*Waves Across the Mediterranean*

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## *Introduction*

A bout of typhoid might have impacted his ability to manage the Greek Civil War more effectively, but on 3 September 1949 King Paul addressed the country. He assured those listening that he had closely followed the struggle, which had been imposed by 'alien invaders and internal enemies'.[1] The aliens, to which he was referring, were none other than the *Kommounistiko Komma Elladas* (Communist Party of Greece; hereafter KKE). In the eyes of the King and the post-war Greek Government, the Party had betrayed the nation. And it was their act of treachery, that precipitated the establishment of what has been termed a 'regime of repression and exclusion', that endured long after the climax of the Greek Civil War.[2] A similar ordeal befell the *Partido Comunista de España* (Communist Party of Spain; hereafter PCE) after the Spanish Civil War. Francisco Franco entered Madrid on 28 March 1939, drawing to a close a three-year long Civil War. To make ends of his declaration that the 'war was over', he cultivated an image of the defeated as foreign and

[1] Hellenic Publishing Company, *The Nation's Battle: The Struggle of the Greek Nation against Communism till 29th August 1949* (1952).
[2] Nikos Christodoulakis, 'Conflict Dynamics and Costs in the Greek Civil War 1946–1949', *Defence and Peace Economics*, 27.5 (2016), pp. 688–717 (p. 708), doi:10.1080/10242694.2014.1000010; Neni Panourgia, *Dangerous Citizens: The Greek Left and the Terror of the State* (Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 116.

anti-Spain. In so doing, Franco prolonged a state of siege mentality that endured up until his death on 20 November 1975.[3]

According to Konstantinos Tsoukalas, the way repression was administered in Greece and Spain transcended politics.[4] Thus, the former Resistance faced uncertain futures. With regard to the Greek refugee community, neither could they criticise their leadership, nor mention a comrades failings, since this might be deemed as harming the movement.[5] Many tried to hang onto a 'unified image of themselves' and an 'idealised memory'.[6] Fuelling this romanticised memory, was the KKE decision to rekindle the internationalist antifascist discourse of the 1930s. This insight was intimately connected to the influence that volunteering in the International Brigades exerted on a faction within the KKE, but also on the rank-and-file who were desperately searching for a glimmer of hope amidst their bleak circumstances.

Little is known about how the KKE and the PCE navigated their displacement to the Soviet Union. This paper fills the historiographical lacuna. Part I charts the genesis of their relationship and the Spanish Civil War. When the conflict broke out, the KKE answered the Comintern call to send a detachment of members to fight with the International Brigades. For those who managed to bypass the laws inhibiting them from doing so, the experience proved transformatory. Not only had their baptism of fire in Spain transformed them on a personal level, it also planted the seed of their hypercriticism of KKE policy, which reared its head during the Greek Civil War and the subsequent displacement to the Soviet Union. For the rank-and-file, their experiences diverged

[3] 'Parte oficial Guerra', *ABC*, 2 April 1939; Sandie Holguín, 'How Did the Spanish Civil War End?… Not So Well', *The American Historical Review*, 120.5 (2015), pp. 1767–83 (p. 1769), doi:10.1093/ahr/120.5.1767.
[4] Konstantinos Tsoukalas, *The Greek Tragedy* (Penguin, 1969), p. 114.
[5] Tassoula Vervenioti, 'Left-Wing Women between Politics and Family', in *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943–1960*, ed. by Mark Mazower (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 106.
[6] Ibid., p. 106.

sharply from those of their leaders. As historian Anastasia Koukouna observes, a notable distinction existed between the predominantly rural and uneducated rank-and-file, and the bilingual, affluent, prosperous, and intellectual leadership.[7] This disparity, historian D. George Kousoulas concludes, erected a formidable barrier of differing motives between the ordinary fighters and their leaders.[8]

It is the aforementioned dialectic between the romanticised memory of the Spanish Civil War, cherished by a few, and the reality of the present, that forms the crux of this paper. Lacking the infrastructure to influence public opinion domestically and internationally, the KKE and the PCE resorted to radio and print propaganda to inform the world about their plight. Their adoption of an internationalist antifascist discourse was in stark contrast to Soviet policy, which advocated for European communist parties to follow a more conciliatory approach in the aftermath of the Second World War. An examination of their radio stations, therefore, illuminates the myriad internal contradictions that plagued the two communist parties after the Greek Civil War.

## *A Relationship Forged in Spain*

Greece was facing its own crisis when the Spanish Civil War erupted in July 1936. A year earlier, the country had experienced a failed coup to avert the restoration of the monarchy, and on the shopfloor industrial action was on the rise. Strikes were not limited to Athens and Thessaloniki; they spread to places like Piraeus on 21 July 1936, and Lafpio and Serres on 30 July 1936. Bert

[7] Anastasia Koukouna, 'Free Greece, 1947–1949: A Communist State in the Greek Countryside during the Civil War?' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Lausanne, 2021), p. 294.
[8] D. George Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat: The Story of the Greek Communist Party* (Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 251.

Birtles, who was present in Athens at the time, captured the Spanish air that permeated the Greek shopfloor, noting how slogans such as 'down with Metaxas, down with Fascists, long life the fight of all the workers, Hispania' resonated through the streets.[9] To halt this downward spiral, King George II intervened and appointed Ioannis Metaxas.

To weaken and discredit the KKE, Metaxas resurrected the so-called declarations of repentance (or *Dilosi* in Greek), a tactic that was originally introduced by Konstantinos Maniadakis in 1933. In this way, Spain became a magnet for Greeks being hound down by the State. When asked, for instance, why he had left Greece, Jacobus Amiralis from Tinos responded that 'I realised that I could, and that I must, fight against Metaxas and international fascism, and it is for this purpose that I came to Spain'.[10] Metaxas promulgated laws and issued fines of up to 10,000 drachmas, to prevent others from following Amiralis' example.[11] The measures certainly succeeded in preventing more from going. According to my database chronicling the lives of Greek volunteers, only four percent of those who fought in Spain emanated from mainland Greece. For the few who managed to leave Greece, however, they perceived their mission as a dual struggle: to thwart the Nationalist attempt to overthrow the Spanish Republic, while simultaneously envisaging that their involvement could catalyse the overthrow of Metaxas. And for them, at least, the antifascist sentiment of that era remained a steadfast presence throughout the Greek crises of the 1940s but also thereafter.

[9] Bert Birtles, *Exiles in the Aegean: A Personal Narrative of Greek Politics and Travel* (Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1938), pp. 269–70.
[10] Moscow, Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoy istorii [Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History] (hereafter RGASPI): f. 545, op. 6, d. 413, l. 9.
[11] Athens, Ypiresia Diplomatikou kai Istorikou Archeiou [Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry] (hereafter YDIA), 1937/44/4, 'Ley obligatoria 511/1937, sobre la prohibición de reclutamiento o salida de voluntarios hacia España', *Gaceta del Gobierno*, 27 February 1937.

Italy invaded Greece in October 1940; however, a combination of Italian hubris and a staunch Greek counteroffensive forced Adolf Hitler to intervene. By this point the Greek Government had relocated to Cairo, and realising the opportunity was there to assert its hegemony, the KKE made a move to spearhead the disparate resistance movements.[12] The Greek International Brigade veterans, stuck in Europe after the Spanish Civil War, also did what they could to aid their compatriots. From France, Panagiotis Aivatzis sent equipment to the *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo* (National Liberation Front; hereafter EAM), while Nikos Karagiannis and Savvas Pales mobilised Greek seafarers in British ports.[13] That they were able to fall back on a network of Spanish Civil War veterans, reinforces the argument put forth by Robert Gildea about how 'resistance created a fraternity or sorority of heroism and suffering that only those who had experienced it could share'.[14]

Networks of former International Brigade volunteers were horrified by the situation in Greece. In her comprehensive investigation about the British left, and their stance on the Allied intervention in Nazi-occupied Greece, Anastasia Chartomatsidi recorded how activists participated in, and 'actively shaped the public conversation' on the events in Greece and the role of the British Government thereto.[15] Public anger was particularly inflamed by the allegation that, whereas former collaborators of the Nazis were purged in other countries, no such measures were taken in

[12] Leften Stavros Stavrianos, *Greece: American Dilemma and Opportunity* (Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. 54.
[13] Giannis Pantelakis, *Los buenos antifascistas* [The Good Anti-Fascists] (Themelio, 2021), p. 246; Magda Fytilí, 'La tercera muerte de los brigadistas griegos: historia y memoria de una militancia internacionalista' [The Third Death of the Greek Brigades: History and Memory of International Militancy], *Historia del presente*, 37.2 (2021), pp. 63–82 (p. 69).
[14] Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* (The Belknap Press, 2015), p. 437.
[15] Anastasia Chartomatsidi, 'The British Left's Attitude towards the Battle of Athens, December 1944–February 1945: Commonalities and Divisions', in *Labour United and Divided from the 1830s to the Present*, ed. by Emmanuelle Avril and Yann Béliard (Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 134.

Greece.[16] Rather, it was the EAM and the *Ellinikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos* (Greek People's Liberation Army; hereafter ELAS) that the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared should be 'starved and struck at every means in [our] power'.[17]

Churchill did not hesitate to break ties with the EAM when the Allies liberated Greece in October 1944. He advised the erstwhile commander of the British forces in Athens, that he was responsible for 'neutralising or destroying all EAM' bands, and it was this move that triggered the armed confrontation in Athens, in December 1944, between Greek and British soldiers and the EAM and their sympathisers.[18] A month later, an EAM delegation visited Britain to tell of how the 'ringleaders of the collaboration and supporters of the Metaxas dictatorship' continued to 'hold all key positions in the state machinery'.[19] Christoforos D. Laganas, who was a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, interpreted the situation through the prism of his experiences in Spain. As he saw it, the situation in 1944 was no different to when the Great Powers agreed the Non-Intervention Pact during the Spanish Civil War.[20] The Allies' benevolence towards the Spanish Republic, created an asymmetrical structure of external support and inhibitions–advantageous to the insurgent side—as German and Italian support could never be matched in quantity or quality by the limited Soviet aid.[21] But just as they misconstrued the best course of action in Spain, some contemporaries

[16] Polymeris Voglis, *Becoming a Subject: Political Prisoners during the Greek Civil War* (Berghahn Books, 2002), p. 55; Procopis Papastratis, 'The Purge of the Greek Civil Service on the Eve of the Civil War', in *Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War 1945–1949*, ed. by Lars Baerentzen and others (Museum Tusculanum Press, 1987), p. 48.
[17] Richard Clogg, '"Pearls from Swine": The Foreign Office Papers, S.O.E. and the Greek Resistance', in *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, ed. by Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (Macmillan, 1975), p. 195.
[18] Winston Churchill to General Scobie, 5 December 1944.
[19] Manchester, People's History Museum (hereafter PHM), ID/CORR/GRE/55, Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo, 'Final Statement of the EAM Delegation to Great Britain' (London, 1 January 1945), p. 2.
[20] Christoforos D. Laganas, *Potsoroumpe: ho emphylios polemos stin Hispania amoibaiotites Hellenikou Dekembri ho lochos Zachariadi* [Potsoroumpe: The Civil War in Spain, Greek December Mutuality and the Zachariadis Company] (Genaris, 1957), p. 12.
[21] Enrique Moradiellos, 'La No Intervención: una farsa política y diplomática' [Non-Intervention: A Political and Diplomatic Farse], in *En el combate por la historia* [In the Struggle for History], ed. by Paul Preston and others (Pasado y Presente, 2021).

believed they also misapprehended the nature and objectives of the EAM. During a visit to Greece in 1945, the literary critic Edmund Wilson wrote that the EAM was:[22]

> Neither a chess play directed from Moscow nor a foray of bandits from the hills- but a genuine popular movement which had recruited almost all that was generous, courageous and enlightened in Greece; the most spirited among the young, the most clear-sighted among the mature.

The British Foreign Office agent Reginald Leeper echoed this view, confirming how 'none of us in Athens were ever able to trace the direct hand of Russia in the revolt of December 1944'.[23] In response to their ostracization from the political arena, therefore, the KKE resorted to rekindling the memory of the transnational antifascist resistance during the Spanish Civil War to inspire the international community to their plight.

## *Civil War in Greece, Guerrilla War in Spain*

### *An 'Irregular' Civil War*

Whatever Franco might have alleged, the Spanish Civil War had not ended on 1 April 1939. After the war, the dictatorship had to contend with an 'enemy that was much weaker, less numerous and completed isolated', nevertheless 'extremely elusive'.[24] Utilising the Pyrenees as a bridgehead, the PCE sent detachments of guerrillas to sabotage Guardia Civil outposts, municipal councils and

[22] Denna Frank Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins, 1917–1960* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), p. 185.
[23] Reginald Leeper, *When Greeks Meet Greeks* (Chatto & Windus, 1950), p. 16.
[24] Jorge Marco, 'Rethinking the Postwar Period in Spain: Violence and Irregular Civil War, 1939–52', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 55.3 (2020), pp. 492–513 (p. 499), doi:10.1177/0022009419839764.

Falange headquarters. To combat their incursions, Franco received vital intel of potential attacks by 'French and Allied authorities, who were opposed to [any] attempt to reopen the Spanish Civil War and encourage communism'.[25] Using methods of deception, moreover, Franco generated an atmosphere of internal suspicion as *Grupos de Fuerzas del Servicio Especial* sowed discord and systematically picked off the guerrillas one by one.[26]

Influential figures within the PCE justifiably began to reassess their strategy. Among them, Enrique Líster—who led the drive to recruit guerrillas—admitted the PCE would have been better placed had it launched a counterattack in 1945. Líster argued that, at that time, the French Government was unable to prevent them from using their territory as a base for operations into Spain. Furthermore, the British and Americans, perceived their struggle as a threat to the Franco regime, would have been more inclined to support a republican solution to avert a more radical outcome.[27] Nevertheless, the deed was done. Up against an overwhelmingly superior enemy, Spanish guerrillas found common ground with the fighters in the mountains of Greece, drawing parallels between their respective struggles. Better together than alone, the KKE reciprocated, as both struggles revived the memory of the internationalism of the Spanish Civil War to garner much-needed aid for their movements.[28]

## *Civil War in Greece*

[25] Fernando Hernández Sánchez, 'La maldición de Sísifo: auge, caída y reconstrucción del PCE (1936–1953)' [The Curse of Sisyphus: Rise, Fall, and Reconstruction of the PCE (1936–1953)], in *Un siglo de comunismo en España: Historia de una lucha* [A Century of Communism in Spain: History of a Struggle], ed. by Francisco Erice (Akal, 2021), p. 125.
[26] José Luis Martín Ramos, *Historia del PCE* [History of the PCE] (Catarata, 2021), p. 170.
[27] Enrique Líster, *¡Basta!* [Enough!] (G. del Toro, 1978), p. 187.
[28] Nikola Tohma and Julia Reinke, '"Like we would help brothers or sisters?" Practising Solidarity with Greek Civil War Refugees in Socialist Czechoslovakia and the GDR in the Shadow of World War II', *International Review of Social History*, 69.S3 (2024), pp. 13–41 (p. 35).

In the same year Líster claimed that the PCE should have launched their guerrilla struggle, the KKE signed the Treaty of Varkiza. The treaty of 12 February 1945, repealed martial law, ensured the freedom of political expression, and granted amnesty for all political offences committed between 3 December 1944 and 12 February 1945. Spyridon Tsoutsoumpis claimed the treaty was 'greeted with relief by a very large segment of the population that had been exhausted by years of fratricidal struggle and pauperisation'.[29] Although true to some extent, Tsoutsoumpis did not account for how the Left felt it a humiliation after its supporters were surrendered and subsequently persecuted, while the Right saw it as mission unaccomplished in its resolve to annihilate rivals and dominate post-war politics'.[30]

In response, the KKE upped its rhetoric; advocating the institution of a Soviet-style regime and focusing on the elimination of those identified as monarcho-fascists. This was enshrined in October 1946, when the new face of the EAM, the *Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas* (Democratic Army of Greece; hereafter DSE), launched a campaign to take control of Greece. Almost immediately, the General Secretary of the KKE, Nikos Zachariadis, sought to carve out the international dimensions of the Greek Civil War, aiming to provoke a global response. On 16 December 1947, for instance, Zachariadis announced how the KKE were 'no longer in December '44 or in Varkiza when [they] fought alone', but that 'the international democratic movement is standing firmly by [their] side'.[31] In calling out for transnational leftwing unity, Zachariadis tapped into the memory of the Popular Front during the Spanish Civil War.[32] The Popular Front was

[29] Spyridon Tsoutsoumpis, 'Paramilitarism, Politics and Organised Crime during the Greek Civil War (1945–1949)', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 43.2 (2019), pp. 262–86 (p. 264).
[30] Nicos Christodoulakis, 'The Conflict Trap in the Greek Civil War 1946–1949: An Economic Approach' (unpublished GreeSE Paper No. 83, London School of Economics, 2014), p. 33.
[31] Nikos Zachariadis, 'Pou travame?' [Where Are We Going?], *Exormisi*, 16 December 1947.
[32] Nikos Marantzidis, *Under Stalin's Shadow: A Global History of Greek Communism* (Cornell University Press, 2023), p. 167.

originally conceived to stall the spread of fascism, with the 'additional advantage that it represented and claimed the affection of broader masses'.[33] The KKE had rallied behind the strategy in June 1936, announcing that:[34]

> Only the unification of all the democratic antifascist popular forces, organisations and parties in a Popular Front, following the example of France and Spain, can mobilise the broadest masses, put a barrier to the fascist attack and… pave the way for greater and decisive popular conquests.

Reviving this cause in 1946 struck a chord in the international communist movement. As Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames explain, the legacy of that era served as a 'rallying cry' that 'triggered the imagination and fascination of people who at a certain point might be mobilised against fascism'.[35] Nothing illustrates this better than the fact that the erstwhile General Secretary of the PCE, Santiago Carrillo, visited the leader of the former President of the *Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija* (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; hereafter SFRY), Josip Broz Tito, to request aid for his guerrillas.[36] Although he denied their request, Carrillo persisted. He even shared a bulletin with the DSE, declaring that the 'Spanish partisans… are watching with admiration the heroic struggle of the Greek people, and we are convinced that the Greek partisans

[33] Harry Gannes and Theodore Repard, *Spain in Revolt: A History of the Civil War in Spain in 1936 and a Study of Its Social, Political and Economic Causes* (Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1936), pp. 195–96.
[34] Kommounistiko Komma Elladas (hereafter KKE), 604/B, 'Brosta stin amesi apeili tou fasismou: empros ston agona gia to Laiko Metopo' [Against the Fascist Threat: Forward with the Struggle of the Popular Front], 18–20 June 1936, cited in KKE, *Episima Keimena, 1934–1940* [Official Documents, 1934–1940], vol. IV (Modern Era, 1975), pp. 388–91.
[35] Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames (eds.), *Fighters Across Frontiers: Transnational Resistance in Europe, 1936–48* (Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 178–79.
[36] Santiago Carrillo, *Mañana España: conversaciones con Régis Debray y Max Gallo* [Tomorrow Spain: Talks with Régis Debray and Max Gallo] (Colección Ebro, 1975), p. 123.

will triumph in this struggle, which is also a struggle for global democracy and freedom'.[37] The eccentricities of the PCE and the KKE undermined Joseph Stalin, for neither of their struggles fit into Soviet geopolitical plans.[38] Stalin had previously warned the PCE not to 'focus exclusively on armed struggle', but to 'develop other strategies such as infiltration into the structures'.[39] They continued with their initially programme, despite what Stalin had told them, and even overstated their influence in meetings with the Soviets. During a trip to Moscow in August 1948, for instance, they claimed the guerrillas had experienced considerable growth.[40] This was a far cry from the truth, for the support of a population harassed by the forces of public order but also by the guerrillas themselves, sparked the slow dismantling of the guerrillas which, in addition to the lack of international support, suffered the progressive defection of a frightened and silenced population.[41]

A year after the Spaniards paid a visit to Moscow, the Greek Civil War ended. On 29 August 1949, some 10,000 Greeks crossed into neighbouring Albania. When the dictator Enver Hoxha announced that all Greeks found on Albanian soil would be disarmed and detained, they moved on to the Soviet Union; and it was from there that they encountered the PCE.[42] The Spaniards were considerably fewer in number, as many who joined the exodus of 1939 promptly returned to Spain. Those who remained in the USSR, did not see themselves as 'victims expelled from their country,

[37] Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas (hereafter DSE), 'Oi dimokratikoi laoi gia ton agona mas' [Democratic Peoples for Our Struggle], 13 March 1948, p. 6, cited in *Ntokoumenta tou ellinikou proodeftikou kinimatos* [Documents of the Progressive Greek Movement, 1946–1949] (Mnimi, Athens).
[38] Bisser Petrov, 'The Greek Civil War as Covered by the Cominform Journal "For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy"', *Études Balkaniques*, 3 (2023), pp. 385–406 (p. 389).
[39] Marco, 'Rethinking the Postwar Period in Spain', p. 512.
[40] Madrid, Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España [Historical Archive of the Communist Party of Spain] (hereafter AHPCE), 29, 'Informe de la Delegación del Buró Político del CC al CC del PCE(b) sobre la situación política y el Partido' [Report from the Delegation of the Political Bureau of the CC to the CC of the PCE(b) on the political situation and the Party], 8 August 1948.
[41] Concepción Mir Curcó, 'Violencia política, coacción legal y oposición interior' [Political Violence, Legal Coercion and Internal Opposition], *Ayer*, 33.1 (1999), pp. 115–45 (p. 141).
[42] Edgar O'Ballance, *The Greek Civil War, 1944–1949* (Faber & Faber, 1966), p. 200.

but rather as active subjects in the fight against fascism'.[43] In keeping with their belief, the refugees began to send 'waves' across the Mediterranean and throughout Europe, conveying the plight of Greek and Spanish communists on an almost daily basis. Unbeknownst to them, their actions precipitated a (counter-)wave of inverse transnationalism, with Franco seeking to leverage their activities as a means to forge closer relations with Greece and the United States in opposition to the communist threat.

### *Waves Across the Mediterranean*

With their membership in disarray, radio and print media acquired significant importance for the KKE and the PCE. *Radio España Independiente* (Independent Spanish Radio; hereafter REI) was conceived on 21 July 1941. Nevertheless, it was only really after the Second World War, when psychological warfare, the use of military intelligence and the persecution of support networks became commonplace in Spain, that the architects of the REI increased their radio transmissions.[44] The symbolic importance of this was captured by the erstwhile employee of the REI, Marcel Plans Macià, who described how in the Spanish collective memory, the radio station provided a 'voice that said that everything had not been lost and that, with struggle and sacrifice, a way out could be found'.[45]

In much the same way, Greek communist radio endeavoured to sustain the revolutionary spirit of its members after the Greek Civil War, broadcasting messages of solidarity and resistance

[43] Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 116.
[44] Marco, 'Rethinking the Postwar Period in Spain', p. 500; Jorge Marco, *Guerrilleros and Neighbours in Arms: Identities and Cultures of Anti-Fascist Resistance in Spain* (Sussex Academic Press, 2016), pp. 156–57.
[45] Marcel Plans, 'Radio España Independiente, la "Pirenaica", entre el mito y la propaganda' [Radio España Independiente, la "Pirenaica": Between Myth and Propaganda], in *De las ondas rojas a las radios libres* [From Red Waves to Free Radios], ed. by Luis Bassets (Gustavo Gili, 1981), p. 118.

to a populace weary from years of conflict. The radio station *Eleftheri Hellada* (Free Greece) started out in Belgrade before moving to Bucharest in March 1948. Since then, Vaso Psimouli has produced one of the most comprehensive accounts of the station. Psimouli emphasised how the station transformed into a 'modernist tool with unlimited possibilities in terms of its scope and immediacy, which could represent the Greek armed movement and help disseminate the political and ideological positions of the belligerents'.[46] Given what they perceived to be their identical circumstances, Greek and Spanish communist radio stations combined forces. Their strategy was neither complex nor meticulously planned out; it simply boiled down to denouncing one of the great fallacies of U.S. Cold War strategy. This fallacy lay in what D.F. Fleming described as the assumption that the spread of communism could be curbed by subsidising the reactionary forces around the world.[47] On 12 October 1949, the REI sent out the following transmission boasting that:[48]

> The guerrilla movement not only does not falter, but develops and consolidates itself despite the repeated and concentrated efforts of the Francoist government to destroy it… The day will come to go on the offensive all along the line, and then it will not be just a handful of heroes, but masses of thousands and hundreds of thousands who will participate in the open struggle to deal the decisive blows to the hateful Francoist tyranny.

Released just days before the end of the Greek Civil War, it illustrates how American geopolitical strategy catalysed the PCE to revive memories of transnational resistance. Within a

[46] Vaso Psimouli, *Eleftheri Ellada/I Foni tis Alitheias, o paranomos radiofonikos stathmos tou KKE archeio 1947–1968* [Free Greece/The Voice of Truth, the Illegal KKE Radio Station Archive 1947–1968] (Themelio, 2006), p. 31.
[47] Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins*, p. 450.
[48] AHPCE, 105/1.1, 'Las tareas fundamentales de los guerrilleros en esta etapa de la lucha' [The Fundamental Tasks of the Guerrillas in this Stage of the Struggle], 12 October 1949.

year of the aforementioned transmission, *Eleftheri Hellada* followed suit, attacking the United States for having brokered a deal between Franco and the Greek Government for the exchange of up to two million dollars.[49] Shortly after the ratification of the accord, radio operators expressed their frustration with what they saw as the 'persistent' campaign to establish a Mediterranean bloc encompassing 'monarchical fascist Greece' and Spain.[50] Despite their rhetoric, on 26 September 1953, Spain and the United States signed three executive agreements, thereby committing the Americans to an 'unspecified amount of aid in return for the right to establish four military bases in Spain'.[51] The pact was long in the making. Franco had leveraged the Greek Civil War to advocate for bolstering Mediterranean defences through increased U.S. military investment.[52] The comparison to Greece aimed to reinforce his utility for the western world, at a time when Spain remained diplomatically isolated'.[53] Sandie Holguín concurs, relating that 'the Allies paid lip service to punishing the Franco regime for its fascistic tendencies and its support for the Axis powers, but in the end they did little to chasten Spain beyond treating it (briefly) as a pariah state'.[54] Indeed, two years after the 'Pact of Madrid', Spain was admitted into the United Nations. On 14 December 1955, *Eleftheri Hellada* responded by stating that:[55]

> There is a certain fear of the unfolding of a consistent struggle against the regime, a certain hesitation in the face of an open and decisive approach to the solution of the problem as it corresponds to the interests of Spain and not of that group of this

[49] Athens, Archeia Synchronis Koinonikis Istorias [Contemporary Social History Archives] (hereafter ASKI), *Radiofonikos Stathmos Eleftheri Hellada* [Radio Station Free Greece], K2, 19 April 1950.
[50] ASKI, *Radiofonikos Stathmos Eleftheri Hellada*, K2, 30 September 1950.
[51] Oscar Calvo-Gonzalez, 'American Military Interests and Economic Confidence in Spain under the Franco Dictatorship', in *The Journal of Economic History*, 67.3 (2007), pp. 740–67 (p. 744), doi: 10.1017/S0022050707000290.
[52] Anthony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (Orion Books, 2006), p. 464.
[53] Loukianos Hassiotis, 'The Views of Franco's Regime on the "Children's Issue" during the Greek Civil War', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 33 (2009), pp. 204–18 (p. 211), doi:10.1179/174962509X417672.
[54] Holguín, 'How Did the Spanish Civil War End?', p. 1778.
[55] ASKI, *Radiofonikos Stathmos Eleftheri Hellada*, K8/F2, 24 February 1955.

> monarchical or democratic faction […]. These hesitations are fomented by the distorted propaganda of the regime that puts before the Spaniards the false dilemma – Francoism or communism. The Communist Party declares once again to those forces that are still wavering that this is not the case. The real dilemma is fascist tyranny or democracy.

How to maintain their relevance amidst the rapidly changing geopolitical language constituted a dilemma for the two communist parties. But then again, there were times when they neither strengthened their cause nor addressed the task of attending to the rank-and-file. Take what occurred in 1950, when the General Secretary of the *Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas* (Unified Socialist Youth; hereafter JSU) Ignacio Gallego was invited to supply a piece for the November/December issue of the KKE magazine *Neos Kosmos*. Gallego used the platform to accuse Tito of ingratiating himself with Franco and the United States. He also attacked his sympathisers—including members of his own Party—for relying on 'bourgeois politicians who, having lost their influence over the people, seek refuge in the intelligence services of the Anglo-American imperialists'.[56] He then ended by describing Titoists as a 'sinkhole where one finds the rubbish that Spain's revolutionary, democratic movement threw from its ranks in the course of the struggle against fascism'.[57] In writing what he did, Gallego situated on a par Spaniards with the Greek communists who had also endured the fallout from the Tito-Stalin split in 1948. As a result of the rupture in relations, on 7 July 1949 Tito sealed the border between Yugoslavia and Greece, thereby hastening the defeat of the DSE.

[56] Ignacio Gallego, 'O frankistes kai oi titikoi tsakalia tis idias ratsas' [The Francoist and Titoist jackals are the same breed], *Neos Kosmos*, November–December 1950, pp. 808–9.
[57] Ibid., pp. 808–9.

Filling newspapers and magazines with vendettas and feuds would avail little to consol the refugees. In spite of this, Spanish and Greek communist publishers seldom projected a long-term strategy. On the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the PCE, the former General Secretary of the Party Dolores Ibárruri contributed a piece in *Neos Kosmos*. She called on readers to 'fight tirelessly to defend the peace', threatened by the 'the Anglo-American imperialists', for the 'struggle for peace is closely linked to the struggle for a democratic Spain'.[58] By choosing to promote the continuation of clandestine activities, Ibarruri would have risked exacerbating the strain on a membership already grappling with the emotional baggage their displacement entailed. Furthermore, by the time of her publication, Spanish workers' organisations had become virtually obsolete, and the middle classes—once a steadfast ally of the PCE during the epoch of the Popular Front—had been weakened by the exile of intellectuals and the anti-communist sentiment fostered by the dictatorship.[59] The impact of this was felt after the death of Franco, on 20 November 1975, as the 'disappearance of any radical cutting-edge to the PCE' lost the Party support among the traditional working class, whilst their 'lack of any genuine commitment to internal democratisation alienated many of its new middle-class followers.[60]

Neither would her message have offered much solace to Greek refugees grappling with the harsh reality of their displacement. Discord amongst the Greek communists triggered the formation of two distinctly opposing factions within the KKE.[61] One group adhered to Zachariadis, whilst the other faction, which enjoyed Soviet support, championed Kostas Koligiannis, who would

[58] Dolores Ibárruri, 'Ta trianta chronia tou kommounistikou kommatos Ispanias' [Thirty years of the Spanish Communist Party], *Neos Kosmos*, May 1950, p. 265.
[59] Martín Ramos, *Historia del PCE*, pp. 177–78.
[60] Paul Heywood, 'Mirror-images: The PCE and PSOE in the transition to democracy in Spain', *West European Politics*, 10.2 (1987), pp. 193–210 (p. 205), doi:10.1080/01402388708424627.
[61] Kostis Karpozilos, 'The Defeated of the Greek Civil War: From Fighters to Political Refugees in the Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 16.3 (2014), pp. 62–87 (pp. 82–3), doi:10.1162/JCWS_a_00471.

become the future general secretary of the party in exile and a staunch defender of the local Greek community in Tashkent. Tensions spilled over on the dawn of 11 September 1955, when refugees clashed in street fighting. Stones, knives, and clubs were used, leaving what Kostis Karpozilos articulated as a 'deep trauma among those who just some years earlier had fought side-by-side'.[62] Embroiled in the dispute were also veterans of the Spanish Civil War. Take the case of the journalist Savvas Pales, who the KKE nominated to travel to Spain to report on the activities of the Greek volunteers for the Party newspaper *Rizospastis*. Following the Spanish Civil War, Pales went to Britain where he worked alongside trade unionists and other activists to spread awareness of the plight of Nazi-occupied Greece. After the Greek Civil War, however, the KKE banished him to Kazakhstan, to which he responded in a letter to some of his comrades by attacking the 'political blindness and fanaticism of certain corrupt adversaries'.[63]

Nikos Karagiannis was another Spanish Civil War veteran who met a most untimely end. One of the first Greeks to set foot in Spain, Karagiannis excelled as a Sergeant in the Balkan Battalion of the 129th Brigade. After the Nazi occupation of Greece, he was left in a state of uncertainty: continuing his revolutionary work in Britain before relocating to North Africa to work for the *Omospondias Ellinikon Naftergatikon Organoseon* (Federation of Greek Seafaring Workers' Organisations; hereafter OENO). After the Greek Civil War, Karagiannis was sent to Cluj in Romania, where he claimed 'the causes of the isolation of each one were different, but they all had a common denominator: their opposition to the leadership of the KKE on some specific issue'.[64] The experience of fighting with the International Brigades in Spain led Karagiannis, and

[62] Karpozilos, 'The Defeated of the Greek Civil War', pp. 82–3.
[63] Savvas Pales, 'Letter from Kazakhstan', cited in Kostas Gritzonas, *Meta to Grammo* [After Grammos] (Glaros, 1986), p. 97.
[64] Ibid., p. 90.

other Greek veterans the Spanish Civil War, to falsely believe they could openly criticise the KKE, its policies during the Greek Civil War, and its handling of the refugee community in the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, for those who had not fought in Spain, or been exposed to the internationalist discourse of that era, the propaganda resurrecting internationalist antifascism was eclipsed by a genuine yearning to return home. When this would occur remained a mystery.

Following the Greek Civil War, the victors promoted *Ethnikofrosyni* (national mindedness), which Alexander Kazamias characterised a 'system of negative myths and stereotypes whose aim was to portray the Greek left as a segment of society that was divested of its Greekness and thereby removed from the body of the nation'.[65] Similarly, after the Spanish Civil War, Javier Rodrigo and David Alegre Lorenz conveyed how the defeated were subjected to a 'system that questioned their belonging to the national community, investigated them, and made them pay for their responsibilities on the Republican side'.[66] Conditioned by the ideologically fraught milieu in Greece and Spain, the relationships forged abroad became a crucial, confirming the status of the KKE and the PCE as an 'integral part of a wider international movement with a historical mission to fulfil'.[67] If only this was matched by the feelings of the rank-and-file, many of whom longed for nothing more than to return home.

## *Fighting Fire With Fire*

[65] Alexander Kazamias, *Greece and the Cold War: Diplomacy and Anti-Colonialism in the Aftermath of Civil Conflict*, 2nd edn (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), p. 24.
[66] Javier Rodrigo and David Alegre Lorenz, 'Before the Convention: The Spanish Civil War and Challenges for Research on Refugee History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 41.2 (2022), pp. 196–217 (p. 213), doi:10.1093/rsq/hdac005.
[67] Vassilis Kapetanyannis, 'The Communists', in *Political Change in Greece: Before and After the Colonels*, ed. by Kevin Featherstone and Dimitrios K. Katsoudas (Routledge, 1987), pp. 147–48.

Sending waves across the Mediterranean came at a cost. The Spanish ambassador to London during the Greek Civil War, described Spain and Greece as 'two pillars of civilisation in the Mediterranean that resist the materialistic radiation of Soviet expansionism'.[68] Franco perpetuated this to ruthlessly eradicate the remnants of the PCE.[69] Much like Hitler who fabricated the conspiracy about a Jewish-Bolshevik plot to take over Germany, the myth of a communist and Masonic plot against Spain endured until the very end of the Francoist regime. The Cold War was, thus, framed as an extension of the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War and the Greek Civil War, for all these conflicts shared in a common denominator—the Soviet Union. This complicated matters for both Greek and Spanish communists.

A tried and tested tactic employed by Francoist newspapers was to cite articles written by Greeks, which accused the communists of committing heinous crimes. For example, the newspaper *El Noticiero Universal* ran a segment by Alec Kitroeff that coincided with the Greek elections of 1955. Owing to the growing discontent regarding Greek foreign policy, declining living standards and higher taxes, Kitroeff admitted the resurgence of leftwing propaganda. Notwithstanding that the communists—now represented by the *Eniea Dimokratiki Aristera* (United Democratic Left; hereafter EDA)—might experience a boost in the elections, Kitroeff assured readers that the:[70]

> Memory of the communist guerrillas that acted from 1946 to 1949, and in which the communists revealed themselves as they are… are still remembered by the bivouacs and orphans throughout the country, and several thousand children… who

[68] Hassiotis, 'The Views of Franco's Regime on the "Children's Issue" during the Greek Civil War', p. 211.
[69] Jorge Marco, 'Rethinking the Postwar Period in Spain', p. 507.
[70] Alec Kitroeff, 'Rusia y los Estados Unidos observan el panorama electoral' [Russia and the United States are watching the electoral landscape], *El Noticiero Universal*, Year 68, No. 21665, 25 December 1955, p. 7.

> were kidnapped by the Reds [and who] are still being held in the countries [behind] the Iron Curtain.

In November 1960, the same newspaper covered another story about the state of the Greek border with Macedonia. The article claimed that the Greek government had uncovered a vast spy network that was preparing to infiltrate Greece.[71] Articles like these were a strategic windfall for Franco, who escalated the state of siege mentality to secure U.S. investment for Spanish military defences.[72] There is no doubt that American policy-makers saw through his claims; nevertheless, their commitment to fighting communism pushed them to pay lip service to Franco. Greek and Spanish communist radio, thus, had to evolve to the changing geopolitical landscape, and so it tried to do so by infusing antifascist rhetoric with anticolonial and anti-imperialist themes. In addition, those producing the propaganda argued that by pushing the stories of political prisoners to the forefront, their readership and the international community could better connect the plight of prisoners in the 1950s and 1960s to the Greek and Spanish civil wars. In August 1962, for instance, *I Foni tis Alitheias* (The Voice of Truth), formerly the *Eleftheri Hellada* radio station, informed to its listeners that among the:[73]

> Spanish political prisoners facing fascist atrocities in Asturian prisons is Ramón Ormazábal, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain, who was arrested two months ago in Bilbao […]. To the appeal of the Spanish prisoners… the Greek people… respond with all their strength in their souls. Free the Spanish fighters for democracy [and] down with Franco's bloody fascism.

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[71] *El Noticiero Universal*, 'Detención de espías en Macedonia' [Arrest of spies in Macedonia], Year 72, No. 23179, 2 November 1960, p. 7.
[72] Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 107.
[73] ASKI, *Radiofonikos Stathmos Eleftheri Hellada*, K371/F3, 8 August 1962.

Ormazábal had fought in the Spanish Civil War, but was condemned to twenty years in prison for his alleged involvement in a string of industrial disputes in 1962. The international communist movement reacted vociferously to the news about his situation. In Cuba, the newspaper *España Republicana* denounced the incident and appealed for the release of Ormazábal who they charged had been:[74]

> Subjected to torture in a Bilbao police station since his arrest. With just concern, the media of the opposition to the regime fear for his life. The torture to which the detainees have been subjected has been so savage that one of the detainees, the well-known painter Agustín Ibarrola, desperately tried to commit suicide.

International leftwing publications were also reporting on the conditions of Greek prisoners, with stories of political prisoners resorting to suicide being not uncommon. In a letter written by George Bunney, the Honorary Secretary of the League for Democracy in Greece, to the Eva Reckitt Trust, on 6 October 1966, he referred to the case of one prisoner who was only:[75]

> Kept from suicide by his love and feeling of obligation for his teenage daughter, who had been born after he was imprisoned… There is also a growing number of 'new' prisoners, sentenced for such things as attending Resistance celebrations, even singing Resistance songs and protesting against the overthrow of the Centre Union Government.

Owing to work of the League for Democracy in Greece, Britons learned about the situation in prisons and camps around Greece. Among all its efforts, one instance warrants particular

[74] *España Republicana*, Year XXIV, No. 523, 15 July 1962, p. 1.
[75] London, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (hereafter LHCMA), MGA/GRF3, League for Democracy in Greece Relief Committee: Correspondence, 'Letter from George Bunney, the Honorary Secretary of the League for Democracy in Greece, to the Eva Reckitt Trust', 6 October 1966.

attention. Following the torrential rain that had swept a concentration camp in Agios Efstratios, on 20 January 1955, the League issued an appeal to its members and the British Government. The appeal contained information about how the concentration camp, which was situated in a deep ravine, was flooded out and most of the tents in which the detainees lived were washed away. Witnesses of the situation, they claimed, recounted how:[76]

> Most of them lost all their blankets, and clothes and that food stocks were ruined. Delegations of relatives of the detainees have been begging the Greek Minister of the Interior to send new tents, clothes, food and medicines to the exiles but so far he has done nothing than send for the Camp Commandant to report on the situation.

Their plight not only aroused considerable sympathy, but it also led some to view Greek and Spanish political prisoners as two sides of the same coin. The Manolis Glezos case ignited particular discontent among those fervently advocating for freedom and democracy in Greece. For his role in the wartime resistance to the Nazi occupation, and the Greek Civil War, Glezos was condemned to a life on the run. European activists rallied to secure his release, and in 1959 a Committee was established in Paris to investigate his case. Their report found how the 'ideals of the Resistance are still the inalienable possession of all of us. They still galvanise the energies of men, still call us to unite. It is not a mere principle, but a categoric imperative, that these ideals must be defended with utmost vigilance'.[77] For many, their involvement in resistance movements became the yardstick by which they measured the world. Persecuted for their involvement on the wrong side in the Greek and Spanish civil wars, the campaigns to release Glezos and Ormazábal served as a stark reminder that conditions in Spain and Greece had not improved. So to combat the

[76] LHCMA, MGA/GRF3, League for Democracy in Greece Relief Committee: Correspondence, League for Democracy in Greece to NUM ECs, 'Greek Exiles Flood Victims Appeal', 20 January 1955.
[77] LHCMA, MGA/PM71/1–17, KKE Pamphlets, MGA/PM 69/3, 'The Manolis Glezos Case' (Paris, 1959), p. 2.

continued persecution of political dissidents in their countries, the KKE and the PCE invoked the memory of the internationalist solidarity of the Spanish Civil War era. Nevertheless, they found themselves red-faced when the very nature of the discourse they sought to promote came into direct conflict with the more conciliatory policies of the USSR. Not only that, but also that the dynamics of transnational solidarity brought the Greek Government and Franco into mutual orbit, prompting them to respond in kind.

## *Conclusion*

After the Greek Civil War, the KKE and the PCE exploited radio, newspapers and magazines, to denounce American intervention in Spain and Greece, and the continuous torture and assassinations of political prisoners. This tension did not wither away over time. On the contrary, it escalated throughout the course of the Cold War. Their anger was manifested in a joint statement in April 1962. The statement declared that having the most 'reactionary regimes' in Europe:[78]

> The fascist dictatorship of Spain and the reactionary regime of Greece placed their national territories at the disposal of imperialism to serve as a basis for their aggressive plans against the socialist countries and the national liberation movements of Africa and the Middle East […]. For 25 years Franco's fascism has kept Spanish democratic militants in the workshops of violence. For 18 years the Greek antifascist fighters of the National Resistance have been tortured on the throne of the neo-fascism of the xenophobic reactionary right.

[78] ASKI, GR-ASKI-0002, *I Foni tis Alitheias* [The Voice of Truth], CCCLXXI, 13 April 1962.

Etched into their collective memory was the resistance waged during the Greek and Spanish civil wars. So deeply ingrained was this memory that it stifled the two Parties, leading them to defy the official Soviet policy line. This fixation hindered, moreover, their ability to address the impact of displacement on the rank-and-file, preventing them from looking beyond the Spanish and Greek civil wars. For a faction of the political refugees, the defeat of fascism was 'a matter of life or death' as many of the former resistance 'fought with their backs to the wall against the encroaching forces of fascism' and imperialism, which 'gave priority to the immediate struggle.'[79] The impact of the dialogue correlating their struggles had a profound effect. Investigating twentieth-century European resistance movements, University of Oxford professor Robert Gildea asserted that former resistance fighters cultivated a unique aura of 'fraternity or sorority of heroism and suffering that only those who had experienced it could share.'[80] Exploiting this feeling to fuel their propaganda, the KKE and the PCE contested the 'two camp' doctrine by revitalising the Popular Front and transnational antifascism. Little did they realise that, in doing so, they would inadvertently bolster U.S. resolve to solidify Greece and Spain as strategic bulwarks in their mission to thwart the spread of communism.

[79] Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism* (Abacus, 2011), p. 274.
[80] Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, p. 437.