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The Greek Civil War in the Czech Press

Konstantinos Tsivos

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Abstract

The Greek Civil War was the first open confrontation in Europe between the Eastern block and the West after the Second World War. This confrontation did not only develop on the battlefield, but also on the propaganda front, inside Greece and abroad. Czechoslovakia was actively involved in the Greek Civil War, mainly by sending military equipment to Greece and by providing asylum to approximately 4,000 child refugees. The Greek Civil War was prominent in the Czechoslovakian press throughout its duration (1946-1949). This article, based on material from the Prague National Archives, analyses the events of the Civil War as presented by Czech newspapers. In addition, this presentation reflects on the confrontation between the political forces that formed the National Front government of Czechoslovakia, before and after February 1948. There is also special reference to the activities of the propaganda machine that the Greek Communist Party had established in Prague at this time.

Keywords

Greek Civil War, Czechoslovak Press, Cold War, February 1948, polarization, propaganda

In March 1945 the Czechoslovak National Front government was formed. All the Czech and Slovak anti-fascist parties were equally represented in it, each by three ministers. The Communist Party, which had the leading role in forming the government liberation program, took control of three ministries that played a crucial part in the orientation of the country: these were the ministries of Interior, Agriculture and Information. The latter played an important part in the 1948 domination of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Under the leadership of Václav Kopecký it formed the post-war frame of operation of daily and periodical press. In this particularly fluctuating political scenery, the Czechoslovak media regularly informed their readers about post-war developments in Greece. The Greek Civil War was the first open conflict of the Cold War. Parallel to the battles taking place on the Greek mountains between government troops and communist guerrillas, the two sides, supported by their allies, also met on the propaganda front, trying to gain the support and recognition of international public opinion. The aim of the present article is to analyze the perception of the events of the Greek Civil War by the Czechoslovak media. We chronologically examine the sources and the way the Civil War events were presented through the prism of confrontation among Czechoslovak political powers before February 1948 and after. We chose the method of quoting articles and placing excerpts from relevant articles so that the readers can form their own opinion. The comments aim to aid the orientation of the reader and do not comment on the content of the articles.

The post-war backdrop of Czechoslovak media

Immediately after the end of the war, the landscape of media radically changed in Czechoslovakia. The National Front government put forward the view that newspapers and magazines are national property and therefore they may not be a means of profit for individuals or groups of publishers. President Edvard Beneš himself noted that journalism is a public service, arguing that the rampant (pre-war) freedom in the area of the press would not be repeated.¹ The notion that the press should be treated as a social good and not as a means of speculation was in line with a strong tendency towards the nationalization of large and medium-sized enterprises. Note that not only the communists, but also the representatives of the rest of the parties participating in the National Front government supported this tendency with enthusiasm.

1 Bednařík (2004: 132).

Information Minister Václav Kopecký was of the opinion that the press should serve the goals and the program of the National Front. Already on May 18, 1945, the National Front government banned the publication of all periodicals not belonging to the governing parties. The issuing of known newspapers published with the support of the agriculturalists before the war was interrupted. At the same time, the publication of newspapers that had ceased to be issued during the occupation was renewed, while print media issued by mass organizations that acted alongside the National Front, such as trade unions, cooperatives, the army, youth organizations etc. made their first appearance.²

In 1946, Kopecký, citing paper sufficiency problems, approved the publication of 10 newspapers of an all-Czech range. We briefly mention the background and the print runs of each newspaper: *Rudé Právo* was the central organ of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and its circulation reached 500,000 copies in a country of ten million inhabitants and zero illiteracy. The second largest newspaper was *Svobodné Slovo* of President Beneš's National Socialist Party, reaching 300,000 copies. *Práce* was the newspaper of the unions with a circulation of 250,000 copies. *Právo Lidu* was the newspaper of the Social Democrats, reaching 190,000 copies. *Lidová Demokracie* with 185,000 sheets was the newspaper of the Christian Democrats, *Zemědělské Noviny* with 120,000 sheets was the newspaper of the agricultural cooperatives, *Mladá Fronta* with 80,000 sheets was the newspaper of the Czech Youth Union. Other daily newspapers with lower print runs were the army newspaper *Obrana Lidu*, *Svobodné Noviny* of the cultural organizations and *Národní Osvobození* of the Czech legionnaires. Each National Front party also issued its own print media on a county or region level.³

Note that after the war and until February 1948, there was no form of official censorship. However, there was sometimes recorded tension between the communist minister Kopecký and certain print media that were not consistent with the line of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. One of these episodes was related with the initiative of the non-communist city councilors of Prague who refused to allow the organization of a solidarity event in support of "Democratic

2 Zieris (1947).

3 The policy followed post-war in the neighboring Slovakia – the media of which we will not be dealing with in the present article – was quite different. The Slovak Ministry of Information, which was controlled by the Democratic Party, did not ban the publication of newspapers belonging to private entities. Therefore, until 1948, there were being issued print media in Slovakia that did not belong exclusively to the parties or to mass organizations friendly with the National Front.

Greece”, in other words, the government of Markos Vafiadis.⁴ Until 1948, there were no limitations as to the exercise of the journalistic profession. Even then, however, as is today, everyone understood that there were taboos, matters that no one dared to touch. Articles critical of President Edvard Beneš, reporting on the violent expulsion of the Sudetenland Germans, articles about the conditions prevailing in the Czechoslovak army or about the choices of the Soviet Union were considered to be out of the official line. Journalists that dared to refer to any of the above-mentioned issues or to criticize the choices of the Czechoslovak Communist Party were forced to leave the country immediately after February 1948.

Archival material – Operation of the information mechanism of the KKE

In the archive of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs there are six folders containing 674 indexed articles of mainly Czech, Slovak and known international print media concerning developments in Greece during the period 1945–1950.⁵ Four hundred seventy-one articles are from Czechoslovak newspapers, while 203 articles are from English, American, Soviet, Yugoslav etc. newspapers. The classification of this archival material is particularly problematic. In most folders, the articles are not classified according to chronological criteria, but according to some obscure political-geographical criteria that increase the vagueness of the whole undertaking. Since the folders do not carry any designation, we attempted a chronological classification based on the subject of the majority of news pieces contained in a particular folder.

The sources, from which information about the Greek Civil War is drawn, are in most cases, especially in the period 1945–1948, basically reports of international news agencies or reprints of articles of known newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Daily Mirror*, the Soviet *Pravda* or the Yugoslav *Borba*. Most articles

4 Markos Vafiadis (1906–1992) became a communist in his teens and fought with the partisans against the Germans during World War II. After the war he remained with the DSE guerrilla forces, rising to commander under the title General Markos. In December 1947 he proclaimed a provisional Greek government in northern Greece with himself as prime minister. After bitter internal rows with Nikos Zachariadis was purged as a ‘defeatist’ (October 1948). He settled in the Soviet Union, where he clashed with party leadership and was alternately rehabilitated, purged, and restored to party membership. He returned to Greece after the general amnesty (1983), and he was elected to parliament as a supporter of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (1989).

5 *Národní Archiv Praha, Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí – MZV* [Prague National Archive, Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. Folder codes: MZV – VA 863–867 and MZV – VA II 465.

of this period invoke Reuters, the Soviet TASS or the USA agencies United Press – UP and Associated Press – AP as their sources. Some reports, until early 1948, also cited the Yugoslav agency Tanjung as a source. Since 1947, there begin to appear more regularly articles invoking the party agency Telepress as a source, founded and staffed in the same way as other party agencies in various European capitals.⁶ This mechanism forwarded to Czechoslovak press translated communiqués of the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE)⁷ or announcements of the Greek Communist Party (KKE)⁸, as broadcasted by the party radio station “Free Greece”.⁹

Regarding the press material under examination, we can say that the percentage of comments, signed articles or authentic reports on the situation in Greece and the course of the Civil War, remains low. There is a total count of 32 signed reports, articles or comments. Greeks sign 14 articles, while Czech journalists and commentators sign the other 18. Regarding the Greek columnists, journalist Yannis Georgiadis, who appears as a correspondent of Greek communist paper *Rizospastis* in Prague in some archival materials, signs eight articles. The articles were published in various newspapers from May 1946 to September 1947.¹⁰ Miltiadis Porfyrogenis signs three articles, one is by Serafeim Maximos,¹¹ one by Thanasis Georgiou,¹² while one is by Dinos Xenos (clearly an alias). In order to comprehend fully the intervention of the KKE in the propaganda war, it would be useful to add some information about the mechanism of representation – information organized by the leadership of the Greek Communist Party in Prague.

Already in 1945, a Greek Office began operations in the Ministry of Information. The Hellenist lawyer Miloslava Vieweghová was in charge of the office. Following her initiative the Czechoslovak-Greek Association was founded in 1946, which played an important role in organizing solidarity events

6 Mavroidis (2006: 173–185).

7 *Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas* [Democratic Army of Greece].

8 *Kommunistiko Komma Elladas* [Communist Party of Greece].

9 Regarding the operation of the KKE information mechanism see: Matthaiu – Polemi (2003: 19–36). For more details about the operation of “Free Greece” radio station see: Psimuli (2001: 14–23).

10 This is apparently Yannis Malkotsis–Georgiadis, around 40 years old, a native of Varna, Bulgaria, of whom we know that was active since 1948 in the translational machinery of the KKE, working initially in Bulkes and later in Bucharest. Matthaiu – Polemi (2003).

11 For more details about S. Maximos see: *Aferoma ston Serafeim Maximo* [Tribute to Serafeim Maximos], Archiotaxio, Vol. 3, May 2001, 50–89.

12 Former editor of “Free Greece”, head of the respective Party agency in Berlin. See: Mavroidis (2006).

and fund-raisers for the fighters of “Free Greece”. The role of the Association was crucial in the subsequent period, especially regarding the preparations for the reception of children of political refugees in the spring of 1948.¹³ M. Vieweghová, who was a connoisseur of the Greek language, was the secretary of the Association and was in contact with Miltiadis Porfyrogenis, the Justice Minister of the first post-war Greek government under G. Papandreou as well as of the “Mountain Government” under M. Vafiadis. Porfyrogenis conducted regular visits to Prague and was responsible for leading the mechanism that represented the Communist Party in the Czechoslovak capital. The head of the mechanism was lawyer Dimitris Papas, who arrived in Prague in 1946 for medical reasons.¹⁴ In the same year D. Papas was appointed as an associate at the Ministry of Information, while simultaneously, he started working as editor of the Greek broadcasts of the Czechoslovak radio. D. Papas was active both in the information and publishing sectors.

In this information campaign, we also encounter Yannis Georgiadis who in 1946–1947 made his appearance in various Czech newspapers with eight articles. About Georgiadis we only know that he appeared as a correspondent of *Rizospastis* in Prague, while his traces are practically lost after 1948. In February 1949, after his expulsion from Paris, Serafeim Maximos came to Prague. He was a former leading member of the Communist Party, who personally knew Nikos Zachariadis,¹⁵ with whom he also shared common ancestry. Despite Maximos’s undoubted knowledge and multilingualism, beyond a few public appearances, he does not seem to have played another role in Czechoslovakia, apparently because he was considered to be stigmatized by his pre-war exclusion from the KKE. Miltiadis Porfyrogenis, during his Civil War visits in Prague, was making

13 Regarding the aims of the Czechoslovak-Greek Association see: Marantzidis – Tsivos (2012: 170).

14 Regarding the activity of D. Papas in Prague see: Tsivos (2014: 66–75).

15 Nikos Zachariadis (1903–1973) was the leader of the KKE from 1931 to 1956. He was arrested by the right-wing Metaxas dictatorship. From prison, he lent his political influence to a united antifascist front following the Italy’s invasion in Greece on October 1940. Zachariadis remained imprisoned and when the Nazis ultimately occupied Greece was transferred to Dachau, where he remained until the camp was liberated in May 1945. Along with Markos Vafiadis, Zachariadis was an integral figure in the formation and operations Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) during the Civil War. Following the collapse of the military effort in 1949, Zachariadis and other leaders of the DSE retreated to Bucharest. He continued to receive support as the General Secretary of KKE until the death of Stalin in 1953. Zachariadis fell out of favor and he was removed from his post with the support of Nikita Khrushchev by March of 1956. He spent the rest of his life in exile in Siberia, where – according to official KGB records – he committed suicide in 1973.

public appearances or had meetings with leading members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The presence of Porfyrogenis in Prague was documented by the occasional publication of his statements in the Czech press and by the publication of three articles signed by him. Porfyrogenis's "weakness" for Prague was undoubtedly supported by the fact that his partner – later on his wife – Maria Trifunovicova, had settled in the Czechoslovak capital.¹⁶

The first period of the Civil War (1945–1947)

Few reports from 1945 refer to what preceded the Greek Civil War.¹⁷ One news report speaks of terrorism against Slav-Macedonians; another speaks of the enlisting of collaborators in the Gendarmerie, while other news reports refer to the Greek government being displeased about the agreed war reparations. Regarding the latter issue, *Svobodné Slovo* in an article entitled "Greeks dissatisfied with their share of reparations" reports that during a visit of an EAM¹⁸ delegation in London, it was noted that "the Greek public opinion is deeply disappointed by the decision of the Reparations Commission to approve a percentage of 2.7% for Greece, while at the same time 3% was approved for Czechoslovakia and 6.6% for Yugoslavia".¹⁹ A month earlier *Svobodné Československo*, citing the Yugoslav radio as its source, published a news report under the title "Slavs persecuted in Greece". It is noted that there was a demonstration held in Monastir, during which "terror unleashed by fascist gangs against the Slavic population of Greece"²⁰ was denounced. *Mladá Fronta* published a telegram of the Soviet news agency TASS entitled "SS divisions in the Greek Gendarmerie". The article cites an accusation by EAM according to which "the Greek government violates the *Treaty of Varkiza*. The Security Battalions created by the German SS in Greece during the occupation period, are now part of the Gendarmerie and the National Guard. This takes place while 20,000 Greek patriots remain in prison and hunger spreads in Greece".²¹

16 Regarding the visits of M. Porfyrogenis in Czechoslovakia and his relationship with M. Trifunovicova see: Marantzidis – Tsivos (2012: 233–239).

17 Regarding the Greek Civil War see: Baev (1999), Marantzidis (2010), Margaritis (2000), Iliu (2005). About the involvement of Czechoslovakia in the Greek Civil war see: Hradečný (2003: 77–92), Marantzidis – Tsivos (2012: 212–230), Botu – Konečný (2005: 11–24).

18 *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo* [National Liberation Front].

19 *Svobodné Slovo*, 27.12.1945.

20 *Svobodné Československo*, 7.11.1945.

21 *Mladá Fronta*, 17.11.1945.

Since early 1946, the Czech newspapers usually refer to the first post-war elections in Greece in two-column articles from news agencies. It is typical that the news titles of all Czech print media, regardless of political preference, express strong reservations about the fairness of the elections. Most reports cite as their source mainly western agencies (Reuters, UP, AP), while the Soviet TASS news agency is mentioned only exceptionally. *Práce* published a news article entitled “Falsification of popular will and intensification of terror”. In the report, it is stated that according to the KKE the conditions in Greece are not suitable for conducting fair elections. At the same time, the decision of the Communist Party not to participate in the elections under these conditions is noted.²² *Mladá Fronta* published a news article under the title “The situation in Greece roughens – won’t the elections be eventually postponed?”. The article mentions that “divisions of ELAS²³ are reactivated in order to face attacks from the monarchist organization X, against which the government does not take any measure”.²⁴ The same newspaper published a news story on March 5 entitled “The Greek Left will not participate in the elections – Royalists’ terror reinforced”. In the preface, it is noted that representatives of EAM visited the prime minister and informed him of their decision to abstain from the elections.²⁵ On the same day, *Práce* published a news article under the title “Greek elections or electoral coup of the Right?”. In the report, it is stated that “monarchists attacked the headquarters of the Communist Party. According to what is reported in *Rizospastis*, the attack was led by Police Chief Evert, who had held the same position during the occupation period”.²⁶

On March 22, the communist newspaper *Rudé Právo* published a news story entitled “The British capital ordered elections for March 31”. On the same day, the socialist newspaper *Svobodné Slovo* published a news article entitled “A thousand observers in Greece – Chaos expands – Voices for and against the elections”. On the eve of the elections *Mladá Fronta* published telegrams from Reuters and UP about the upcoming elections entitled “The electoral farce in Greece is tomorrow – Not even the prime minister has the right to speak”. *Svobodné Československo* satirically headlined its own news story: “Democratic’ elections in Greece today”.²⁷

22 *Práce*, 26.2.1946

23 *Ellinikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos* [Greek People’s Liberation Army].

24 *Mladá Fronta*, 28.2.1946

25 *Mladá Fronta*, 5.3.1946

26 *Práce*, 5.5.1946

27 *Svobodné Československo*, 31.3.1946.

The Czech newspapers began to publish results and comments on the election results since April 2. The fact that that no newspaper reported on the bloody attack launched on the day of the elections by communist guerrillas against the Gendarmerie station in Litochoro is striking. This attack actually marked the beginning of the Second Civil War that lasted until August 1949.²⁸ The relevant titles of Czech newspapers are indicative of the climate in which the elections took place: *Mladá Fronta*: “Terrorism and incidents – Half of the Greek people boycotted the elections”, *Zemědělské Noviny*: “The Greek people rejected the reaction”, *Svobodné Československo*: “Greek electoral farce”. An article printed in *Mladá Fronta* on April 4 is also indicative of the situation: “Chaos surrounds election results in Greece – Churchill claims that there is democracy...”. *Rudé Právo* and *Svobodné Československo* alike published cartoons satirizing the “unimpeachable conduct of elections in Greece”.

From April 1946 until the eve of the constitutional referendum, the Czech media are mainly concerned with the persecution of trade union officials and youth organizations adjacent to the EAM. During the same period, several news stories refer to legislative decrees imposing prohibitions or sending into exile or to the firing squad leftist opponents of the government. From July 1946, news stories start citing the Telepress agency as a source, which was set up by the Greek Communist Party mechanism to inform the media in Czechoslovakia. For example on July 21, 1946 *Práce* published a two-column story under the title “Terror in Greece intensifies – Even children are sent into exile”. During the same time, *Národní Osvození* published a news article entitled “Executions due to communist activity in Greece”. The report, among other things, mentions the first death sentences issued by military courts and it particularly highlights the mass execution of seven people in Giannitsa.²⁹

From late August, the Czech print media focused their interest on the constitutional referendum and on the phenomenon of terror. The referendum was first

28 As First Civil War we call the clashes that occurred in 1942–1944, during the Occupation, between the EAM, and its military branch ELAS, which were controlled by the KKE, and the other resistance groups. After the liberation (October 1944) the prelude of another round of civil war took place in Athens, on December 1944. A bloody battle (*Dekemvriana*) erupted after Greek government gendarmes, with British forces, opened fire on a massive unarmed pro-EAM rally, killing 28 demonstrators and injuring dozens. The battle lasted 33 days and resulted in the defeat of EAM after the heavily reinforced British forces. The subsequent signing of the *Treaty of Varkiza* (February 1945) spelled the end of the left-wing ascendancy. All the while, White Terror was unleashed against EAM-KKE supporters, further escalating the tensions between the dominant factions of the Greek nation.

29 *Národní Osvození*, 24.7.1946.

mentioned on August 23 in the communist paper *Rudé Právo*. The article entitled “Imminent referendum – A farce in Greece” cites the Soviet TASS news agency as its source, which mentions a protest by Greek high-ranking party officials against terror methods used by royalist armed gangs. The article also refers to the murder of Kostas Vidalis, editor of the communist newspaper *Rizospastis*, by a paramilitary gang. We indicatively mention headlines related to the referendum:

Rudé Právo, 3.9.1946 (source: Reuters): The outcome of Greek “vote”: External interventions and fascist terror restore monarchy in Greece – The people’s struggle for freedom continues.

Svobodné Československo, 4.9.1946 (source: Reuters/UP/AFP): A tragedy for Greek democracy – Victory for terror and manipulation.

Právo Lidu, 4.9.1946: The king and his successor are impatient – Democracy pays a heavy toll for their return.

Práce, 8.9.1946 (source: United Press): After the Greek referendum: Three-quarters in favor of the monarchy – Democrats protest against election manipulation.

Národní Osvození, 8.9.1946 (source: Reuters): The king returns to Greece – 75% of the voters in favor of the monarchy – Referendum under conditions of terror.

On September 6, 1946, *Mladá Fronta* published an article by Yannis Georgiadis entitled “Another redundant king – What the Greek people want”. In the preface of the article, it is noted that: “The developments in Greece cause worldwide concern. The monarchist government managed to restore monarchy in Greece after the unreliable elections and an even more unreliable referendum. However, because neither the brutal and incompetent government nor the king are able to improve the tragic situation, they are trying to focus the attention of public opinion on neighboring states, citing non-existent threats... In order to clarify that this policy is not consistent with the views of democratic Greeks we publish today the objectives of the foreign policy of EAM, as presented by Yannis Georgiadis.” In the article, among other things, it is stated that one of the objectives of EAM is that territories inhabited by Greek populations (Cyprus, the Dodecanese) as well as territories in which the Greek element had been dominant in the past (Northern Epirus, Turkish Thrace) should be returned to Greece. The demand for the payment of war reparations for the damages caused to the country by the occupying forces of Germany, Italy and Bulgaria is also noted. After the news coverage of the referendum new reports follow that inform about the “Athens government’s decision to declare the country to be in a state of emergency due to the operation of armed groups, mainly in the areas of Macedonia and Epirus”.³⁰

30 *Svobodné Noviny*, 18.9.1946.

The first news piece regarding the creation of the Democratic Army of Greece – DSE is found in the pages of *Rudé Právo*. The news article is entitled “The Greek Democratic Army denounces the lies of the government”. In the report, which cites the AFP news agency as its source, it is stated among other things that: “The leadership of the DSE in Northern Greece denies that it maintains contacts with outside countries, that it is being armed by external forces and that it launches attacks from abroad. Its main suppliers are the monarchist groups that were equipped by the occupying British troops. The DSE was born from the persecution imposed by neo-fascists. The violations of *Varkiza Treaty* led the guerrillas to flee to the mountains. The DSE rejects allegations of disruptive aims, considers the Greek territory and its borders sacred and fights for the honor of the people, democracy and the independence of Greece. It also rejects the accusation of burning down villages and murdering women and children. It declares that it fights for the freedom of Greece.”³¹

Rudé Právo later republished statements of the KKE leader Nikos Zachariadis, originally published in *Chicago Daily News*, under the title “Who is responsible for the conflict in Greece – Statements by the leader of the Greek communists”. In his statement, Zachariadis stressed that the DSE was created by “democratic Greek citizens forced to take up the arms and flee to the mountains when they were convinced that there was no other way to defend their lives, their families and their children”. Then Zachariadis states that the right of self-defense is an inviolable right of democrats and therefore those who defend life and democratic rights cannot be condemned. When asked about who is responsible for the situation in Greece, the leader of the KKE replies: “The responsibility lies with the English occupying forces, the Anglo-Saxon machinations, their intervention in our internal affairs and the shameless behavior of the monarcho-fascist government that was established after the English intervention in Greece. They turned the *Treaty of Varkiza* into a worthless piece of paper bringing Greece to its current situation.”³²

Since mid-1946, the Czechoslovak media started reporting more regularly about legislative measures that established the function of temporary military tribunals, about the ban of organizations and unions adjacent to the KKE, about the operation of concentration camps and especially about death sentences and executions of communists. From 1947 until the end of the Civil War, we counted about 50 reports providing data on the number or the detention conditions of prisoners and exiled people and about death sentences. The reports mainly

31 *Rudé Právo*, 22.11.1946.

32 *Rudé Právo*, 30.11.1946.

emphasized the fact that among the prisoners and those executed there were many fighters who had fought against the German troops during the occupation period. Several news pieces cited reports of British delegations that had visited Greece or reports of British soldiers who had served in Greece. For example, *Práce* newspaper published a news article entitled “A report of a British parliamentary delegation about Greece – Testimony on government terror”. In the report the members of the British delegation noted that Greece should immediately “restore internal order and parliamentary liberties, to repeal the specific decrees and to ensure the return of all those exiled in various islets”. It also recommends new elections to be conducted under reliable voter lists.³³ Other news articles refer to medieval tactics followed by right-wing paramilitary groups in order to humiliate their dead opponents. The decapitation and public exhibition of the heads of dead guerrillas is mentioned, accompanied by relevant gruesome photos. *Práce* published testimonies of British soldiers who had returned from Greece in which they expose the gory details of the decapitation of dead guerrillas, which the Greek Minister of Public Order justified as necessary in order for the declared bounty to be paid.³⁴

It is striking that no Czech newspaper mentioned the creation of the Provisional Democratic Government – PDK,³⁵ under General Markos Vafiadis on December 24, 1947. The lack of news on the creation and composition of the first mountain government is a question hard to explain. We assume that the cautious approach of the Czech media must have certainly been influenced by the unwillingness of Moscow and its satellites to formally recognize Vafiadis’s government.

From the arrival of refugee children until the military defeat of the communists (1948–1949)

The folder MZV – VA II 465 contains 40 articles with clippings considering solidarity events organized by the Czechoslovak-Greek Association for “Democratic Greece”, as well as several articles regarding the hosting of refugee children from Greece and the international reaction caused by their arrival. The first articles are concerned with the coverage of the opening of a photography and art exhibition held on March 12, 1947 in a hall in Prague following the initiative of the Czechoslovak-Greek Association. *Národní Osvobození* mentions that the

33 *Práce*, 7.1.1947.

34 *Práce*, 13.11.1947. Other print media (e.g. *Mladá Fronta*, 12.11.1947) reprint gruesome pictures from the *Daily Mirror*.

35 *Prosorini Dimokratiki Kyvernisi* [Provisional Democratic Government].

exhibition would remain open until April 7 and it is about the “heroic liberation struggle of EAM – ELAS against the fascist conquerors as well as about the struggle of the Greek people against the new oppressors”. Most reports note that PDK minister Miltiadis Porfyrogenis attended and spoke at the opening of the exhibition.

The unilateral sympathy events for the PDK, organized at a time when Czechoslovakia still maintained diplomatic relations and signed trade agreements with the royalist Athens government, caused reactions among the other three parties (Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and National Socialists) forming, along with the communists, the National Front government. Therefore the communist newspaper *Rudé Právo* published on March 28, 1947 a two-column news article entitled “Malicious attempt to ban a demonstration of support for Democratic Greece – the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats and the National Socialists requested police intervention against an event organized by nationwide organizations”. In the article it is noted that the representatives of the three afore mentioned parties in the Municipal Council of Prague “despite strong protests by communists adopted an unprecedented provocative decision. They requested the ban of an event during which the sympathies of our people to the sorely tested and heroic Greek people were to be expressed...”. The report goes on to compare the struggle of “Democratic Greece” with the struggle of the Spanish democrats against fascism.

The Christian Democrat newspaper *Lidová Demokracie* responded to the article of the communist newspaper the next day by a single-column comment under the title “Discussion about Greece in the City Council – The democratic majority of the City Council against demagogy”. In the comment, it is mentioned that the request of the Czechoslovak-Greek Association caused a two-hour long discussion in the City Council, the majority of which “adopted a decision according to which it requests the ban of a protest directed against the current Greek government... The City Council must adopt decisions that serve the policy of the state outside its borders. At a time when decisions considering our borders are taken, it is not wise for nationwide organizations to take decisions that are inconsistent with the policy of the Czechoslovak government. Such interventions are considered unacceptable and constitute a dangerous interference in the internal affairs of other states”, as was noted in the article of the Christian Democrat newspaper.³⁶

The pattern of comparing the Spanish Civil War with the Greek Civil War appears later as well since the “Greek problem” became a side-face confrontation

36 *Lidová Demokracie*, 29.3.1947.

between the Czechoslovak communists and their political opponents within the National Front. Undoubtedly, members of the Christian Democrats, the National Socialists and the Social Democrats often became recipients of information leaked by the government of Athens and its Western allies considering the establishment of “international brigades”, members of which were allegedly communists from various Slav countries, who were to take part in the Greek Civil War. From what we already mentioned, it becomes clear that by the end of 1947 the communists had indeed the upper hand in the Czechoslovak political developments. However, they did not monopolize power and considering certain sensitive foreign policy issues, as were the demonstrations of solidarity with Greece, they were forced to respond to the declarations of discontent of their, albeit only formal, allies in the National Front government about the uncritical support provided to “Democratic Greece”. The situation was definitively clarified on February 25, 1948 when the communists began to monopolize power. A proof of this is provided by the triumphant reception given by the Czechoslovak press to the refugee children that arrived in Czechoslovakia two months later.

The first news story about the arrival of refugee children from Greece in Czechoslovakia was published on April 1, 1948 in the youth newspaper *Mladá Fronta* under the title “Greece: Ten thousand children will come to Czechoslovakia”. Two days later *Rudé Právo* confirmed the news about the arrival of Greek children but significantly limited their number. “2,000 Greek children will come to Czechoslovakia”, reads the title of the article, which states that “they will be hosted in premises of the unions until complete liberation from the monarcho-fascist government”.³⁷ *Právo Lidu* published news regarding the hosting of 2,000 Greek children. The newspaper mentions that members of the Czechoslovak-Greek Association had provided the information on the arrival of the children. It is also mentioned that children from Markos’s democratic Greece would be accommodated in premises of the unions, the Red Cross and the Catholic Church charity organization *Charita*.³⁸

On April 24, 1948, *Rudé Právo* was the first newspaper to publish a news article entitled “The Greek children have arrived”. In the report, it is noted that a train arrived from Belgrade at the Parkan border station carrying 749 children aged from 5 months to 15 years. “The children were taken away in order to escape persecution by fascists and the monarchist air force bombing... Over the next few days more Greek children will arrive as 12,000 children are currently threatened by famine in Greece,” ends the news article.

37 *Rudé Právo*, 3.4.1948.

38 *Mladá Fronta*, 7.4.1948.

Svobodné Noviny covered the arrival of the children at the Slovakian Parkan border station with an extensive report. An anonymous article entitled “A tragic mission – Greek children arrive in Czechoslovakia” describes the first moments of the arrival of the train carrying the Greek children and very eloquently speaks of the tragic situation the children were in, describing their fatigue, despair, fear and inability to communicate with the people welcoming them. It also describes the decontamination process and the spraying with DDT as well as the route the children followed until they reached Mikulov station, where they spent a period in quarantine. The report ends with an appeal to readers to send directly clothing and shoes to the children.³⁹

Related reports published at the same time by other newspapers were written in the same spirit. The relevant article of *Zemědělské Noviny* was entitled “The Greek children are satisfied in our country – Presents for the victims of the Civil War arrive from all places”,⁴⁰ while a day later *Národní Osvobození* publishes a report entitled “We saved the Greek children”. On June 10, 1948 four newspapers publish information provided at a press conference in Prague by “representatives of Democratic Greece” in order to reply to accusations by the government of Athens about kidnapping the children and the risk of them being slavified. *Rudé Právo*, in an article entitled “New provocation by the Greek monarcho-fascists: they request the return of the children after having murdered their parents”, notes that “children whose parents are in prison or were killed, were helped to escape Greece following orders of General Markos’ government. Due to time pressure, the government did not consult with international organizations but appealed directly to democratic organizations around the world. So far 10,000 children were saved, of which 2,500 are in Czechoslovakia. This display of humanity and international solidarity does not violate the integrity of the Greek state in no way”.⁴¹

The issue of the accommodation of the children and the Athens government diplomatic appeals is later mentioned in other newspapers as well. *Svobodné Slovo* for example reported on a press conference given in Prague by “Democratic Minister of Education and Social Affairs Petros Kokalis, expressing the gratitude of the Greek people towards Czechoslovakia about providing to children asylum in decent conditions, where surrounded by nature they are educated in the Greek spirit. The issue of the ‘abducted’ children was discussed at the United Nations and it was decided that they should be returned to Greece

39 *Svobodné Noviny*, 26.4.1948.

40 *Zemědělské Noviny*, 8.6.1948.

41 *Rudé Právo*, 10.6.1948.

if their parents would request their return. However, no parent has so far requested for the return of a child,” reads the report.⁴²

The last phase of the Civil War

Until August 1948 the news covering the course of warfare are not few and they usually rely on reports of foreign press agencies. The situation in this area changed radically from August 1948, when the Czech media placed the course of warfare at the heart of the “Greek problem”, drawing almost exclusively from reports of “Free Greece” radio station or from statements of KKE envoys in Prague. Several reports also refer to interventions of Soviet diplomats at the UN regarding the course of the Civil War, mainly citing TASS as a source. Enough publicity is dedicated to Partsalidis’s government composition and to General Markos’s “resignation due to illness”. During the last two months of the Civil War and shortly after its end, articles regarding Tito’s “back stabbing” increase in number.

In July and August 1948, numerous news reports refer to harsh conflicts between government troops and guerrillas taking place in the Grammos mountain range. The prevailing tone is optimistic about the outcome of the war for the communist guerillas. For example on August 20, 1948 *Lidové Noviny* spoke of the failure of the American intervention in Greece as American officials realized they could not curb the guerillas. *Svobodné Slovo*, citing statements of American officers in Greece, notes that the USA is faced with the dilemma of terminating its military intervention in Greece. “In another case more millions will have to be approved for military aid to Greece in the coming years. These pessimistic predictions follow the failed attack of government troops, since even though Markos was pushed back from a part of the front he managed to gain strategic locations elsewhere... General Van Fleet declared that for the absolute annihilation of Markos’s units he would need an army of 700,000 men, while currently the Greek army numbers only 130,000 men,” says the report.⁴³ In late October, *Obrana Lidu* published an extensive article under the heading “Greece is struggling for freedom and independence – Markos’s army celebrates the second anniversary of its foundation”. In the report, it is stated that General Van Fleet is essentially the leader of the Greek armed forces and that 65% of the expenses of the Greek budget is intended for covering the needs of the Greek security forces. At the same time, it is noted that “the aim of the so-called Marshall Plan aid was to transform Greece into a USA colony”.

42 *Svobodné Slovo*, 18.12.1948.

43 *Svobodné Slovo*, 19.8.1948.

Since early 1949, the news coverage regarding developments in the Greek Civil War thickens and radio station “Free Greece” as well as DSE press releases become the almost exclusive source of information. If there is something that characterizes news coverage of the last months of the Civil War in the Czech media that is exaggeration. Exaggeration in terms of the size of the success of the DSE on the military front, as well as exaggeration and picturesque description of the losses of the opponent and the situation in the ranks of the National Army. In short, the worse the situation on the front was for the DSE, the further news provided to friendly regimes and their press by the KKE mechanism were from reality. The passages cited below show that the news coverage of “Free Greece” had gotten a final divorce from reality.

On February 8, 1949, almost all Czech newspapers covered with extensive reports the decision of the 5th Plenum of the KKE Central Committee, which was assembled on January 30 and 31. *Rudé Právo* printed extensive excerpts from N. Zachariadis’s speech during the Plenum. What was said about the situation on the military front is indicative: “The Democratic Army recaptured the largest part of Pindos. The monarcho-fascists’ situation in the Peloponnese and Northern Greece is dire.” In the report, the changes made to the composition of the leadership are mentioned, while it is noted that General Markos was relieved of his duties due to serious illness.

After January 1949, the number of news reports about the “victorious operations” of the DSE grew. *Obrana Lidu* published a full-page report signed by Thanasis Georgiou with the title “How the Democratic Army of Greece lives and fights”. In the preface of the article, the operations of the DSE against strong fortified cities such as Thessaloniki, Karditsa, Edessa and Naoussa are mentioned. The DSE is described as powerful as ever and able to undertake decisively victorious operations against its opponents in 1949. It is noted that the victory for the DSE would be faster if it had the quantity and quality of weapons held by the opponent. A large part of the article is devoted to the position of the woman-fighter in the ranks of the DSE.⁴⁴ The Czech newspapers also covered the major offensive launched by DSE units in February 1949 against Florina. Of course, there was no mention about the crashing defeat suffered by the guerrillas and the loss of hundreds of members of DSE units. On the contrary, *Rudé Právo*, with a three-column article, declared that “monarcho-fascist units refuse to fight the democrats”. The news piece refers to “an increase in cases of open revolts in monarcho-fascist units as soldiers refuse to fight the democrats”. It

44 *Obrana Lidu*, 7.1.1949.

mentions that in Kastoria alone a court-martial sentenced 69 soldiers who refused to fight in Vitsi.⁴⁵

From March until September 1949, Czech newspapers reprint, almost on a daily basis, the press releases of “Free Greece” which speak of victorious attacks in the most unlikely locations in mainland Greece. Guerrilla units, during a time when they were under relentless persecution or were completely exterminated in Roumeli and the Peloponnese, appear to be conquering strategic locations, strategic villages or to be launching attacks causing thousands of deaths in the ranks of the “monarcho-fascists”.

The exaggeration of rival losses characterizes more or less all the announcements of military staffs. However, the question arises whether the political members of the KKE were able to diagnose the upcoming and irreversible defeat and to prepare their followers by moderating their rhetoric aggression, and possibly to point out the need for an honorable compromise. Serafeim Maximos, one of the two envoys of the KKE leadership in Prague, evaluates the course of events. One of his articles was published on March 25, 1949 in *Obrana Lidu* under the title “The fourth year of war in Greece”. In his front-page article S. Maximos ridicules the statements of US General Van Fleet, who shortly after the victorious battle of the government troops in Florina declared that 1949 would be the last year of the war. The communist journalist reminds the readers that the American general had predicted the crashing defeat of the DSE already in 1948, declaring that it would take only four weeks for that to happen. However, reality proved him miserably wrong. “1949 will be a year of truly decisive importance for Greece. However, it will be entirely different than what Van Fleet expects,” Serafeim Maximos notes with optimism in his article.⁴⁶

On the eve of Victory Day, *Mladá Fronta* published an “exclusive” article of Miltiadis Porfyrogenis entitled “New attempt for peace in Greece”. In his article, Porfyrogenis reminds of a letter sent on April 20 by the PDK to the SG of the UN, proposing him to mediate in finding a peaceful solution. He notes, however, that this proposal caused new aggressive statements by the “criminals of Athens”. Attempting to assess the situation of the “monarcho-fascists camp”, he characterizes it as worse than ever. The government’s soldiers do not want to fight because they realize that the time when their leaders could send them to slaughter without protest have passed. Entire brigades run away from the front as soon as they are slightly pressed by DSE’s small groups, notes the leading KKE member. M. Porfyrogenis then refers to the situation prevailing in the political

45 *Rudé Právo*, 6.3.1949.

46 *Obrana Lidu*, 25.3.1949.

camp of his opponents. He speaks of corruption scandals in which the king himself is implicated. “It is obvious that such a decayed, corrupt and hated by the people regime cannot resist for long,” Porfyrogenis stresses in his article.⁴⁷

Optimism prevails in the news releases broadcast by “Free Greece” radio station even during the summer months. Since early August 1949, the reports of “Free Greece” published in Czech newspapers had been concerned with the outcome of the battles at Grammos. Fierce battles are mentioned involving aircrafts making use of incendiary bombs (napalm). The attacks of “monarcho-fascists” appear to be repulsed by DSE units, causing hundreds of deaths in the ranks of their opponents. Since mid-July, the Czech newspapers begin referring to Tito’s betrayal as well. The first relevant comment directed against Tito was published on July 15, 1949 in *Práce* entitled “The traitor’s megalomania”. In the news piece, it is stated that accusations of the Greek PDK about Yugoslav officers cooperating with the Greek monarcho-fascist army with the blessings of their Anglo-American allies were confirmed. Two weeks later *Obrana Lidu* conveyed in its pages a comment of “Free Greece” under the title “Greek fascism will not be saved by Tito’s aid – Capitalist money aimed at saving the Trotskyist regime”. In the preface, it is mentioned that fascists and imperialists of all shades are exulted because of Tito’s defection, while at the same time they pose the strengthening of cooperation between Belgrade and Athens as a condition for granting a loan to the Yugoslav regime.⁴⁸

On August 2, *Rudé Právo* published a three-column news article entitled “The KKE announcement regarding Tito’s betrayal”. In the article it is noted that Tito’s and the imperialist agents’ clique were surprised by the revelation of their treacherous cooperation with monarcho-fascist Greeks. *Práce* published an extensive report by Dinos Xenos entitled “The Yugoslav betrayal aims at saving the Athenian regime – Grammos and Vitsi will become the graveyards of the monarcho-fascists”. The article also presents a map of the Greek-Yugoslav border, which the “monarcho-fascists” had allegedly crossed in order to attack DSE forces operating in Kaimaktsalan from behind. The same report states that government forces, during their attack at Grammos from August 2–9, counted about 6,000 dead and wounded.⁴⁹ On August 17, *Lidová Demokracie* published an extensive report entitled “The heroic struggle of the DSE – The attack led by the Americans and the English will fail”. On the same day *Rudé Právo* printed a four-column story under the title “The attack at Grammos had a cost of 15,000 dead

47 *Mladá Fronta*, 8.9.1949.

48 *Obrana Lidu*, 30.7.1949.

49 *Práce*, 14.8.1949.

for the monarcho-fascists – the DSE is better equipped and more experienced than last year”. On September 1, 1949, two days after the final defeat of the DSE at Grammos, *Lidová Demokracie* published a new news release of “Free Greece” under the title “The heroic resistance of the democrats at Grammos mountain range”. In the report, it is stated that DSE units unabated continue to defend their strongholds at Grammos. There is also talk about offensive operations by DSE units in the areas of Epirus, Thessaly and Central Macedonia.

On September 24, 1949, *Obrana Lidu* first published a story entitled “Greek Democrats in favor of ending the Civil War – The DSE develops intensive action on the fronts and at the enemy’s rear”. In the report, it is stated that the PDK sent a memorandum to the United Nations, expressing its willingness to end the Civil War based on proposals submitted by the Soviet Union at the spring meeting of the United Nations. At the same time, the article refers to attacks launched by the DSE in most parts of northern Greece. *Obrana Lidu* published the final report referring to “Battles in Greece” on October 16, 1949, on the same day as the KKE Central Committee announced the temporary cessation of military operations from Bureli, Albania.⁵⁰

The decision was published on October 18, 1949 in *Rudé Právo* under the title “Announcement of the Greek PDK for the temporary cessation of military operations – The DSE has not surrendered its weapons”. In the announcement, it is characteristically stated that the Democratic Army did not surrender its weapons, it just stopped firing. It retreated due to the consequences of the overwhelming material superiority of the foreign conquerors, strengthened by the Tito’s backstabbing betrayal. It is also noted that “while monarcho-fascism continues its murderous orgy, thousands of fighters remain in Roumeli, Thessaly, Epirus, Thrace and Macedonia, in Crete and other islands, ready to defend their lives and the lives of the people from the firing squads of the executioners of Athens”.

Conclusions

The Czechoslovak press covered the developments in Greece with hundreds of reports from the end of 1945 until the end of 1949. The focus of attention was initially on the conduct of the parliamentary elections and the constitutional referendum, the terror attacks, the bans of organizations, the operation of concentration camps, the death sentences and executions of communists. In this period, most articles drew their information mainly from western press

⁵⁰ *Obrana Lidu*, 27.9.1949.

agencies. However, they knew how to filter their content as they could sense which side implicitly supported the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which had become the largest party in the country and was in control of the Ministry of Information.

It is indicative that from the end of 1946 the use of the term “monarcho-fascist” was generalized to characterize opponents of Greek communists while the use of the term “democratic” was used to characterize the followers, the government, the territory and the army created by the KKE in Greece. It is evident that from the beginning of 1947 the information of the Czechoslovak media was influenced by the mechanism organized by the leadership of the KKE in Prague, in which Dimitris Papas and Serafeim Maximos played an active part under the guidance of Miltiadis Porfyrogenis. From 1947, the two of them began supplying the Czechoslovak media with numerous translated announcements of the KKE and DSE leadership that had been earlier broadcast by the party radio station “Free Greece”. This mechanism, as well as the Czechoslovak-Greek Association, put forth the initiative to organize fund-raising and dozens of other solidarity events for “Democratic Greece”, as well as for the welcoming of refugee children. Czechoslovak media covered these events extensively.

Towards the end of the Civil War articles reporting on the course of military conflicts dominated the relevant news coverage. Characteristic of these news articles is the exaggeration in terms of the operational possibilities and the activity of the DSE, which appeared to be causing huge losses to its opponents. Along these articles, there were also incurably optimistic comments of KKE members, who until the last moment did not cease to speak of the imminent victory of the DSE forces.

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