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# Greeks in Hungary: From the Orthodox Greek Merchants to the Refugees of the Greek Civil War

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## Abstract

The current face of the Greek community in Hungary was undoubtedly shaped by the political refugees who arrived in Hungary due to the Greek Civil War and their descendants. However, this Greek community recognises the legacy of the Greek merchant diaspora of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which played a decisive role in the modernisation of Hungary as its own heritage. Therefore, I will briefly describe what this heritage consists of and how contemporary Greeks relate to it. I will then review the history of the resettlement of Greek political refugees in Hungary, with a particular focus on Greek children who arrived in Hungary without parental care. I will present their forced departure from Greece, their arrival in Hungary, their settlement, and their integration, partly based on archival materials and mainly on life history interviews.

## Keywords

Greek political refugees, Greek Civil War, diaspora, Hungary, oral history

## 1. Greek diaspora in Hungary during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries

It is widely recognised that when discussing Greeks in Hungary, we should think of two communities that were separated in time and have very different social characteristics. The current face of the Greek community in Hungary was largely shaped by the refugees who arrived in Hungary after the Greek Civil War and their descendants. This Greek community maintains local self-governments throughout the country, operates schools, cultural associations, and various other collective institutions, and publishes books and magazines. However, another Greek diaspora played a decisive role in Hungary during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, namely the orthodox Greek merchants of that period. Furthermore, we can distinguish two subgroups of this Greek merchant diaspora in Central Europe, particularly in Hungary.

The first and larger group appeared in Transylvania and the eastern regions of Hungary in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when these areas were still under Ottoman administration. They primarily resided in the mountain settlements of Macedonia and Thrace but expanded their activities further north following the routes of the itinerant trade. Their mass settlement in Transylvania can be traced to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and in Hungary at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (cf. Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

They settled primarily in regions where they could rely on existing local markets, for example, in agricultural trading centres such as Nagyvárad (Oradea, now in Romania) or Kecskemét, and the wine-producing areas of Gyöngyös, Eger, Miskolc, and Tokaj. They were also the first source of the Greek merchant diaspora in Pest.<sup>2</sup> Their resettlement and the settlement of the newcomers in Pest was closely linked to the development of the second Greek merchant diaspora from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on, thanks to the customs privileges granted by the Treaty of Požarevac. They were mainly engaged in wholesale activities, the framework for which was not defined by treaties with local authorities but by imperial conventions. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Greek community in Pest was still in regular contact with those who remained in the Ottoman Empire due to trade and family relations. The secret Society of Friends was also established in Pest, which was closely related to the movement of Velestinlis Rigas's followers in Vienna.

Undoubtedly, today's Greeks in Hungary are not direct descendants of this diaspora. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, today's Greeks in Hungary recognise

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1 Bácskai (2006).

2 Seirinidou (2006), Katsiardi-Herring (2012).

this diaspora of Greek merchants as their ancestors. For this reason, they organised various events related to the role of the Greek Orthodox merchants of the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century in Austria-Hungary. In 2005, for example, a conference entitled “Bridge of Chains – The role of Greek merchants in Austria-Hungary” was organised on the prominent role played by the diaspora of the Greek merchants of Vienna and Budapest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the development of Hungary. The choice of the conference’s title was symbolic as the Hellenic banker of Vienna, Baron George Sina, played a key role in the creation of this bridge. Baron George Sina also financed the construction of the Athens Observatory, which is still home to a number of research centres in Athens.<sup>3</sup>

The building of the “Bridge of Chains” started in 1839, with Count István Széchenyi, a descendant of a noble family, as the originator and George Sina as



Figure 1. Greek communities (see the dots) in the Kingdom of Hungary during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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the head of the project. The “Chain Bridge”, the first permanent bridge between Buda and Pest, contributed in a decisive way to the urban unification of the two cities and eventually to the formalisation of the city as the capital of Hungary (cf. Figure 2). Over time, this bridge has undoubtedly emerged as one of the most important symbols among the monuments representing Hungary.

3 Asimakopoulou (2006).



Figure 2. Domokos Perlasca: *A budai vár a Lánc híddal* (The Buda Castle with the Chain Bridge), 1849.

© Historical Gallery, Hungarian National Museum

The conference took place at the Headquarters of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The choice of the venue was also highly symbolic because George Sina's son, Baron Simon Sina, was the greatest sponsor of the construction of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' headquarters. It should be noted that Simon Sina also financed the construction of the Academy of Athens.<sup>4</sup> In 2007, the Research Institute of Greeks in Hungary and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences established the Simon Sina Award in honour of the Greek sponsor. The Simon Sina Prize is awarded to natural or legal persons who have contributed to the promotion of Scientific Research in Hungary. On the occasion of the award, the Research Institute of Greeks in Hungary published a bilingual photo album dedicated to the life of Simon Sina and a bronze medal with his portrait (cf. Figure 3).<sup>5</sup> The Research Institute of Greeks in Hungary also published a number of bilingual Greek-Hungarian books concerning this first Greek diaspora, among them a book about the Greeks of Pest and Buda and one about Takiatzides, the famous Greek merchant family from Kozani.<sup>6</sup>

In 2010, on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Simon Sina's birth, the Research Institute of Greeks in Hungary organised a conference at the Great Hall of the

4 Chatziioannou (2012).

5 Kerényi (2006).

6 Cf. Sasvári - Diószegi (2010), Pampas (2012).

Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Then, in 2011, on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition “Greek Heritage. The Greek Orthodox Diaspora 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century”, a second conference was organised in the Conference Hall of the Old Parliament at the National Historical Museum in Athens entitled “The role of Greeks in the modernisation of Hungary”. The conference lectures were published in a bilingual book.<sup>7</sup>

This is obviously a rich heritage that the current Greek minority in Hungary has incorporated into its ethno-cultural identity as its own tradition. However, of course, its identity is still fundamentally defined by the fact that it is a community that emerged after arriving in Hungary due to the Greek Civil War. Next, I will present some characteristic details of this community. This phase of the presentation consists of three parts. First, I discuss the main facts of the arrival and reception. These are well-known and well-researched stories in the case of all Central European countries, and I have not discovered any new facts.<sup>8</sup> I merely intend to present and interpret these phenomena somewhat differently, namely, within a preliminary – Czech-Romanian-Hungarian – comparative framework. Second, I present the main facts of the reception and placement of children arriving in Hungary. Finally, based on three life story interviews, I will present some cases of the Greek children’s grand journey in Eastern European societies from the initial trauma to solace.



Figure 3. Simon Sina medal.  
© Nikos Fokas

## 2. Main facts of arrival and reception of political refugees

### 2.1. Summary – the case of Czechoslovakia

The recent monograph by Konstantinos Tsivos<sup>9</sup> makes it clear that the reception of Greek political refugees in Czechoslovakia had some peculiarities. The first arrivals in Czechoslovakia in August–September 1949 were members of the Greek community of Bulkes.<sup>10</sup> Next, in November 1949, the first trainloads of refugees from Poland arrived after circumnavigating Europe by sea. Initially,

7 Fokas (ed.) (2012).

8 Cf. Voutyra et al. (eds.) (2005), Tsekou (2013), Fokas (2020).

9 Tsivos (2019).

10 Králová – Tsivos (eds.) (2015).

the villages vacated by expelled Sudeten Germans were chosen for the resettlement of the Greeks.<sup>11</sup> A similar method was also followed in Poland but not in Hungary. Germans were also expelled from Hungary but were replaced mainly by Hungarians expelled from Slovakia.

According to Tsivos, in Czechoslovakia, a significant number of 24 villages were selected and prepared for Greek refugees. However, this approach did not work, mainly because the Greek refugees could not find enough job opportunities locally. As a result, the refugees began to disperse as early as the spring of 1950, first to villages and small towns in the surrounding area but soon beyond the county borders. Finally, in 1952, the Communist Party of Greece took the initiative to resettle political refugees in towns where heavy industry was strong.

### **2.2. Summary – the case of Romania**

Very early, between June and October 1949, the Romanian authorities built 32 wooden houses, each with a capacity for 120–150 people, in the village of Florica, now known as Ștefănești, located 150 km northwest of Bucharest by car. According to Apostolos Patelakis, author of a monograph on the history of Greek political refugees in Romania and himself a descendant of Florica settlers, the first ship carrying refugees – the Romanian Transylvania cargo ship – sailed from Durres in Albania in August 1949 with 3,500 Greek refugees hidden on board.<sup>12</sup>

The encounter with reality was traumatic. A Greek individual involved in the preparation of the settlement and present at the reception of the new arrivals reported that the refugees cried and wailed with despair upon seeing the barracks and mass housing that awaited them. However, step by step, the settlement improved. Between 1951 and 1953, the refugees gradually moved to newly erected three-story urban-style buildings. Despite the improvements, the authorities unexpectedly decided to dissolve the settlement. During 1953–1954, its inhabitants were relocated to various industrial towns in Romania. It can be said that Florica (renamed Partizani after the execution of Nikos Belogiannis) missed the opportunity to become a second Greek settlement in Central Europe after the village of Beloianisz in Hungary.

### **3. Housing and employment of Greek refugees in Hungary**

In Hungary, Greek refugees were initially resettled in holiday homes at Lake Balaton. However, this was obviously only a temporary solution. A proposal

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11 Tsivos (2019: 77).

12 Patelakis (2019).

for housing and employment for Greek refugees was discussed at the highest level by the Organising Committee of the ruling party in April 1950.<sup>13</sup> A strictly confidential proposal – produced only in 11 copies – on housing and employment for Greek refugees reveals:

*There are around 7,000 Greek refugees in Hungary. They arrived in two larger groups: about 3,000 children earlier and, during 1949, about 4,000 political refugees of various ages.*

*The care and education of the 3,000 children who previously arrived without parents is satisfactory.*

*Of the 4,000 or so Greek refugees who arrived in the second group, 3,400 are accommodated in various holiday homes (3,000 in holiday homes at Lake Balaton).*

In addressing the theoretical aspects of the issue, the authorities decided that:

*Refugees able to work should be put to work as soon as possible to earn enough to support themselves and their families.*

*To achieve this:*

*Of the adults of working age, 1,500 have to be placed in industry and 900 in agriculture.*

### **3.1. Resettlement and employment of Greek political refugees in industry**

Based on the accepted proposal for a solution,

*the 1,500 refugees to be employed in industry (1,900 including family members) have to be housed in Budapest, in the former Tobacco Factory site, after appropriate rebuilding (cf. Figure 4).*

What was life like in the “Tobacco Factory”? Below are some related stories:<sup>14</sup>

*Well, life was good, but what the living conditions were like, you can't imagine. Rooms were like a corridor, one and a half meters wide and six meters long. It used to be a long building, I don't know, three hundred meters, a tobacco factory. And that was blown up during the war, bombed, and cleaned up, and they were big workshops, divided into compartments.*

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<sup>13</sup> Dzindzisz (2013), Fokas (ed.) (2017).

<sup>14</sup> Fokas (ed.) (2013), Fokas (ed.) (2017).





Figure 4. The main entrance of the “Tobacco Factory” in 1963.  
© Vlachos - Raptis - Fokas (eds.) 2017.

*The first apartment we got in the Tobacco factory... it was a 4 × 3-meter apartment, a 4 × 3-meter room, two beds, where I slept in one bed with my sister, and my father slept in the other bed with my mother.*

*One floor with 14 apartments all of which were one room. There was nothing more. [...] Well, it had 8 gas stoves, a common kitchen for 14 families... Inside the apartment, there wasn't even a tap to turn on and say, “I'm going to have a glass of water”.*

*Those were times when I imagine it must have been very hard for our parents. We as children, because we grew up in that environment, we never once felt that we were deprived of anything, in the sense that we were all Greek children - all the time.*

*There the Tobacco Factory was a closed quarter, a closed quarter, a big gate, I think it closed at 8 o'clock, nobody could get in there. Of course. I think it was 8 o'clock, or 10 o'clock, I think it was 8 o'clock, at night. They closed the gate, nobody could get in, it was a Greek quarter. It was very difficult for the Hungarians to get in. So, we only had contact with Greeks.*

*This Tobacco Factory is a symbol for me. [...] The truth is that we were in a foreign place. [...] It was not easy for us to grow up there and live in Hungary.*

*It was not easy. The Greek temperament, I think, is completely different... it's completely different from other people's. But there in the Tobacco Factory where we were, I think it was 1,500–2,000, we don't know exactly how many people were there, how many families were there, but there we were really a small village, a small Greek village. Where we were children, we played, we lived together. But we didn't care about that, the good thing was that we had a good time, we were treated very well by the Hungarians.*

### 3.2. Resettlement and employment of Greek political refugees in agriculture

For the housing and employment of Greek agricultural workers, the authorities opted in April 1950:

*[...] the construction of a new village, about 400 village dwellings, usually built with local materials, will be needed to house all the agricultural workers (1,700 including family members). [...] The new village should be built in such a way that the refugees participate in the construction of the houses.<sup>15</sup>*

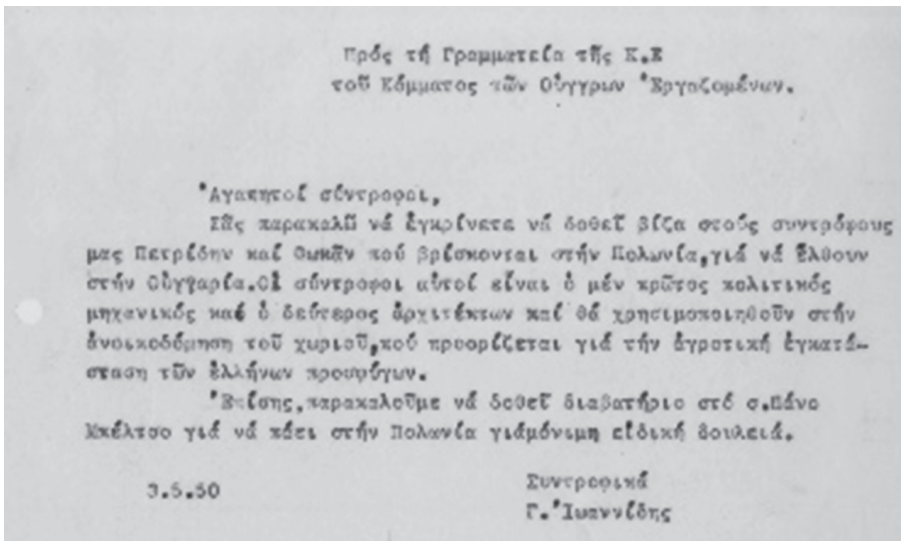


Figure 5. Letter of Ioannides.  
© Archive of KKE, ASKI

In Figure 5, there is a letter from the GKP's Deputy General Secretary Ioannides, dated 3 May 1950, asking the Hungarian authorities to grant visas to comrades



Figure 6. The Greek village under construction.  
© Vlachos – Raptis – Fokas (eds.) 2017.

Petridis and Fokas, who were in Poland. Petridis was a mechanical engineer, and Fokas was an architect; so that they could participate in constructing a Greek village. The construction of the village began in May 1950 (cf. Figure 6). The first inhabitants of the Greek village – as it was called then – moved in in November 1950. This village, named the village of Beloianisz after the execution of the communist martyr, still exists today, and Greeks, even though they are minority, still play a dominant role in the life of the village.

#### **4. Reception and placement of children arriving in Hungary without parental care**

It is well-known that on 4 March 1948, the so-called Radio Free Greece, then based in Belgrade, announced that due to the immediate emergency caused by bombings by the Greek Royal Air Force, the Provisional Democratic Government had called on the People's Democratic countries to take in the children from the bombed villages. In Hungary, a report dated 10 April 1948 (cf. Figure 7) revealed that the National Centre for National Relief in Budapest was informed on 3 April 1948 that it has to accommodate 2,000 Greek children. Based on this official report on the arrival and resettlement of the Greek children, we learned that the authorities have decided:

1/ Upon their arrival, we will keep the children in quarantine for 10–12 days. After disinfection, antiparasitic treatment, a first clothing supply, various medical examinations and recording the children's details, we will start settling them.

2/ During the 10 days of quarantine, we set up and equip institutions suitable for mass reception.

- On 7 April 1948, the first train arrived with 860 children and 14 adults.
- On the morning of 9 April 1948, the second train arrived with 720 children and 18 adults.

while

- In the afternoon of the same day, the third train arrived with 607 children and 5 adults.

[...]

Upon arrival, they received a rich soup prepared at the Jewish Hospital, and cocoa, tea, a sweet bun, and loaves of bread. The children and their Greek adult attendants were taken by Red Cross trucks in groups of about 50 to the Váci Street Disinfection Foundation, where, after disinfection, they received new clothing. From there, they were taken by bus to accommodations in the three camps.

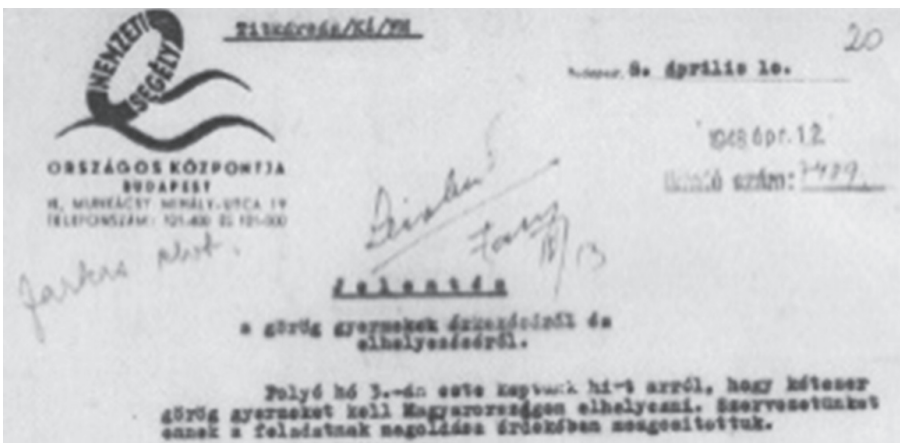


Figure 7. The header of the official report.

© National Archives of Hungary, MOL\_FOND, 10/4/1948

According to an official report on 20 April 1948, the population of the various institutions was as follows:

|                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Camp Mátyás           | 841 persons          |
| Camp Andrásy          | 1,130 persons        |
| Camp Szent László     | 201 persons          |
| Asylum                | 33 persons           |
| Hospital Szent László | 14 persons           |
| Hospital Margit       | 1 person             |
| Hospital str. Madaras | 4 persons            |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>2,224 persons</b> |

According to the same report, the age distribution of Greek children was as follows:

|                        |          |           |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|
| 0-1 years old          | 5 boys   | —         |
| 1-5 years old          | 284 boys | —         |
| 6-13 years old         | 819 boys | 748 girls |
| 14-18 years old        | 179 boys | 141 girls |
| more than 19 years old | 1 man    | 34 women  |

According to the same report on 20 April 1948:

*Children are generally in good health, although there was an increased occurrence of colds in the first days, with 109 children being partially hospitalised and under hospital supervision. Seven cases of typhoid fever, 4 cases of dysentery, and 7 cases of pneumonia were reported as serious illnesses, but none led to major complications.*

Petros Kokkalis, the Minister of Education of the Provisional Democratic Government, proposed the establishment of Greek schools for the 2,684 Greek children living in Hungary as early as the summer of 1949. According to the proposal, these schools would teach the children's native languages, Greek or Slavo-Macedonian, Greek history, geography, and political knowledge. These subjects would be taught by Greek teachers. In primary school, Hungarian language was also taught along with arithmetic, science, and technical knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

The children were placed in five orphanages or children's homes at Dég, Balatonalmádi, Fehérvárcturgó, Balatonkenese, and Hőgyész. According to an

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16 Bontila (2000).

official report, the total number of children in 1951 was 1,750, with the following distribution:

|                |     |
|----------------|-----|
| Dég            | 320 |
| Balatonalmádi  | 412 |
| Fehérvárcsurgó | 376 |
| Balatonkenese  | 379 |
| Hógyész        | 321 |

In Czechoslovakia, the children were placed in around fifty orphanages/children's homes. Romania, after Yugoslavia, took the largest number of children in twelve children's homes.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Many refugees, many stories

Where did the children who arrived in Hungary come from, why did they come, and how did they get there? The general pattern of the stories is known, so in the following, I will present some micro-historical variations based on some characteristic details quoted from three life-story interviews. I intend to present a coherent story of "The Great Journey" of the Greek children, from the initial trauma of uprooting to the consolation of integration into Hungarian society. In the following paragraphs, these witnesses speak for themselves.

### The war has arrived

- *Early memories? In the forties, I was already four – testified our first interviewee, who was born in 1936 in the Epirian village Distrato (Δίστρατο)*
- *and have very vivid memories of the Italian occupation.*
- *The men were collected one by one and taken to the school, where they were beaten and tortured to hand over their weapons. The image is vivid in my mind: my mother and my father's sister bringing home my father, wrapped in a blanket, who had been beaten so badly that he was unable to walk.*

### The German occupation

- *The next major image to leave its mark is the German occupation. I was already 7 years old.*

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17 Bontila (2000), Patelakis (2019), Tsivos (2019).

- *The news spread from village to village that they were coming. The women buried what they wanted to save. The Germans dug everything up. The villagers fled up the hill. A few old people, unable to walk, perished in the village.*
- *From up there, we watched, the adults in despair, the children in great amazement, as the whole village burned. Out of two hundred houses, barely twenty remained intact.*

### **The winter of 1941-1942**

- *Then came the great famine. We had already eaten every green thing there was – even the clover. I still remember it vividly: my mother would mix a little flour with it; her tears were falling as she watched my sister and me chipping at flour stains.*

### **Civil war 1946-1949**

- *The Second World War was barely over, and before we could even sigh with relief, new horrors began.*
- *My father helped the partisans in his own way. [...] One of his colleagues betrayed him in the village. [...] They sent people to his workplace to kill my father. [...] They changed their minds and took him to Janina instead. So, they brought him first to our village. That was in '47. He was kept in the cellar of a house in the village with several other prisoners for 9 days. My mother and I went every day and took water. [...] One day I didn't recognise my father. He looked out of the basement with a swollen, blue head. During the night, he was tortured by the cruellest interrogator, who beat the prisoners so hard the whole village resounded with their cries.*
- *Nine days later, my father was sent to prison in Janina with another man. That was the last time we saw him.*

*I was born in April 1942 in the Macedonian village of Chionato (Χιονάτο) – reported the second witness.*

- *Chionato had very few inhabitants. In fact, when the Greeks of Asia Minor were expelled from Turkey, many of them were settled here and they were given land.*
- *As the village was only a few kilometres from the Grammos Mountains, the main theatre of fighting, there were several larger and smaller clashes nearby. The locals had learned that taping newspaper to windowpanes prevents them from shattering from the resonance of the bombs.*

- However, as the fighting was getting closer, my mother, [...] and my aunt decided to move [...] further north, away from the fighting.
- We wandered around a lot, but only at night. By the end, we were hiding in the caves at the eastern foot of Grammos.
- We learned, for example, to distinguish airplanes by their sound, by which we knew which was a reconnaissance plane, the “Galatas” (“The milkman”) as we called it, that came early in the morning, like the milkman, or the bombers that followed.
- We lived in a huge cave, big enough to accommodate two villagers. There were about 600-700 of us in all. We lived there and, before that, we wandered around a lot, but only at night.
  
- [...] my father [...] went to the partisans - highlighted a key element of his life story the third witness from the village Lefki (Λεύκη Καστοριάς).
- We had constant house searches; they were always looking for my father. Once they even tried to burn down our house. They had my mother bring in straw, which they put under the wooden stairs and lit it. My grandmother tried to put out the fire. Then they hit my grandmother with a gun.
- As a nine-year-old, of course I was scared. Later, two armed government soldiers took me behind a neighbour’s house and asked:
  - Where is your father?
  - He went up the mountain!
  - Where did he go?
  - I don’t know!
- Then an elderly man came from the neighbourhood [...]. What are you doing with this child, aren’t you ashamed of yourselves? [...] So, they took me by the ear to the end of the village. To the chapel of St. Demeter. And there again:
  - Where’s your father? Where did he go?
  - I said, - that way! And I pointed at the mountain.
- Then they fired a shot into the air and left me there. I ran back to the village, back to our house and saw everyone crying. But they weren’t crying because they had been beaten, but because they thought I had been killed, that I was finished.

### **The departure**

- My father’s message arrived after these antecedents. [...] going to Yugoslavia or Albania until the end of the civil war. When the war is over, we’ll return anyway. So, my mother agreed.



According to our first interviewee:

- [...] the news came – that the village would be bombed in three days.  
 - My mother was in a dilemma whether or not to send the children when the news came that the Albanians were taking in the children for three months. Now what? She can't ask my father, he was imprisoned but she, my aunt and grandmother finally decided to send three of us. My two sisters and me, but they didn't dare to send my four-year-old sister.

- Soon a messenger came – stated the second interviewee – bringing the news that we had to leave quickly because it had been discovered – the huge cave, where they lived – and there would be bombing. It was quite a mess. We left at dawn and were well away when the reconnaissance plane, the Galatas, came and then the bombers appeared. Nothing was left intact.

- Suddenly, my father – he had already gone to the partisans – appeared and said that we had to cross the border now. The order came and we crossed at Erseka into Albania.

- We all spoke Albanian in the family. My maternal grandfather was from Korça in Albania. Many people came from Albania, anyway, serving in the houses. People were moving in and out, in fact, with Albania we were already a European Union of sorts.

- Slavomacedonian was spoken in the family, and Greek, too. The language of everyday communication was primarily Greek.

- The next day, trucks came for the children, and my sister and I were taken to Elbasan. That was when I was separated from my parents. I couldn't even say goodbye to my father because he was on some sort of mission.

- About 75 children were gathered in the village – said the third witness – with three caretakers, we were divided into groups of 25 and set off for Dendrochori. That's about eight kilometres away, and we did it all on foot.

- I was nine, there were some sixteen-year-olds, but there were also three-year-olds, and there was one half a year old. He was carried by the older girls [...].

- We got there, waited for someone to come, and escort us on. So, we always had a partisan with us who knew the way. He took us all the way to Gavros. That was also about 5–6 km away. More children joined us in Gavros, so we were a group of 98 with 4 escorts.

- Sometimes planes came, so we had to go in the evening. After Gavros, we went to Andartiko, which is near the Prespa Lakes on the Yugoslavian now North Macedonian border. From Andartiko we climbed over a mountain in the evening.

- In Yugoslavia (North Macedonia) we were placed with families. I remember they were very poor. They had almost nothing.

- We could communicate because the majority of our village was Slavic-speaking. In our family, three languages were spoken, Slavic and Greek, in addition to Vlach.

- We stayed in this village for about a week. [...] we boarded a freight train [...] my sister said they were very smelly; they must have been used to transport animals. Then we arrived in Belgrade.

- My mother accompanied us all the way to the Albanian border - reported the first witness - for five days we walked from village to village. Of course, the partisans arranged for us to sleep somewhere. There were places where we could cross one by one because they were already shooting from the front. Usually, we walked during the day, but there were times when we had to go at night. Because the partisans knew what to keep an eye on.

- My mother came with us all the way to the border. Here is the last village. Farewell to my mother. I can still see her. It stays with me as she walks away down the hillside through a jungle path. See you in three months! And she's gone. She's gone for me. I had no idea it was the last time we'd see her.

At this point I interrupt the witness' recollection and let her former teacher take over:

- A small girl with blue-green eyes and blonde hair. She stole my heart when we first met. Back then, like her peers, she barely spoke Hungarian. [...]

- One day she received a letter. She opened the envelope with feverish haste. I can still see it today. She was wearing a light blue dress with a tiny white pattern and a red ribbon in her hair. With one movement, she plucked the red ribbon from her hair and burst into heart-breaking tears. I should have known it was news of death. It was not uncommon in our home.

And at this point, I return to the interviewee's narrative:

- When my mom returned home, she and several other women brought clothes and food for the partisans. She was wounded in a bombing raid and died two months later in Central Hospital.

- We in Albania knew nothing about this. My sisters were informed sooner here in Budapest.

- But I was in the children's home in Csurgó. I found out about it only in '51. Imagine, until then I wrote to my parents a letter every month.

- I lost my father in '49 and my mother in '48. I thought they were alive, but no letters. Well, we knew there would be no letters. But we wrote them.

- I learned of their deaths when my aunt, who was in Poland in '51, wrote a letter to my sisters consoling them over my father's death. One day, this letter came to me in Csurgo. How did it come to me when it was addressed to them?!

- The next day I received another letter from Czechoslovakia. My father's sister lived there. She was consoling my sisters for my mother's death.

- So, I found out, with a difference of one day, that I had lost my father and my mother.

- That defined my life.

- In Albania, we were taken straight to Korça.

- Ninety children with three adults. My older sister, then 15, was also in charge of a group of children. There were about thirty children.

- In Korça, we were distributed to various families. [...] We stayed with the family for fifteen days.

- Then we were transferred to Vlora. We stayed there for nine months. Here they could only teach the first and second graders. In our village, I was already a third grader, but here I said I was a second grader. Just so I could go to school. I think I said that I was born in 1937, but when I went back home 30 years later, I found out that I was born in '36.

## **The arrival**

As the third witness attested:

- We were then divided up according to which train we would be on. Some 4-5 children from our village were sent to Romania, the rest, 74 of us, were sent to Hungary. When we got on the train, we fell asleep immediately. We were so tired.

- We arrived in Hungary in daytime, it was 7 April. The Eastern Railway Station. They were waiting for us there. [...] Since we arrived without papers they gave us a number, and I was number 1966.

- They took us to Széchenyi Baths in trucks painted white. I guess they were Red Cross vehicles. There, they disinfected us, gave us a bath, we stank.

- [...] I remember we walked like sheep. We watched "Mom" to see where she was going. She kept herding hard us to go here, go there. [...] So, we went. They took us to the Mátyás barracks and later to the Andrassy barracks. We were in big rooms together. The brothers slept together, next to each other. On beds next to each other, but if there weren't enough beds, we slept in a bed together.

- *In the yard of the Mátyás barracks there was a big square with big wooden huts where we played a lot. We felt like we had arrived. Yes. We're no longer on the march. No, no, we're here now. Well, we'll live here then.*
- *So, it took a month to get from our village to Budapest. Which is a long trip, and we were already homesick. Especially my little sister. She cried a lot: "When are we going home?" We told her that when this whole war is over, we would go back.*

The journey of the first witness was a little different:

- *In Albania, we were taken straight to Korça. [...] we were distributed to various families. [...] We stayed there for fifteen days.*
- *Then we were transferred to Vlora. We stayed there for nine months. [...]*
- *Well, after nine months [...] back in the cars and then on the train. [...] Crossing Yugoslavia we came to Hungary, arriving at the Eastern Railway Station. First, they took us to the disinfection centre. And then to the Mátyás barracks. [...] Because it was Christmas, a nurse went around with sweets and gave to everyone. By the time it was over, the first ones went up to the second floor to queue up there.*
- *You mustn't! - I remember the cleaning lady, loudly, almost singing, always saying that in the hallway. When she was mopping. It was the first Hungarian sentence we learned. It's not allowed!*

The doctor assigned to receive the children at the Mátyás barracks in April 1948 wrote in his diary:

*In April 1948, I could see the effects of the traumas of the experience and memory of the war, the sudden and forced separation from family and home on the children. [...] When I entered the courtyard of the barracks and looked around at all the children bustling about, I must admit that I was startled at first. A frightening image of deprivation, neglect, and misery appeared before me, seeing the many children in ragged clothes. They chased each other, crawled, howled around me and filled the whole yard.*

- *I remember, - underlined our third witness - we were standing by the fence, begging. To get money. So, we could go back to Greece. It must have been one of the older kids' ideas.*
- *We talked about how it would be good to escape and go back. Although we started out with the idea that we should wait until the partisans win.*

– But we got to know the Hungarian cuisine. We couldn't really eat it. The soups, the "bean soup" for example, we didn't know any other soups in the village, or I don't remember. The vegetable soup they gave us, who could eat that? We didn't want to eat it.

– So, we'd rather go home.

– I didn't eat the poppy seed pasta for a long time because I said it was minced, sugared ants, and later we found out that someone had washed the poppy seeds off. The cottage cheese pasta was the only thing we really wanted.

And then a contrary opinion of our first interviewee:

– What remains of Fehérvárcsurgó in my memory?

– The poppy seed pasta was the most amazing. If we bet on anything, it was the poppy seed pasta. Everybody made sure that they went for the end of the bread because it was a bigger piece. It's 49!

By then according to the third witness:

– We were starting to feel the absence of parents. Especially the younger ones.

– We were always busy, they were taking us somewhere, watching shows. I remember the Lilliput Children's Theatre, and they took us to the zoo, which was great fun for the kids.

– That we wouldn't be going back for a long time was something we could see, we could feel. When someone escaped, they brought him back.

– We were also each other's support. [...] We, who were brought up in Dég, to this day we are Dég's people, like the people of Fehérvárcsurgó, or the people of Kenese, and still stick together. It's an interesting thing, like a family, it's formed.

– I was skipping classes, taking two classes a year to catch up. I loved studying because it was drilled into us that we were studying to build a new Greece. They told us from the beginning that we were studying so that when we went back to Greece, we could build it. The Hungarian and Greek teachers both said this.

– We entered high school in 1952 – reported the first witness – 27 of us were the first to finish elementary school, and all of us went on to higher education. We lived on-campus college and attended the Anna Koltói high school.

– This was the first place where we were mainly with Hungarians. There were girls from the countryside, and there were also girls in state care. I still keep in touch with some of them.

- At that time, they could sense that Hungarian was not my mother tongue. Maybe it still can be felt. They could also feel it at university, but my classmates helped me.

- The children's home at Dég, therefore, has a double image - underlined the third interviewee - on the one hand, I've had a very long, life-long education from my teachers. Many friendships were formed then.

- At the same time, there was this element of homesickness. We already understood that we were not here temporarily and knew that it would be a long stay.

- When it really sank in that I couldn't go back, it really hurt. [...] I couldn't share this with anyone else because the others had the same problem.

- It made it difficult to talk to them about it. The common fate just didn't make it any easier. I actually escaped from this fate later on. For example, in the relationship with the girls.

- Everyday life, clearly, was what brought us together - remembered the first witness - that we had the same problems. We sang together, danced together, studied together. We did everything together. There was a choir that Aunt Irene organised, and then we went from village to village. To perform. I was not in the choir, I recited. I loved to recite.

- I was admitted to the Mechanical Engineering Technical School in Székesfehérvár - reported the third interviewee.

- There was another Greek boy in the dormitory, the others were Hungarian. The interesting thing is that they loved us. We were very good athletes, so we were involved in all kinds of sports.

- The language difficulties didn't come up here. They just always used to make fun of my name, because when we went into class, the teacher would say:

- Now go to the blackboard and then tell us what your name is! I said "Vlasev Lambro!" Write it down!

- But your certificate has a different name! I said, "my original name is Vlahos Haralambos!" He asked me to say it out loud. I said it out loud, and then everyone laughed, everyone. How can you pronounce that name?!

- After graduation, what next? - asked the first witness - My mother always wanted me to be a teacher. She was illiterate.

- She wanted to see me as a teacher, and I wrote on the application form that I was going to go to ELTE university. And then Ikonomu Michalis, you know who he was, the "grandpa", came and said "No!" Greece, because we were going

home, we were going back to Greece, and Greece needs doctors. Because we are after the war, and we need doctors.

– The group set up a very good team. So, they accepted us. They helped us when we needed it. Apart from university trips, we didn't have any other activities. We just studied and studied. It's amazing how much we wanted to measure up. Really. It was a prestige thing for us, that we had to live up to it.

– Because I wasn't just representing myself, I was representing the Greek community. We were the Greeks. We, as Greeks, had to deliver on everything. We went to summer camps, and I was always a brigade leader. When I got my diploma, I felt I had fulfilled a great task.

– Since high school, I have lived among Hungarians. I kept in touch with the Greeks as much as I could. I went to all kinds of programs, I went to Greek demonstrations. I've stopped going since I'm no longer young and I can't come home late.

– And on 8 August 1959, – said the third witness – I started to work at the Csepel car factory. I was received by the head of the engine plant. I wanted to learn to work on all the machines in order to go back to Greece well prepared. So, this motivation was still in me.

– They loved me! Being Greek may have had something to do with it. Everyone wanted to be friend with me, so I had lots of friends. Even now, when I'm retired and I don't go to their club, they miss me. We have a hangout in a restaurant, 15–20 of us used to get together there. Then we're always just reminiscing, drinking, and talking. Well, we're happy to see each other.

– In 1963, I got my passport, and, with my sister and her little boy, we took the train to my parents' house near Skopje in Yugoslavia (now North Macedonia).

– We were there for a month. It was good. My father tried everything to get me to stay. He also took me to the police and there they assured me that I could stay and that they would get me a job. They would get me an apartment, too.

– I told my father that I could not leave Hungary. I have my friends there, my job, everything. I was so homesick arriving in Hungary that I don't want to experience that again. [...] I have a lot of ties to Hungary. The workplace, people, colleagues, and then of course my friends from the village who were in Hungary and whom I can't leave. I felt like I was letting them down.

– I already have a job, I'm married, but I really started to feel at home in Hungary when I had my children, in '70–'71. By then, the homesickness had faded. In '84, when I went to Greece for the first time, all I wanted was to go to my home village.

– It's a strange thing. When my grandchildren ask me and I start telling them my life story, I realise, whoops, here's something interesting.

*- I got involved in something. The drift. So, I have drifted in my life. [...] Until I got married, until I had a family, I was actually drifting.*

But this life is another story. It is not possible to analyse it in detail here. I will just share two assessments from the witnesses themselves:

*- That in my life – summarised the first interviewee – the lack of love was the most important thing. For example, when I got my university degree, my biggest pain was that my parents couldn't be there.*

*- Do you understand? That was my biggest sorrow, because it was such a big thing that, well, I became a doctor. And I couldn't tell them, I couldn't tell them. This thing, the loss of my parents completely defined my mood, everything. When I got the news that they had died, I didn't sing for a year. They almost tried to fail me at school in singing.*

*- With the death of my parents, it was like they were saying to me: well, here's the life you have ahead of you. The responsibility is yours.*

*- It was a hard life! – underlined the third witness – Obviously, not an easy life. I always felt like a refugee. Alone, or an orphan, regardless of the fact that I knew I had parents and everything.*

*- Now, when I meet the pensioners, everyone makes the distinction that I'm Greek. That distinction is actually an honour.*

*- People talk to me differently, I feel.*

*- My environment makes me feel a bit different. Not in a negative way, I don't feel negative, but it this differentiation was more manifest than in case of Swabian or something else. They don't distinguish so much, they are more accepted, they are Hungarian.*

*- It's like they always ask,*

*- How can you live with a name like that?*

*- I say: Very well!*

## 6. To conclude and summarise

It is obvious that the current Greek minority in Hungary has a rich heritage, going back into the distant historical past. However, its identity is still fundamentally defined by the fact that it is a community that emerged after arriving in Hungary due to the Greek Civil War. This is why I presented some characteristic details of this community. First, I discussed the main facts of their arrival and reception. Finally, based on three life story interviews, I presented some case



stories of the Greek children's grand journey from the initial trauma to solace. From the analysis of the narratives has emerged that in their cases "this traumatic event is the violent rupture in childhood with the family, which haunts children's memories and defines their lives".<sup>18</sup>

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