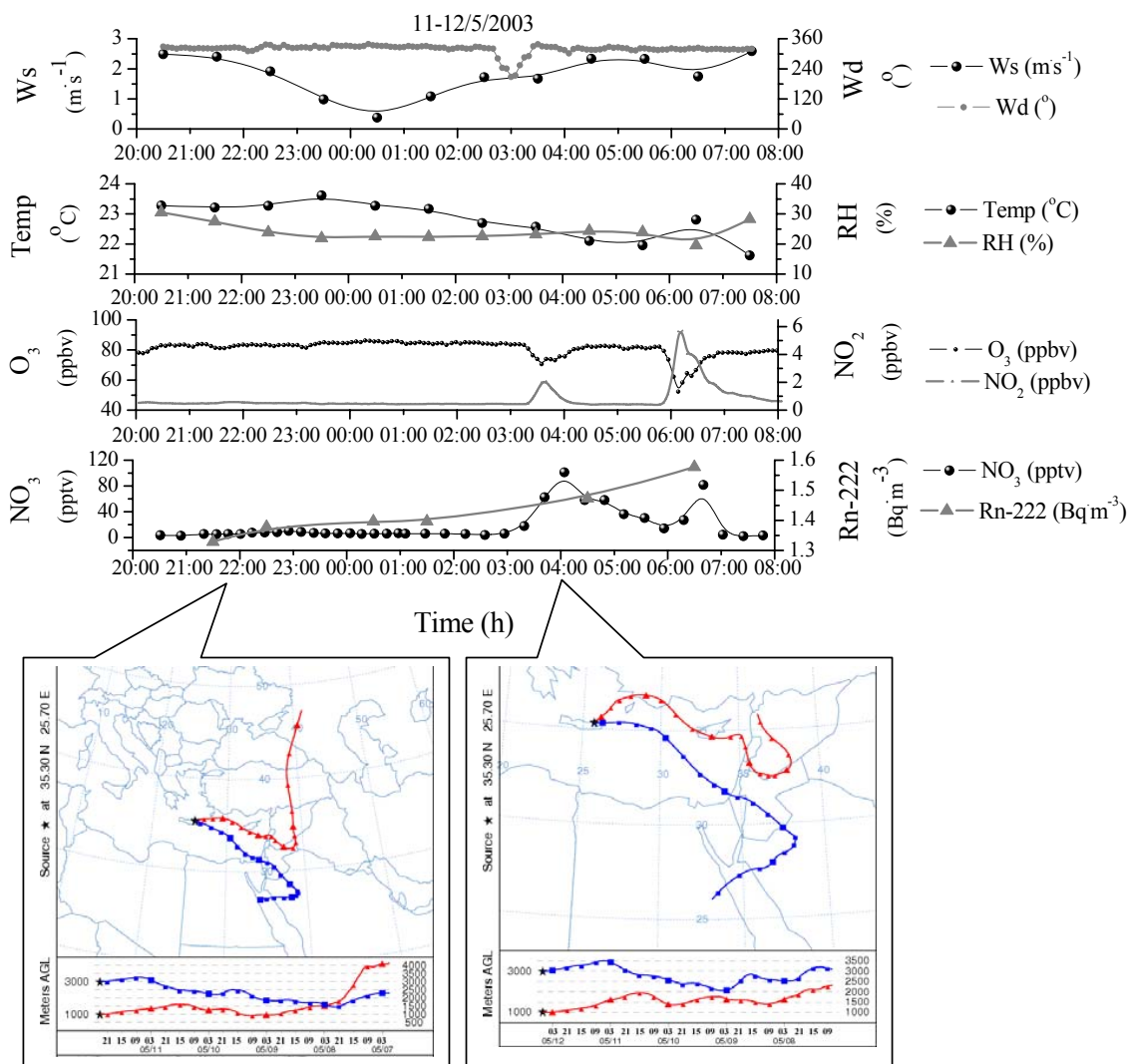


Fig. 5. Variation of wind speed, temperature, O₃ and NO₃ radicals during Transport of polluted air masses as indicated by an increase in Radon, and wind speed, change in wind direction followed by an increase in NO₂ and depletion of O₃, an increase in NO₃ radicals (time expressed in local time) and 5-day back trajectories of air masses arriving at Finokalia on 11 May 2003 at 22:00 LT and on 12 May 2003 at 04:00 LT.

variables. This explained variability is related by 60%, 30% and 10% to the T, the RH and the O₃ variability, respectively.

The results of both single and multiple regression analyses show that the NO₃ radicals are very sensitive to changes in temperature and relative humidity and, to a lesser extent, to O₃ variations. Relative humidity is the only parameter anti-correlated with NO₃ due to the indirect removal via heterogeneous reactions of N₂O₅, as will be discussed below.

3.3 Factors controlling NO₃ levels – mechanistic studies

Under steady state conditions the NO₃ levels are in equilibrium between production (P_{NO_3}) and losses (f_{NO_3}). The pro-

duction rate of NO₃ radicals by Reaction (R1) is given by

$$P_{\text{NO}_3} = k_{\text{NO}_2+\text{O}_3} \cdot [\text{NO}_2][\text{O}_3] \quad (2)$$

where $k_{\text{NO}_2+\text{O}_3}$ is the rate of this reaction. The losses of NO₃ radicals (f_{NO_3}) are the sum of direct (f_A) and indirect loss rates (f_B).

$$f_{\text{NO}_3} = f_A + f_B = \frac{P_{\text{NO}_3}}{[\text{NO}_3]} \quad (3)$$

The indirect losses of NO₃ (f_B) are related to the loss of N₂O₅ (f_B') as shown below in Eq. (4) that is derived assuming steady-state conditions for N₂O₅, NO₃ (Geyer et al., 2001b):

$$[\text{NO}_3] = \frac{P_{\text{NO}_3}}{f_A + [\text{NO}_2] \cdot k_{\text{eq}} \cdot f_B'} \quad (4)$$

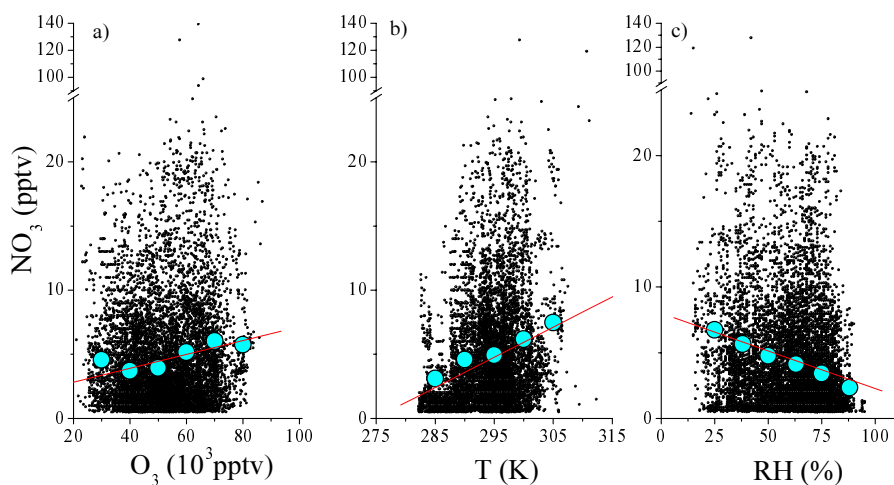


Fig. 6. Scatter plots of NO₃ mixing ratios (in pptv) as a function of (a) Ozone (in 10³ pptv), (b) Temperature (in K) and (c) Relative Humidity (in %). Blue circles are data averaged every 10⁴ pptv (for O₃), 5 K (for temperature) and 12.5% (for RH).

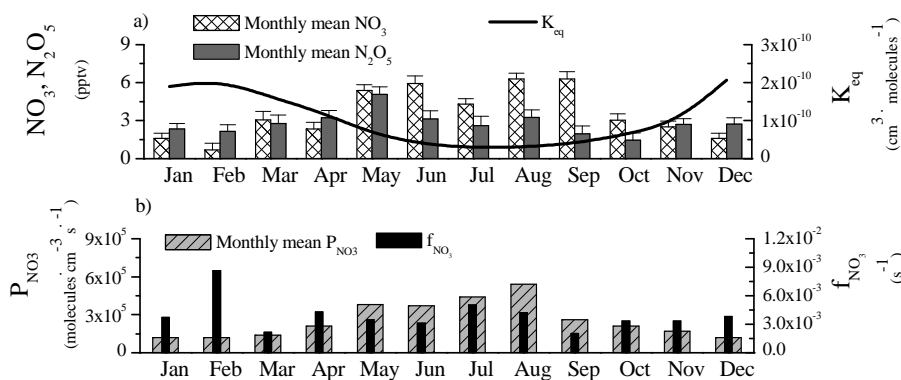


Fig. 7. Annual cycle (a) of observed NO₃ and of N₂O₅ (left axis) calculated assuming steady-state conditions and no heterogeneous losses and of the equilibrium constant K_{eq} of the Reactions [3,-3] (right axis) given by $k_{eq}=3 \times 10^{-27} \exp(10\,990/T)$ (Sander et al., 2003) (b) of the production (P_{NO_3} : left axis) and the loss rate (f_{NO_3} : see text; right axis) of NO₃ radicals; monthly mean values and standard deviations based on the June 2001 to September 2003 observations.

where

$$k_{eq} = \frac{k_{NO_2+NO_3}}{k_{-(N_2O_5)}} = \frac{[N_2O_5]}{[NO_2] \cdot [NO_3]} \quad (5)$$

The N₂O₅ levels can be calculated based on the observed NO₃ and NO₂ levels, and the temperature dependent equilibrium constant k_{eq} of the reversible reaction (Reaction R(3,-3)). For the whole sampling period monthly averages for N₂O₅, P_{NO_3} , and f_{NO_3} are shown in Fig. 7. In winter when temperatures are low, k_{eq} (Fig. 7a) is high thus shifting the equilibrium towards N₂O₅ and increasing the importance of N₂O₅ losses over the direct losses of NO₃. In addition, our wintertime observations indicate a very efficient loss of NO₃ (f_{NO_3} : sum of direct and indirect losses; Fig. 7b) that drastically suppresses the bulk NO₃ and N₂O₅ pool levels and as will be discussed in Sect. 3.3.2 is related to the indirect sink of NO₃ radicals. Therefore, N₂O₅ monthly mean levels

calculated assuming steady-state conditions (Fig. 7a) present maxima in late spring and early summer.

From Eqs. (3) and (4) we deduce that the slope of [NO₃] against P_{NO_3} equals the turnover time of NO₃ considering both the direct and the indirect losses of NO₃.

$$\tau_{NO_3} = \frac{1}{f_A + [NO_2] \cdot k_{eq} \cdot f'_B} \quad (6)$$

If the indirect losses are negligible ($f_B \approx 0$), [NO₃] should be directly proportional to the P_{NO_3} (significant correlation) and, then, the slope of the linear relationship between [NO₃] and P_{NO_3} that equals the lifetime of NO₃ radicals (τ_{NO_3}) is f_A^{-1} . On the other hand, if the direct losses are negligible ($f_A \approx 0$) and the indirect NO₃ loss predominates, the above equation leads to

$$\tau_{NO_3} = \frac{1}{[NO_2] \cdot k_{eq} \cdot f'_B} \quad (7)$$

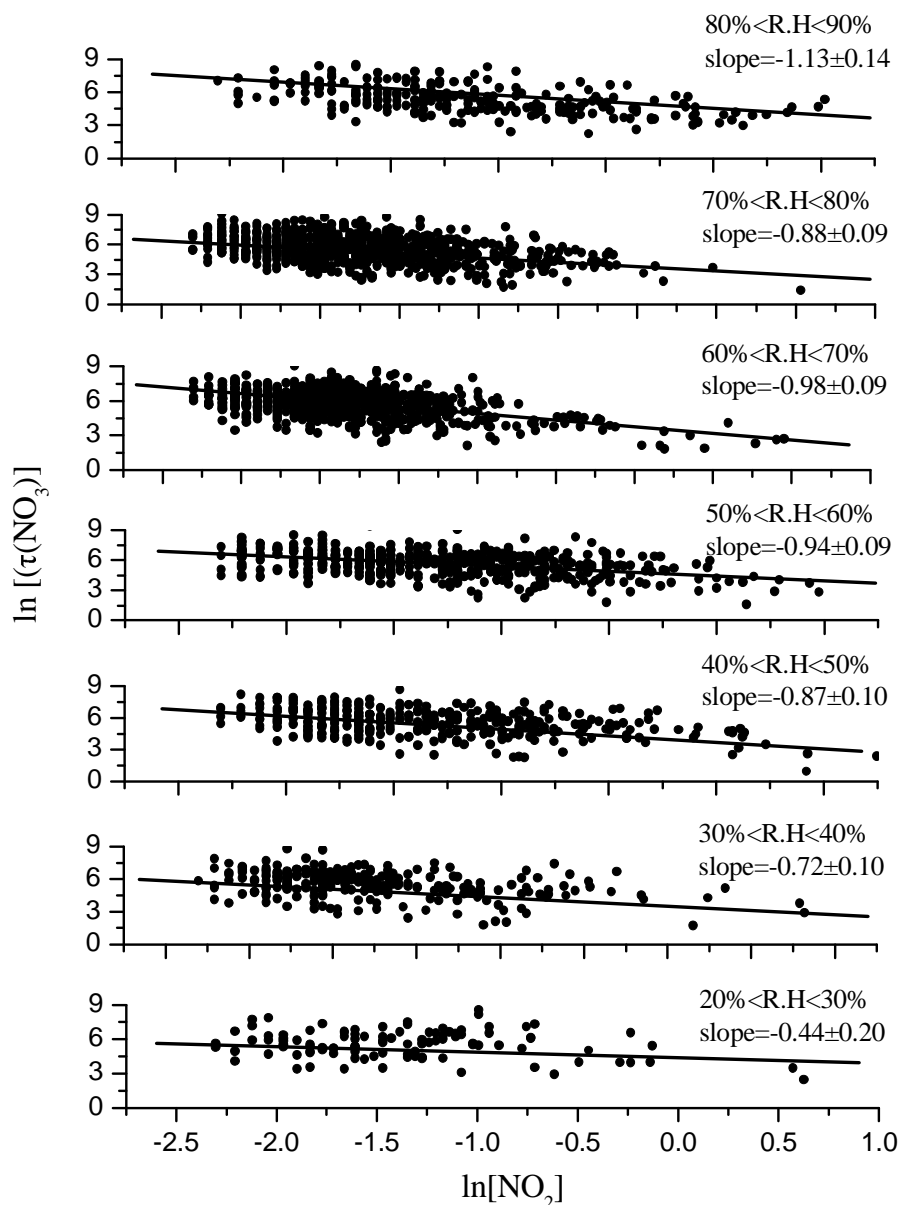


Fig. 8. Correlation of the logarithm of the lifetime of NO₃ radicals as deduced from observations and the logarithm of NO₂ mixing ratios at 7 different relative humidities ranges (from 20% to 90% every 10%). Slopes closer to -1 indicate higher involvement of the indirect losses of NO₃.

Then τ_{NO_3} is proportional to the inverse of the NO₂ mixing ratio (or $\ln(\tau_{\text{NO}_3}) = -\ln(k_{\text{eq}} f'_B [\text{NO}_2])$).

Below the production and loss rates of NO₃ will be examined in detail.

3.3.1 Production rate of the NO₃

Based on Eq. (2) and the temperature dependence of the reaction rate $k_{\text{NO}_2+\text{O}_3} = 1.4 \times 10^{-13} \cdot \exp\left[-\frac{2490}{T}\right] \text{ cm}^3 \text{ molecules}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (T

in K; Atkinson et al., 2004), under typical conditions in the Mediterranean area during summer ($[\text{NO}_2] = 0.5$ ppbv, and $[\text{O}_3] = 50$ ppbv, $T = 298$ K) the production rate of NO₃ (P_{NO_3}) equals 4.9×10^5 molecules $\text{cm}^{-3} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (or 72 pptv NO₃ per hour). Assuming dynamic equilibrium of NO₃ (i.e. that the production by Reaction (R1) equals the loss by photo-dissociation (Reactions (R2a) and (R2b)) and reaction with NO, for average summer daytime $[\text{NO}] = 0.05$ ppbv and $k_{\text{NO}_3+\text{NO}} = 1.8 \times 10^{-11} \cdot \exp\left[\frac{110}{T}\right] = 2.6 \times 10^{-11} \text{ cm}^3$

Table 2. Indicators of direct (a) and indirect (b) NO₃ losses and corresponding lifetimes (τ_A and τ_B , respectively). (a) Linear correlation of the NO₃ radicals mixing ratio with the NO₃ production rate (P_{NO_3}), and (b) linear correlation of the logarithm of the NO₃ lifetime (τ_{NO_3}) with the logarithm of the NO₂ mixing ratio. The linear slope of the direct sinks represents the NO₃ lifetime, τ_A , τ_B are calculated from the seasonal (or annual) NO₂ values and the corresponding logarithmic equation presented in the table.

NO₃ values are expressed in molecules cm⁻³, P_{NO_3} in molecules cm⁻³ s⁻¹, NO₂ in ppbv, τ_{NO_3} in s.

Period	[NO ₃]= $f(P_{\text{NO}_3})$ Slope (r^2)	τ_A (min)	$\ln[\tau_{\text{NO}_3}]=f(\ln[\text{NO}_2])$ $y=ax+b(r^2)$	τ_B (min)
Year	300*±41(0.41)	5.0	$y=(-1.0\pm0.4)x+(4.6\pm0.1)$ (0.93)	5.4
Winter	174±20 (0.08)	2.9	$y=(-1.5\pm0.7)x+(2.8\pm0.6)$ (0.78)	2.3
Spring	520±26(0.96)	8.6	$y=(-0.8\pm0.4)x+(5.1\pm0.3)$ (0.38)	7.5
Summer	203±33 (0.10)	3.4	$y=(-1.1\pm0.1)x+(4.9\pm0.1)$ (0.88)	6.1
Summer_1	321±41 (0.99)	5.4	$y=(-0.6\pm0.1)x+(5.5\pm0.1)$ (0.95)	7.1
Summer_2	106±29 (0.10)	1.8	$y=(-1.2\pm0.3)x+(4.9\pm0.1)$ (0.78)	6.7
Autumn	200±50 (0.25)	3.3	$y=(-1.4\pm0.4)x+(3.3\pm0.2)$ (0.92)	2.3
Autumn_1	649±152(0.75)	10.8	$y=(-0.8\pm0.1)x+(4.6\pm0.1)$ (0.97)	4.2
Autumn_2	128±40 (0.35)	2.1	$y=(-1.6\pm0.5)x+(3.7\pm0.2)$ (0.94)	4.4

*experimentally deduced see text.

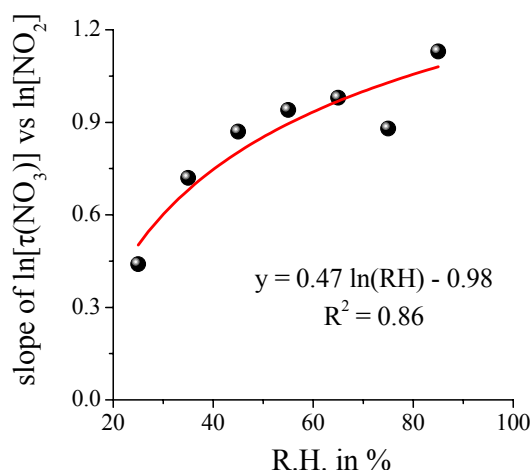


Fig. 9. Correlation of the slope of the regression of $\ln[\tau(\text{NO}_3)]$ versus the $\ln[\text{NO}_2]$ (data from Fig. 8) as a function of R.H.

molecules⁻¹ s⁻¹, the steady-state daytime concentration of NO₃ is calculated to be about 0.1 pptv. Maximum temperature differences of 40°C that have been observed between summer and winter can change P_{NO_3} by a factor of 3.5 (higher P_{NO_3} during summer) assuming that the levels of NO₂ and O₃ do not change significantly. However, the monthly mean temperatures differ by about 14°C between summer and winter (Vrekoussis et al., 2006). In addition, NO₂ and O₃ mixing ratios are higher during summer than during winter. Thus, the overall effect is that the nitrate radical production (P_{NO_3}) is about 4 times faster during summer than during winter. The annual mean P_{NO_3} derived from the monthly averages equals $(2.6\pm1.4)\times10^5$ molecules cm⁻³ s⁻¹ (Fig. 7). Note that P_{NO_3} calculated over the 5 min sampling time shows two orders of magnitude

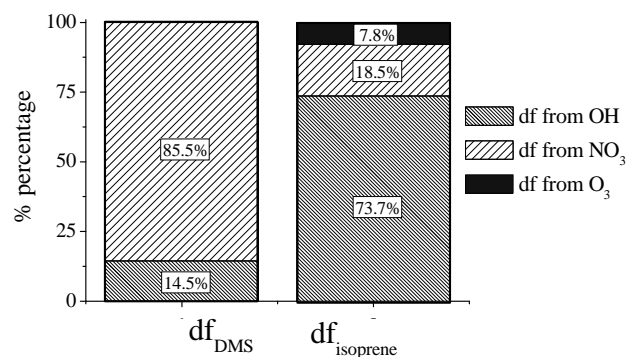


Fig. 10. Contribution of the 3 major oxidants, OH, NO₃ and O₃ to the annual mean degradation frequencies of DMS and isoprene for the studied area.

variability, ranging from 5.0×10^4 molecules cm⁻³ s⁻¹ to 5.5×10^6 molecules cm⁻³ s⁻¹.

3.3.2 Losses of NO₃

Direct removal of NO₃ concerns the NO₃ reactions mainly with VOC, including DMS naturally emitted by the ocean, and with peroxy (RO₂) radicals. The indirect removal of NO₃ occurs via N₂O₅ formation and subsequent heterogeneous reactions.

For the following analysis, to reduce the high scatter in the NO₃ data set (more than 15 000 measurements), NO₃ have been averaged per unit of P_{NO_3} equal to 1×10^5 molecules cm⁻³ s⁻¹ and τ_{NO_3} (equal to $1/f_{\text{NO}_3}$) has been averaged per unit of NO₂ equal to 100 pptv. The interpretation of all data, according to the above analysis for the direct sinks, leads to a linear regression

$$[\text{NO}_3]=300\cdot P_{\text{NO}_3}(r^2=0.41) \quad (8)$$

whereas the derived equation for the indirect sinks is:

$$\ln(\tau_{\text{NO}_3}) = -1.02 \ln[\text{NO}_2] + 4.6 (r^2=0.93) \quad (9)$$

where NO₃ values are expressed in molecules cm⁻³, P_{NO₃} in molecules cm⁻³ s⁻¹, NO₂ in ppbv, τ_{NO₃} in s.

These results indicate relatively strong indirect losses in this region during the 2-years period.

However there is also significant seasonal variability in the importance of the direct versus the indirect NO₃ loss pathways as indicated by the seasonally resolved correlations (Table 2). During winter the direct sinks of NO₃ radicals are of little importance contrary to the indirect ones whereas during spring the data reveal a strong linear correlation ($r^2=0.96$) between NO₃ radicals and their production rate indicating dominance of the direct losses of NO₃. Significant correlations between NO₃ radicals and their production rate have been also determined for summer and to a lesser extend for autumn.

Indeed, a closer examination of the dataset for these seasons reveals two sub-sets. The one sub-set corresponds to a higher linear regression slope and a significant correlation between P_{NO₃} and NO₃, whereas the second one does not present any significant correlation between P_{NO₃} and NO₃ (Table 2). The first one, with a high production rate P_{NO₃} and high NO₃ mixing ratios, corresponds to steady-state conditions in the area where the direct sinks of NO₃ are important, most probably due to increased VOC concentrations from biogenic emissions, indicating dominance of direct NO₃ losses. The second subset is linked to high P_{NO₃}, high NO₂ and low NO₃ mixing ratios. In addition, for this subset the slope of ln(τ_{NO₃}) versus ln[NO₂] is significantly more negative than the respective of the subset one, thus, suggesting indirect sinks for the NO₃ radicals. These slopes have to be viewed with caution since due to the large variability of the observations the slopes are associated with high uncertainties that can generate absolute values higher than unity.

The above analysis is coherent with observations of biogenic organic compounds in the area that are reactive against NO₃ radical. These observations indicate enhanced levels of isoprene during spring and summer (Liakakou et al., 2007) and of marine dimethylsulfide (DMS) from spring to autumn (Kouvarakis and Mihalopoulos, 2002). However, lack of simultaneous measurements of NO₃ radicals and biogenic organic compounds prohibits any deeper analysis of our data.

To further investigate the importance of the heterogeneous chemistry in NO₃ removal via the reactions of N₂O₅, the methodology applied by Heintz et al. (1996) has been followed. The logarithmic correlation between the NO₃ lifetime and the NO₂ concentration is considered for 7 different ranges of relative humidity from 20 to 90% every 10% (Fig. 8). It is found that the slope approaches the “ideal” value of -1 at high relative humidity. Indeed the slope of ln[τ(NO₃)] vs ln[NO₂] exhibits a nice logarithmic relationship with RH (Fig. 9; R²=0.856, N=7) that further supports

the existence of indirect sinks for NO₃ that are strongly related to the presence of water vapour in the atmosphere. This clearly indicates the increasing importance of N₂O₅ hydrolysis with increasing RH and thus water vapour in the atmosphere.

3.4 Implications of the observations

Based on our observations, during nighttime the annual median steady-state NO₃ lifetime is estimated to be about 5 min and presents large temporal variability (up to a factor of 5) shown in Table 2.

Taking into account the observed levels of NO₃ radicals, several VOC species are subject to important nighttime chemistry initiated by NO₃, i.e. of similar relevance as daytime chemistry driven by OH radicals (Vrekoussis et al., 2004). Indeed, for the studied area, based on the observed NO₃ levels and the OH radicals observed during summer 2001 (Berresheim et al., 2003) and calculated for the other seasons (Vrekoussis et al., 2006), the NO₃ initiated nighttime VOC oxidation appears to be more important than the daytime oxidation by OH radicals for a number of VOCs, particularly for monoterpenes and DMS. For these two volatile organic compounds of biogenic origin, isoprene and dimethylsulfide that have been measured in the area (Liakakou et al., 2007; Kouvarakis and Mihalopoulos, 2002), the degradation frequencies have been calculated based on the observed seasonally averaged NO₃, O₃ and temperature levels and the modelled OH for the area (Vrekoussis et al., 2006). The derived annual mean degradation frequencies for the area (Fig. 10) indicate that NO₃ radicals are almost 6 times more efficient than OH radicals in destroying DMS. For isoprene degradation, OH radicals are almost 4 times more efficient than NO₃ and 10 times more efficient than O₃ that contributes by about 8% to the degradation frequency of isoprene on an annual basis. In turn, our model calculations (Vrekoussis et al., 2006; Liakakou et al., 2007) indicate that in the area in the marine boundary layer DMS and isoprene contribute by about 5% and 20%, respectively, to the annual mean NO₃ degradation frequency during night. Thus, VOC oxidation can lower NO₃ levels and shorten NO₃ lifetime. These results agree with recent observations of a positive NO₃ radical vertical gradient in the mid-latitude coastal marine boundary layer during summer (Saiz-Lopez et al., 2006). These authors have explained their observations by a potentially efficient removal of NO₃ radicals by DMS.

In addition, the NO₃ initiated oxidation of VOCs contributes to the nighttime formation of OH and peroxy radicals (Platt et al., 1990; Vrekoussis et al., 2007¹). Finally, our results underscore that nighttime chemistry initiated by NO₃

¹Vrekoussis, M., Myriokefalitakis, S., Mihalopoulos, N., Kanakidou, M., et al.: Nighttime occurrence of peroxy radicals in the anthropogenically influenced marine boundary layer, in preparation, 2007.

radicals is as important as daytime chemistry for the formation of nutrient, nitrate as discussed in detail by Vrekoussis et al. (2006).

4 Conclusions

This paper presents the first long-term NO₃ radical observations performed by a DOAS instrument in the marine boundary layer in the eastern Mediterranean region for a two-year period. The observed nighttime NO₃ levels vary between the detection limit of the instrument (about 1.2 pptv) and 139 pptv with seasonal averages that have a maximum in summer (5.6 ± 1.2 pptv) and a minimum in winter (1.2 ± 1.2 pptv); and an annual mean value of 4.2 ± 2.3 pptv.

Single and multiple component regression analyses on the large number of simultaneous observations demonstrate temperature (positive correlation) and relative humidity (negative correlation) as the most important factors controlling NO₃ levels, and to a lesser extent O₃. However, a significant part of NO₃ and temperature covariance is linked to their seasonal variation.

Further data analysis points to the indirect loss of NO₃ via conversion to N₂O₅, followed by heterogeneous reactions as the major loss process for NO₃ year-around. Direct losses of NO₃ are shown to be important in spring and some summer and autumn periods with high biogenic emissions. Our results also indicate that NO₃ radicals can be important for nighttime VOC oxidation, contributing to the nighttime formation of peroxy radicals, nitric acid and particulate nitrate and in turn biogenic VOC significantly contribute to the NO₃ degradation frequency during night.

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