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The Role of the Cyprus Issue in the Greek-Soviet Relations (1956—1960)

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Abstract. The article examines the role of the Cyprus issue in the bilateral relations between Greece and the USSR in 1956—1960. It is based on primal archival research realised at the Constantine Karamanlis Archive (AKK) and at the Diplomatic and Historical Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry (DIAYE) in Athens. The analysis of the recently declassified documents relate to the events which took place in 1954, when the Soviet Union supported the Greek claims for self-determination of the Cypriot people in the United Nations on the basis of the anti-colonial principles. This contributed to the impressive increase in trade between Greece and the USSR, especially after the unofficial visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister D.T. Shepilov to Athens in 1956. Against the backdrop of the deterioration of the international situation in 1957, Kremlin heavily criticized NATO's decision to deploy the US Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) in Europe and applied diplomatic pressures to NATO member-states including Greece. The shift from tensions to a peaceful offensive strategy, characteristic of the Soviet diplomacy towards Greece, proved to be a double-edged sword for Moscow in the long term. The author concludes that both countries exploited the Cyprus issue for their benefit. Thus, Moscow managed to take advantage of the Greek discontent with the NATO allies as a means of increasing its own prestige in the region, while the Greek governments capitalized on the Soviet tactics in order to increase its political leverage in confronting NATO on Cyprus.

Key words: the Cyprus issue, Greece, the Soviet Union, Greek-Soviet relations, self-determination, Cold War, United Nations General Assembly, NATO

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Кипрский вопрос в отношениях между Грецией и Советским Союзом (1956—1960 гг.)

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Аннотация. Анализируется роль кипрского вопроса в двусторонних отношениях Греции и СССР в 1956—1960 гг. Работа выполнена на основе исследований, проведенных в архиве Константиноса Караманлиса (АКК) и Дипломатическом и историческом архиве Министерства иностранных дел Греции

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(DIAYE) в Афинах. Анализ недавно рассекреченных документов относится к событиям 1954 г., когда Советский Союз поддержал притязания Греции на самоопределение кипрского народа в ООН на основе антиколониальных принципов. За этим последовал существенный рост объемов торговли между Грецией и СССР, особенно по итогам неофициального визита министра иностранных дел СССР Д.Т. Шепилова в Афины в 1956 г. На фоне обострения международной обстановки в 1957 г. Кремль выступил с критикой решения НАТО по размещению американских баллистических ракет средней дальности на подводных лодках (БРПЛ) на территории Европы, пытаясь оказать дипломатическое давление на страны — члены НАТО, включая Грецию. Характерные для советской дипломатии в отношении Греции переходы от напряженности к мирной наступательной стратегии в долгосрочной перспективе привели к весьма неоднозначным результатам. Автор приходит к выводу, что обе страны использовали кипрский вопрос в собственных интересах: Москве удалось воспользоваться недовольством Греции своими союзниками по НАТО как средством повышения собственного престижа в регионе, в то время как греческое правительство взяло на вооружение советскую тактику для усиления политических рычагов в противостоянии НАТО по Кипру.

Ключевые слова: кипрский вопрос, Греция, Советский Союз, греко-советские отношения, самоопределение, холодная война, Генеральная Ассамблея ООН, НАТО

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Introduction

The role of the Cyprus issue in the bilateral Greek-Soviet relations remains an under-researched topic of the Cold War history. Greece, a small country who had had a bitter experience of a recent civil war between the Greek government army and the Democratic Army of Greece (the military branch of the Communist Party of Greece from 1946 to 1949), partially managed to surpass its fears and insecurities in order to restore the diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1953, after J.V. Stalin's death, during a period of a vehement anti-communism [Sfikas 2001]. On the other hand, the USSR aimed to strengthen the economic and trade relations with Greece in order to improve its position in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Cyprus issue could help to dissolve the mutual mistrust since both countries ultimately agreed on this delicate matter. The Greek claims in favour of Cyprus' independence were supported by the USSR, driven by its anti-imperialist and anti-colonial principles against Great Britain, one of its main rivals in the region. This created strong pro-Soviet feelings in the Greek population at a time when its NATO allies opposed the Greek claims in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) [Xydis 1967].

The starting point for our research is 1956, when a seasoned politician Constantine Karamanlis and his party — the National Radical

Union (ERE) won the elections. The Karamanlis' governments of 1956—1963 had a great impact on numerous aspects of Greece's political life. Karamanlis took pains regarding Greek foreign policy and with the assistance of his Foreign Minister Evangelos Averoff-Tossizza made long-term decisions, mainly focusing on the independence of Cyprus and Greece's membership in the European community [Hatzivassiliou 2006]. Our analysis ends in 1960, the year when Cyprus finally received its long-awaited independence after the 1959 Zürich and London agreements. While historical research has comprehensively analyzed the Cyprus issue in the relations between Greece, Great Britain and the United States [Hatzivassiliou 1991; Johnson 2000; Ioannides 2014] relatively fewer works have appeared on its interaction with other major powers of the Cold War, the Soviet Union [Ulunyan 2001].

The author argues that the Cyprus issue did not play a primary role in the Greek-Soviet relations, as Moscow did not perceive it as a bilateral matter, both sides managed to exploit the situation in their favour to a certain degree: the Greek government treated it as a means of pressure on NATO, and the Soviet Union tried to improve its political position in the Eastern Mediterranean. Kremlin policy-makers had accurately predicted that Cyprus would have turned into an 'apple of discord' between NATO

member-states [Tasoulas 2020b]. Cyprus remained a place of a great interest, as it was stated by N.S. Khrushchev during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956.

The research was carried out thanks to the use of archived data from the Historical and Diplomatic Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry (DIAYE) and the Constantine Karamanlis Foundation (AKK) in Athens. The published collection of the Karamanlis archives provided the research with supplementary explanatory data.

The Post-war Situation in Cyprus and the Soviet Support in the United Nations

The ideology of post-war politics in Cyprus was formed by three major political actors: the Progressive Party of Working People of Cyprus (AKEL) [Philippou 2010], the Church of Cyprus and the right-wing Cypriot National Party (KEC). The conservative forces' main objective was the *Enosis* (unification) of the island with Greece. In 1950, Makarios III (who became the first President of the independent Republic of Cyprus in 1960) was elected Archbishop of Cyprus and at the same time a pan-Cypriot referendum showed that over 95 % of Greek Cypriots were in favour of *Enosis*. KEC was soon replaced by the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA), which was a highly politicized movement of the Greek Cypriots. This organization, headed by colonel Georgios Grivas, quickly turned into a spontaneous popular movement [French 2015].

Nationalism became a decisive factor in Cyprus and extensively influenced the interaction and cooperation of the island's politicians with the British colonial authorities [Alecou 2016]. Meanwhile Makarios believed that the Cyprus issue could be resolved only if Cyprus and Greece put serious pressure on Great Britain. Nevertheless, EOKA decided to carry out an armed struggle. It officially started on April 1, 1955, after the diplomatic failures in the United Nations regarding the Cyprus issue. AKEL passionately opposed an armed struggle and expressed its support for a peaceful mass

political fight that would involve all Cypriots (Greeks and Turks). The EOKA armed movement was a radical method of establishing *Enosis*; it lacked any anti-colonial character and sometimes took the form of an anti-Communist crusade. By 1957, the EOKA armed struggle was clearly at an impasse. Makarios decided to change his goals and seek independence instead of *Enosis*. This was made public in September 1958 [Katsourides 2014].

After the end of the Greek civil war (the first proxy war of the Cold War era) diplomatic relations between Greece and the USSR were normalized after Stalin's death in 1953 [Kalinin 2018]. The first step was taken on July 28, 1953 with the signing of the Greek-Soviet trade agreement [Hatzivassiliou 1992].

Two months later, on September 17, 1953 (after the Greek civil war) the first Soviet Ambassador M.G. Sergeev arrived in Greece. The Soviet Foreign Ministry aimed at expanding trade and cultural cooperation [Kalinin 2017] and the Kremlin's decision to support the Greek claims in the UNGA had considerably helped towards this direction. It is noteworthy that the Greek Embassy in Moscow informed the Greek MFA that in August 1954 the Soviet newspaper "Krasnaya Zvezda" (*Red Star*), which was the official newspaper of the Soviet Ministry of Defence, had criticized Great Britain for its refusal to give independence to the Cypriots. According to the Soviet newspaper, the British plans to maintain Cyprus as a strategic military base and to transfer its troops there from the Suez Canal was the main reason for the British intransigence¹.

M.G. Sergeev met with Makarios in Athens and gave him guarantees of the Soviet support in the United Nations in favour of self-determination [Antoniou 2015: 221]. In September 1954 during the 9th session of the UNGA Greece asked for the registration of the Cyprus issue on the agenda. The USSR and the members of the Cominform voted in favour of the registration, while Greece's allies in NATO

¹ Diplomatic and Historical Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry (DIAYE). 1954/25/4. Charge d'affaires of Greece to the USSR G.D. Kaloudis to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. August 3, 1954.

(Great Britain, France) voted against it and the USA abstained. On December 18, 1954, in a letter sent by Makarios to the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, the Archbishop officially thanked the Soviet Union for its support during the discussions in the UN General Assembly [Tasoulas 2020a: 48].

At its 10th session on September 23, 1955 the UNGA voted against the inscription of the item on the agenda. The Soviet Union anew supported the Greek request [Xydis 1967]. The main Soviet reason behind the support was the elimination of the declining British influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, the Soviet Union tried to capitalize on the NATO members' differences over the Cyprus issue [Stergiou 2007]. Until the end of 1955 Moscow sought to extend its influence in Greece and fight Washington's propaganda and for this reason the Soviet Foreign Ministry sought to identify potential British-American contradictions in Greece in order to use them for proper interests [Kalinin 2017].

In other words, the positions of the USSR and Greece on the Cyprus issue were similar, although their goals did not coincide. Consequently, Greek diplomacy's initiatives at the UN were supported by the Soviet Union in order to exploit the Greek dissatisfaction with Great Britain. The Cyprus question seemed promising indeed, as it not only worsened Greece's relations with Great Britain and the United States but also divided Greece and Turkey. The Soviet tactics were aimed at the strengthening of trade and economic relations with Greece, while the leftist powers in Greece and especially the United Democratic Left Party (EDA) would expand their influence among the Greek electorate.

The Cyprus Issue during the Visit of Dmitri Shepilov in Athens in 1956

On June 28, 1956, the Soviet Foreign Minister D.T. Shepilov arrived in Athens for an unofficial visit. The Greek government agreed to accept Shepilov considering that Greece had normalized its diplomatic relations with the USSR [Kalinin 2017: 108]. It understood the importance of Shepilov's visit in connection with the Middle East agenda and the Cyprus issue.

The note by the Greek Foreign Minister Averoff to the Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis with his remarks on the Greek-Soviet relations precisely reflected the Greek intentions. Averoff underlined to Karamanlis that Shepilov's visit coincided with Khrushchev's reforms in his country. Greece, being a small country in a neuralgic geographical location, could not ignore the fact that the USSR was evolving rapidly in both economic and military terms. This was creating potential opportunities for Greece, especially in the economic field. However, taking into consideration that the Soviet foreign policy aims did not change drastically, Greece certainly should have sought to develop its relations with the Soviet Union, but at the same time to strengthen even more its allied ties².

Upon his arrival, Shepilov had long conversations with Averoff, emphasizing the historical bonds of the two countries and underlining that the purpose of his visit was to discuss the measures to be taken for the development of the Greek-Soviet relations. He stressed that the USSR was building its relations with Greece based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect for integrity, and the policy of non-interference. According to Shepilov, regardless of the existing political and ideological differences, his country did not desire to deliberately complicate relations between Greece and its allies, regardless of its principle opposition to NATO. In this framework, the development of friendly relations between the two peoples was prioritized. The Soviet government desired further development of bilateral trade and cultural ties, trying to eliminate distrust and achieve mutual understanding and sincerity. Averoff acknowledged the rise in the bilateral relations, expressing his appreciation for the Soviet Union's support on both occasions when the Cyprus issue came to the UNGA. He admitted that it was an excellent example of the goodwill from the Soviet side³.

² Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation, K. Karamanlis Archive (AKK). 1956/2A/329. Averoff to Karamanlis. June 25, 1956.

³ DIAYE. 1956/26/4. Conversations between the Soviet Foreign Minister Shepilov and the Greek Foreign Minister Averoff. June 28, 1956.

The next day Shepilov had a meeting with both — Karamanlis and Averoff. Shepilov presented an ambitious economic proposal to Karamanlis. The discussion also covered the issues regarding relations between Greece and its northern neighbours [Hatzivassiliou 1992]. Karamanlis and Averoff expressed their gratitude anew to Shepilov for his country's support in the UN regarding the Cyprus question and wished that the USSR would continue to assist the Greek claims, which were based on the principles of self-determination. However, the Soviet Minister after making a short remark about the anti-colonial principles of the Soviet Union directed the attention of his interlocutors to the issues of economic character.

During the private talks it was agreed not to publish a joint statement since the visit was unofficial, but instead to make separate press conferences. Regarding the Cyprus issue, Shepilov clarified that if asked he would take a clear stance in favour of self-determination, as the USSR strongly opposed the establishment of British military bases on the island. Averoff replied that he was only fighting for self-determination of the Cypriot people and not for British schemes. Still, he stressed to Shepilov that no international organization could force Great Britain to completely surrender its rights on the island. Thus, if the British managed to maintain just one millimetre of land, they were responsible for its use. Averoff received Shepilov's pragmatic answer that the USSR strongly opposed any scenario that included the installation of British military bases on the island⁴.

In brief, Shepilov's visit took place when both countries mostly sought expansion of economic relations, but Athens seemed reluctant to expand political cooperation with Moscow. It became obvious that the Soviet policy-makers were not addressing the Cyprus issue as a matter of the Greek-Soviet agenda. Shepilov once again perspicuously declared his country's positions to Karamanlis, as previously expressed during the 9th and 10th sessions of the UNGA. However,

⁴ DIAYE. 1956/26/4. Conversations between the head of the government Mr. Karamanlis and the Soviet Foreign Minister Mr. Shepilov. June 28, 1956.

Shepilov stressed that any other matter outside the frame of the principle of self-determination of peoples would not be supported by Moscow. Shepilov's logic was that the Soviet government could never possibly accept any settlement that would include the installation of a British military base on the island. Athens did not support this scenario. But it was becoming clear that the British were reluctant to give independence to the Cypriots since the geopolitical role of the island had been upgraded after the loss of the Suez Canal in 1956.

Exploiting the Situation: Greek Pressures on NATO

Shortly before February's 1957 UN debate on Cyprus (11th session) the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR V.V. Kuznetsov mentioned in his talk with Averoff that the Soviet bloc's votes would depend on the progress of Greek-Bulgarian and Greek-Albanian relations. Averoff foresaw these particular Soviet tactics and interestingly enough he was prepared to sign a relevant agreement with Albania⁵.

Nevertheless, Karamanlis rejected this idea and instructed Averoff to elucidate to Kuznetsov that a favourable Soviet vote on Cyprus would create a positive political environment in Greece's relations with these countries⁶.

Despite the rejection of the Soviet proposal, in December 1957 at the 12th session of the UNGA the USSR opposed Great Britain, arguing that its policy turned Cyprus to a military base against the Arabs [Xydis 1967: 3]. These developments were indicative of the role of the Cyprus issue in the Greek-Soviet relations. Moreover, it was a time when the Karamanlis government could not agree with the United States on self-determination of the Cypriot people. As recent literature demonstrated [Hatzivassiliou 2006], seeing the deadlock

⁵ АКК. 1957/98А/4. Telegram of the permanent representative of Greece to the UN Christos Xanthopoulos-Palamas to Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. January 29, 1957.

⁶ АКК. 1957/98А/4. Telegram of the minister for the Prime Minister's Office Constantinos Tsatsos to Averoff. January 31, 1957.

regarding Cyprus the US feared that Greece's pro-Western course might be challenged, if the Greeks decided to strengthen even more their relations with the USSR. Certainly Athens never considered abandoning its pro-European course, but the Soviet policy towards the Cyprus issue and the Soviet counterproposal for their support had created strong insecurities to Athens regarding relations with its allies.

At the same time the international political climate has become more complex. The United States' proposal at the NATO's 1957 Paris summit to install US Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) on the European territory triggered a strong Soviet reaction [Kourkouvelas 2012].

On December 12, 1957, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union N.A. Bulganin sent a letter to Karamanlis, in which he criticized the NATO's decision underling that the installation of such weapons in Greece, a small country with limited territorial space, could have devastating consequences, if these weapons were ever used. Naturally, this comment was received as intimidation, despite the fact that Bulganin requested Karamanlis not to take this statement as a threat⁷. In his second letter dated January 8, 1958 Bulganin drew attention of Karamanlis among others to the German issue and to historical bonds between the Greek and the Russian people that had lasted more than one thousand years. Nonetheless, he could not avoid making judgments regarding the social forces of Greece, which by the time were rejecting the possibility of the installation of any American military base on the Greek soil⁸.

This kind of comments, since they appeared during an intense pre-campaign election period, dissatisfied Athens, now feeling that the USSR was interfering in the internal affairs of Greece. Karamanlis in his reply strongly disagreed with Bulganin's arguments and underlined the peaceful intentions of Greece. Unexpectedly, Karamanlis made a remark regarding Bulganin's comment, who obviously had in mind the

situation in Germany, about the absolute necessity to preserve the existing territorial status quo. Karamanlis made a special mention that he supported the Soviet viewpoint that for ensuring peace everyone should unconditionally respect the current international status and condemn any attempt to change the status quo or the existing borders by military actions. Greece, Karamanlis continued, was a staunch supporter of the principle of self-determination of peoples⁹.

Karamanlis must have felt that as a means to counter some of the Soviet pressures the recent progress in the bilateral relations between Greece and the USSR had to be reconfirmed even indirectly, using a psychological argument. That is to say, on the one hand, Bulganin could effectively apply pressure to block a possible installation of IRBMs in Greece; on the other hand, Karamanlis emphasized the defensive attitude of Greece and presented his country as a champion of the rights of the peoples as it was internationally proven by the Greek diplomacy at the UNGA regarding the Cyprus issue. This means that Karamanlis extremely cautiously connected the situation in Cyprus with the one in Germany in order to strongly point out to the principles of self-determination, which the Greek diplomacy used to secure the Soviet support in the United Nations.

In May 1958, Khrushchev reconfirmed the Soviet support regarding the Cyprus issue by publicly stating in the Greek newspaper "To Vima" that his country was against the remnants of the colonization system and that the Cypriots had the right to independently control their own future. At the same time, he severely criticised NATO as an aggressive mechanism that was contributing to the division of the island¹⁰.

In August 1958, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan officially visited Greece to promote the so called Macmillan Plan on the

⁹ Konstantinos Karamanlis: *Archeio: gegonota kai keimena* [Konstantinos Karamanlis: *Archive: Facts and Texts*] / ed. by C. Svolopoulos. Vol. II. Athens, 1993. P. 486—498.

¹⁰ Konstantinos Karamanlis: *Archeio: gegonota kai keimena* [Konstantinos Karamanlis: *Archive: Facts and Texts*] / ed. by C. Svolopoulos. Vol. III. Athens, 1993. P. 120—121.

⁷ AKK. 5A/2232. Bulganin to Karamanlis. December 12, 1957.

⁸ AKK. 5A/2217. Bulganin to Karamanlis. January 8, 1958.

Cyprus issue. Macmillan had forwarded his plan to Karamanlis already from June. Karamanlis strongly opposed it and even stated to the US Ambassador in Athens James W. Riddleberger that Greece's position in NATO could have been challenged, if the British had continued to promote it. Eventually, Greece, Turkey and Archbishop Makarios rejected the Macmillan Plan¹¹.

It is noteworthy that on 9 August 1958, a day when Karamanlis had several meetings in Athens not only with Macmillan but also with the American Deputy under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Murphy, the Soviet ambassador Sergeev delivered a letter by N.S. Khrushchev addressed to Karamanlis. Khrushchev referred extensively to the situation in the Middle East and called Karamanlis to support the Soviet positions in the UN, which opposed the actions of the United States and Great Britain against Jordan and Lebanon. According to Khrushchev, the armed intervention violated the norms of international law and UN Charter and profoundly hindered the legitimate right of the peoples to self-determination¹².

Once again, the right of self-determination of the peoples was used as a means to apply diplomatic pressure. Now, Khrushchev was the one to connect the Cyprus issue with another international problem, namely Jordan and Lebanon, in an attempt to exploit the situation while using a similar psychological argument like Karamanlis did. In other words, Khrushchev argued that the peace-loving Greece could get benefits by siding with the USSR in the United Nations who had already supported the Greek claims. Greece was facing a serious security issue, and at the same time the quality of relations with its allies were at their lowest level. Concurrently, by accepting the Soviet proposal Greece could strengthen its position in the Eastern Mediterranean and increase its

international prestige, especially taking into consideration that relations between Athens and the Arab states were at a decent level.

Reacting swiftly, Karamanlis took advantage of Khrushchev's proposal and applied counter pressure on NATO. Karamanlis made it clear to Macmillan that the Soviets had serious ambitions in Cyprus, and in order to realize them they were trying to use the Greek national aspirations on the island. Furthermore, the Greek Prime Minister expressed to Murphy his frustration regarding the British and Turkish intransigence on the Cyprus issue and complained about the treatment his country received by the Alliance. He also stressed that developments around Cyprus contributed to the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East, something that the Soviet Union was very eager to exploit¹³.

Simply put, Karamanlis utilized the tactics of the Soviet Union on the Cyprus issue in order to apply pressure on NATO. The American passive attitude regarding the Cyprus issue provided the Soviet Union with an excellent opportunity to affect the Greek political life since it managed to influence the electorate to vote for EDA in the national elections, which received almost 25 % of the vote, thus becoming the major opposition force in Greece. At the same time, the Prime Minister facing a dead-end around Cyprus had to estimate how to effectively use the Greek limited diplomatic arsenal in order to reach a settlement that would give Cyprus independence.

During the debate at the 13th session in the UNGA (February 28 — March 14, 1959), the representative of the USSR A.A. Sobolev severely criticized the Macmillan Plan and the violent approach of British authorities in Cyprus. He also stressed that the Cyprus issue could not be resolved in the framework of NATO and criticized the British authorities that were trying to create a pretext to maintain their dominance on the island by sowing hostilities between the

¹¹ Konstantinos Karamanlis: Archeio: gegonota kai keimena [Konstantinos Karamanlis: Archive: Facts and Texts] / ed. by C. Svolopoulos. Vol. III. Athens, 1993. P. 139.

¹² АКК. 1958/5А/2196. Khrushchev to Karamanlis. August 8, 1958.

¹³ Konstantinos Karamanlis: Archeio: gegonota kai keimena [Konstantinos Karamanlis: Archive: Facts and Texts] / ed. by C. Svolopoulos. Vol. III. Athens, 1993. P. 207.

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots [Tasoulas 2020a: 50].

The Cyprus issue had been finally settled outside the UN framework by the Zürich and London Agreements of 11 and 19 February 1959. Cyprus was accordingly recognized as an independent country on August 16, 1960 and the Soviet government immediately welcomed the declaration of independence of Cyprus as a defeat of British imperialism. However, Kremlin severely criticized the installation of two large British military bases on the island and the fact that the guarantor powers of the Republic of Cyprus (Greece, Turkey and Britain) retained the right to intervene in the internal affairs of the new state [Gromyko, Ponomarev 1986: 275].

Conclusion

The Cyprus issue in the bilateral relations between the Soviet Union and Greece during the period 1956—1960 did not play a primary role, however many times directly, or even indirectly, was exploited by both sides in terms of diplomatic pressures, and was similarly directed on different targets. The 1956 first important step towards détente proved to be short-lived, as the deterioration of the political environment after 1957 led the Kremlin's policymakers to apply very specific tactics to Greece that were received by Athens as pressure and interference in the political affairs. Nevertheless, during the period 1953—1959 the Cyprus issue was brought to the UNGA five times and the Soviet Union

supported the Greek claims of self-determination of the people of Cyprus, something that Athens evaluated positively. At the same time, the Soviet Union tried to exploit the already existing severe crisis that had erupted inside NATO due to the Cyprus question, in an attempt to deepen the rift in the relations between Greece, Great Britain and Turkey. But, these tactics were not fruitful since the rift was bridged after the London and Zürich agreements of 1959.

Likewise, the Greek governments tried to exploit the Soviet tactics on the Cyprus issue, as they were expressed by N.A. Bulganin and N.S. Khrushchev in their letters to Karamanlis, in order to re-direct them as a means of pressure on NATO, especially during the diplomatic processes regarding the Macmillan Plan. One might assume that the Soviet tactics proved to be a double-edged sword for Kremlin.

On the one hand, the Cyprus issue was indeed the starting point towards the improvement of bilateral relations with Athens and provided political support to EDA.

On the other hand, it brought to the surface vehement anti-communism (which came also as an aftermath of the civil war) and this resulted to the reluctance of the Greek policy-makers towards détente with the Soviet bloc.

In any case, the USSR was one of the first countries that recognized the new Republic of Cyprus and very quickly established official diplomatic relations, thus opening a new page in the history of the island.

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