

## Greek–Soviet relations 1959–1962: the Greek response to the Kremlin’s challenge

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*In 1959–62, relations between Greece and the USSR entered a new phase. The tactics of the Soviet Union regarding Cyprus in 1955–9 did not pay off, as the rift between Greece, Turkey, and NATO was largely bridged in the aftermath of the 1959 Cyprus agreements. However, the search for a Cold War détente engendered pervasive insecurity in a frontline state like Greece, always afraid that its larger allies might abandon it. Nuclear intimidation, Greek anti-communism on the one hand; on the other, the impressive development of trade relations, created a complex environment. This article, based on the archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry, and the personal archive of the Greek prime minister, Constantine Karamanlis, discusses Athens’ response to the new Soviet policy.*

**Keywords:** Greece; the Soviet Union; Cold War; policy making; diplomatic relations

### Introduction

Relations between Greece and the Soviet Union remain a rather under-researched chapter of the Cold War, especially when compared to relations between Athens and the western countries. Yet, it is an interesting case study in Cold War diplomacy, illuminating the perceptions, fears and hopes of a small member of the Western alliance. Greece nurtured deep feelings of insecurity because of its geopolitically vulnerable position and the recent memories of a civil war (which had also been the first war-by-proxy of the Cold War era), but was now experiencing rapid economic development. This article begins with a turning point in Greek foreign policy: the signing of the 1959 Cyprus agreements. During that year, too, opposition politicians visited Moscow, and a key political battle regarding trade with the Soviet bloc was fought in the Greek Parliament. It must also be noted that the major Cold War incidents of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 had implications for the relations

between West and East. Despite the fact that the Karamanlis government fell in June 1963, thus ending a long period of political stability, while there were strong signs of an aggravation of the situation in Cyprus, the analysis of this sub-period ends in late 1962, following the events of the Cuban crisis. While historical research has extensively analysed the relations of Greece with the United States and Europe in the early 1960s,<sup>1</sup> relatively treatments have been devoted to the other major party of the Cold War, the Soviet Union.

Greek policy had a dual aim: to offset perceived Soviet pressures on the political front, and to shape a convincing response to the growing climate of détente; and to stabilize the spectacular development of trade relations with the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc. Although access to the Soviet archives is easier than a few years ago, nevertheless major research problems still exist. The archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) for this period have not yet been fully declassified, although oddly enough later years are available; similar problems arise regarding the archives of the Russian Foreign Ministry. However, along with other primary Soviet and Greek sources, the archive of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the personal archive of Constantine Karamanlis have been comprehensively researched for this article.

Greek–Soviet post-war relations were normalized on 17 September 1953,<sup>2</sup> a few months after Stalin's death and the announcement by the Soviet Prime Minister, Georgy Maximilianovich Malenkov, that the USSR possessed the hydrogen bomb.<sup>3</sup> For the first time since 1947, the Soviet government sent an ambassador to Greece, the experienced diplomat Mikhail Grigoryevich Sergeev, who had served as director-general of the First European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> Sergeev would remain in Greece for many years, becoming a crucial personality for the Soviet image there. On behalf of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Soviet Foreign Ministry regularly prepared proposals aimed at developing Soviet–Greek relations. These included expanding economic and cultural ties, repatriating Greek political migrants, and improving relations between the countries of the Eastern bloc and Greece.<sup>5</sup> The expansion of trade was the basis of the new era, and

1 See I. Stefanidis, *Ασύμμετροι εταίροι: οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες και η Ελλάδα στον Ψυχρό Πόλεμο, 1953–1961* (Athens 2003) and S. Rizas, *Η Ελλάδα, οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες και η Ευρώπη 1961–1964: πολιτικές και οικονομικές όψεις του προβλήματος ασφαλείας στο μεταίχμιο ψυχρού πολέμου και ύφεσης* (Athens 2001).

2 From Russian historiography see Ar. A. Ulunyan, *Балканы: горячий мир холодной войны. Греция и Турция между Западом и Востоком. 1945–1960 гг.* (Moscow 2001) and A. A. Kalinin, *Греческий конфликт в контексте становления биполярной системы, 1944–1953 гг.* (Kirov 2018).

3 A. A. Gromyko and B. N. Ponomarev, (ed.), *История внешней политики СССР, 1945–1985* (Moscow 1986) 219.

4 A. A. Kalinin, 'Греция в советской политике в период «апогея холодной войны» 1949–1953 гг.', *Ярославский педагогический вестник* 4.1 (2012) 94–9.

5 A. A. Kalinin, 'Политические аспекты советско-греческих отношений в 1953–1959 гг.', *Вестник Вятского государственного университета* 12 (2017) 106–16.

the signing of the bilateral Trade Agreement on 28 July 1953<sup>6</sup> helped in this respect.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Greek–Bulgarian relations also resumed, although for the moment the two states did not exchange ambassadors.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the Soviet leadership urged the governments of Eastern Europe to normalize and develop relations with Greece.<sup>9</sup> This resulted in the restoration of trade relations and an increase in commercial exchanges with the countries of the Soviet Bloc, with the signing of bilateral trade agreements.<sup>10</sup> However, vehement Greek anti-communism inhibited the further strengthening of relations. The entry of Greece and Turkey into NATO in 1952 and the common attempts of Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia, as represented in the 1953–4 Balkan Pacts, to avert Soviet domination of the Balkans, as well as the signing of the Greek–US agreement for the installation of American bases in Greece, were landmarks in Athens’ incorporation into the defensive institutions of the West.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the Cyprus question which set Greece against Great Britain and Turkey in 1955–9, presented new opportunities for Greek–Soviet relations, as the Kremlin and the states of Eastern Europe supported the Greek Cypriot’s claim for Enosis (union with Greece).<sup>12</sup>

On 20 August 1954, the Greek permanent representative to the United Nations, Alexis Kyrou (who was of Greek Cypriot background), submitted to the General Secretariat the application for the ‘Implementation under the auspices of the United Nations of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of the nations on the people of Cyprus’.<sup>13</sup> A few days later, in September, debate took place over the adding of the item to the agenda of the General Assembly (UNGA). The delegates of the USSR and the Cominform states were in favour.<sup>14</sup> The main allies of Greece voted against and the USA abstained, thus posing new questions for and challenges to Greek foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> Greek diplomats had clear instructions from Athens not to cooperate

6 Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation, K. Karamanlis Archive, hereafter AKK, 1956/2A/325, Commercial exchanges between Greece and Russia, 23 June 1956.

7 G. Valinakis, *Εισαγωγή στην ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική 1949–1988* (Thessaloniki 1989) 56.

8 See E. Hatzivassiliou, ‘Greek–Bulgarian and Greek–Soviet relations, 1953–1959: a view from the British archives’, *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 8 (1992) 119–37.

9 E. Botsas, ‘Greece and the East: the trade connection, 1851–1984’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 5.2 (1987) 207–35.

10 S. Walden, *Ελλάδα και ανατολικές χώρες 1950–1967: οικονομικές σχέσεις και πολιτική*, I (Athens 1991) 77.

11 For the entry of Greece into NATO see D. Binder, ‘Greece, Turkey, and NATO’, *Mediterranean Quarterly* 23 (2012) 95–106. See also I. Stefanidis, *Από τον εμφύλιο στον Ψυχρό Πόλεμο: η Ελλάδα και ο συμμαχικός παράγοντας (1949–52)* (Athens 1999); C. Svolopoulos, *Η ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική 1945–1981*, II (Athens 2005).

12 See the diplomatic dictionary of the USSR, ‘Право наций на самоопределение’, in A. A. Gromyko (ed.), *Дипломатический словарь*, II (Moscow 1973) 559.

13 See S. Xydis, *Cyprus Conflict and Conciliation, 1954–1958* (Columbus, OH 1967).

14 See A. Stergiou, ‘Soviet policy towards Cyprus’, *The Cyprus Review* 19.2 (2007) 83–106.

15 E. Johnson, ‘Keeping Cyprus off the agenda: British and American relations at the United Nations, 1954–58’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 11.3 (2007) 227–55. See also I. Stefanidis, *Stirring the Greek Nation: Political Culture, Irredentism and Anti-Americanism in Greece, 1945–1967* (Aldershot 2007).

with the delegates of Cominform members, but evidently welcomed their support at the UN.<sup>16</sup> However, in 1955 the Tripartite Conference on Cyprus, the anti-Greek pogrom in Istanbul and Western opposition to the adding of a Cyprus item in the UNGA agenda, left many Greeks disappointed with Western policy, thus opening up opportunities both for the Greek Left to advocate a non-aligned policy, and for Soviet diplomacy. In the years that followed, the Kremlin sought to convince the Greek public of its good intentions.<sup>17</sup> In November 1957, Khrushchev invited the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU to adopt a maximalist plan aimed at forming an alliance between Egypt, Yugoslavia, Syria and Greece: he apparently believed that the cracks in Greece's relations with NATO over the Cyprus issue, were serious enough to provoke an irreversible rift. However, Khrushchev's colleagues expressed reservations about the prospects of such an ambitious project, holding that it would be impossible to detach Greece from NATO. From that moment on, 'geostrategic pragmatism' became the cornerstone of Soviet policy towards Greece.<sup>18</sup>

### A semi-successful *détente* in the mid-50s

On the overall foreign policy conceptualization of the Karamanlis governments, the triad of history, geography and Cold War formed the basis of Greek foreign policy analysis, with an emphasis on geography. The Karamanlis governments of 1956–63 may be divided into two sub-periods. In the first, from 1956 to 1959, the foundations of a dynamic diplomatic agenda were established; policy-making took into account long-term interests, and especially the independence of Cyprus and the prospect (however distant) of Greece's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC). The second period, from 1959 to 1963, was marked by the implementation of these policies: the declaration of independence of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, the official visit of Prime Minister Karamanlis and Foreign Minister Evangelos Averoff-Tossizza to the United States in 1961, and the signing of the Treaty of Association with the EEC on 9 July 1961. It is notable that Greek diplomacy placed great emphasis on five axes during this period; (i) relations with the United States and NATO; (ii) relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and the movement for European unification; (iii) the development of commerce with the Eastern bloc countries; (iv) the Cyprus issue and Greek–Turkish relations; and (v) a political opening towards the Arab world. On the other hand, the Greek fear that their allies would abandon them in the event of a local war with their northern neighbours was also decisive.<sup>19</sup>

16 Xydis, *Cyprus Conflict and Conciliation*, 12.

17 Johnson, 'Keeping Cyprus off the agenda', 236.

18 S. Rizas, 'Domestic and external factors in Greece's relations with the Soviet Union: early Cold War to *détente*', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 24.1 (2013) 57–80.

19 See E. Hatzivassiliou, *Ενάγγελος Αβέρωφ-Τοσίτσας 1908–1990: πολιτική βιογραφία* (Athens 2004).

In the latter half of the 1950s, Greece and the Soviet Union turned over a new leaf in their bilateral relations. The new Soviet policy of peaceful co-existence and the relaxation of international tensions played a major role to this end.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the change in leadership of the Greek government under Karamanlis and his Foreign Minister Averoff signified the beginning of the new era.<sup>21</sup> The first step was on 28 and 29 June 1956, when the Soviet Foreign Minister, Dmitri Shepilov, made an unofficial visit to Greece, the first ever visit of a high-ranking Soviet leader. Averoff's position was that this was a chance for Athens to develop economic relations with Moscow while remaining wary of the Soviet 'peace offensive'.<sup>22</sup> Averoff correctly foresaw a Soviet emphasis on the political level: the Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister, V. V. Kuznetsov, approached the Greek Embassy in Moscow, noting that the time had come to improve political relations.<sup>23</sup> Concurrently, Athens was explaining to its ambassador to Moscow, Alexandros Kountoumas, that the development of economic and cultural relations should be promoted in a manner that would not aid the Left in Greece.<sup>24</sup> Shepilov's visit, then, took place in a tense climate: both states sought the development of economic relations, but Athens was determined to keep the Soviets at arm's length as far as political relations were concerned. Shepilov expressed his surprise that the 'threat from the North' was of such importance to Athens, while Karamanlis (whose origins were in the region bordering Bulgaria) reiterated Greek fears about Bulgarian intentions and strongly pointed to what the Greeks regarded as Soviet interference in the internal affairs of his country.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, trade relations were significantly expanded as a result of this visit.<sup>26</sup> The new trade agreement between the two countries in 1957 sealed the new era despite the Suez crisis and the 1956 revolution in Hungary which aggravated the international climate.<sup>27</sup>

Certain issues further complicated matters. In 1957, following the Sputnik flight, NATO members accepted the installation of US Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) on their soil; the Kremlin vehemently reacted to this prospect. On 12 December 1957, the Soviet ambassador to Athens, Sergeev, delivered a letter to the Greek government signed by N. A. Bulganin, the Prime Minister of the USSR.<sup>28</sup> A

20 E. P Hoffmann, 'Soviet foreign policy: aims and accomplishments from Lenin to Brezhnev', *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 36.4 (1987) 19–24.

21 E. Hatzivassiliou, *Greece and the Cold War: Frontline State 1952–1967* (New York 2006) 51.

22 AKK, 1956/2A/329, Averoff to Karamanlis, 25 June 1956.

23 Diplomatic and Historical Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry, hereafter DIAYE, 1956/26/4, Kountoumas to Ministry of Foreign Affairs [hereafter MFA], 5 April 1956.

24 DIAYE, 1956/26/4, Theotokis to Kountoumas, 9 April 1956.

25 DIAYE, 1956/26/4, Conversation of Karamanlis with Shepilov, 29 June 1956.

26 DIAYE, 1956/26/4, Conversation of Averoff with Shepilov, 28 June 1956.

27 I. Chalkos, 'Greece and the 1956 Hungarian crisis: perceptions, analysis and politics', *The International History Review* (2020) DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2020.1723676.

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

second letter followed on 8 January 1958.<sup>29</sup> Karamanlis, responding to the Bulganin letters, pointed to the Western Alliance's defensive orientation and Greece's peaceful intentions.<sup>30</sup> Bulganin's military objective was to prevent the deployment of US missiles on Greek territory. He stressed that acceptance of the American missiles would bring immeasurable suffering to Greece and its people.<sup>31</sup> Khrushchev applied similar pressure in a personal letter to Karamanlis.<sup>32</sup> Still, from the threats of early 1957, Moscow soon returned to its efforts to take advantage of the severe crisis in the relations between Greece and its Western allies because of Cyprus in summer 1958. These abrupt shifts from tension to peace offensives characterized Khrushchev's diplomacy towards all Western states, and were often counterproductive for Soviet policy. In March 1959, speaking with American diplomats, Averoff noted that the Soviets had not been very clever in their attempt to instrumentalize the Cyprus issue within Greece; he was also deeply concerned at what Athens viewed as Soviet interference in Greek internal politics and at Soviet attempts to boost the Greek Left.<sup>33</sup> The Soviet Union ultimately welcomed the declaration of independence of Cyprus in August 1960 as a defeat for British imperialism. Nevertheless, the Kremlin noted that the Cypriot government had been forced to accept the London and Zürich Agreements and two large British military bases in Cyprus, while the guarantor powers of Greece, Turkey and Britain retained the right to intervene in the internal affairs of the new republic.<sup>34</sup>

In order to provide the backdrop to domestic political developments related to Greek–Soviet relations it must be noted that after the May 1958 general election the left-wing United Democratic Left party (EDA), which had received almost a quarter of the vote, became the major opposition force for the first time.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the Greek Left and part of the Centre opposition continued to accuse the government of being opposed to détente. The political environment was aggravated after the arrest of Manolis Glezos, a prominent leftist politician who in 1941 had scaled the Acropolis and torn down the Nazi flag. The personal intervention of Khrushchev and the issue of a Soviet stamp in the autumn of 1959 with the image of Glezos and the Acropolis

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

30 C. Svolopoulos (ed.), *Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής: Αρχείο: γεγονότα και κείμενα*, II (Athens 1993) 486–98, hereafter *Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής: Αρχείο*.

31 S. Rizas, 'Domestic and external factors in Greece's relations with the Soviet Union', 63; see also D. Apostolopoulos, 'Ο Κ. Καραμανλής, η Δυτική Γερμανία και η Ευρώπη: στρατηγικές προτεραιότητες της ελληνικής εξωτερικής πολιτικής 1955–1963 και 1974–1980', in C. Svolopoulos (et al.), *Ο Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής στον εικοστό αιώνα: διεθνές επιστημονικό συνέδριο, Ζάππειο Μέγαρο, 5–9 Ιουνίου 2007*, II (Athens 2008) 230–44.

32 AKK, 1958/5A/2196, Khrushchev to Karamanlis, 8 August 1958.

33 Ar. A. Ulunyan, 'Karamanlis's Greece and the Soviet Union (flashpoints and observations), late 1950s–1970s' in Svolopoulos (et al.), *Ο Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής στον εικοστό αιώνα*, II, 398.

34 Gromyko and Ponomarev, *История внешней политики СССР*, 275.

35 I. Nikolakopoulos, *Η καχεκτική δημοκρατία: κόμματα και εκλογές, 1946–1967* (Athens 2001) 255.

in the background, under the phrase ‘freedom to the hero of the Greek people Manolis Glezos’, was considered to be an interference in the internal affairs of Greece, and provoked a ‘stamp war’. Karamanlis personally handled this delicate diplomatic issue, at a time when the government was preparing for the official visit of the American President Dwight D. Eisenhower to Athens. Karamanlis ordered the issue of a Greek stamp with the image of the executed communist Hungarian Prime Minister Imre Nagy and the phrase ‘freedom to the peoples’. Both stamps were withdrawn from circulation following a Soviet proposal.<sup>36</sup>

Before the unification of the Centre forces in Greece, and the creation of the Centre Union in 1961, a strongly pro-Western party under George Papandreou, two significant politicians of the Centre visited the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> Accepting the invitation of A. I. Mikoyan, First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the leader of the Progressives, Spyridon Markezinis, visited Moscow in April 1959. After his four-day stay in the Soviet capital and his meetings with Mikoyan and Khrushchev, Markezinis gave a press conference in Athens. Markezinis supported the Soviet proposal for a missile-free zone in the Balkans and claimed that no issues regarding Greece’s internal affairs had been raised during his visit. However, the government reacted strongly, labelling Markezinis as the bearer of Soviet propaganda.<sup>38</sup> In the Greek parliament, trade with the Soviet bloc found itself at the centre of political clashes in late November 1959. The leader of EDA, Ioannis Passalidis, the leader of the Democratic Union, Elias Tsirimokos, the Liberal leader Sophocles Venizelos, and Markezinis accused the government of being hostile to détente and suggested that Greece should expand trade with the Eastern bloc countries in order to support agriculture in northern Greece.<sup>39</sup> In early June 1960, Sophocles Venizelos visited the Soviet Union and had a five and a half hour meeting with Khrushchev in Sochi in the Crimea. Upon his return, Venizelos stated, among other things, that Khrushchev sought peace and the promotion of economic relations with Greece with no political conditions. He then published articles regarding his conversations with Khrushchev, in which he supported the legalization of the Greek Communist Party.<sup>40</sup> Following these visits, the opposition forces pushed for a more relaxed attitude toward the Soviet Union than that of the Karamanlis government.

### Khrushchev’s hubris

In 1961–2 two of the greatest crises of the Cold War occurred, the building of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban missile crisis. Until then the main opposition between the US and the

36 N. Alivizatos, ‘Ο Κ. Γ. Καραμανλής και η αριστερά την κρίσιμη δεκαετία 1955–63’, in Svolopoulos (et al.), *Ο Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής στον εικοστό αιώνα*, II, 127–8.

37 For the unification of the Centre forces and the Centre Union party see Ch. Christidis, *Ανένδοτος αγώνας: η Ένωση Κέντρου ενόπιον της ρήξης 1961–1963* (Athens 2018).

38 S. Linardatos, *Από τον εμφύλιο στη Χούντα 1955–1961*, III, (Athens 1978) 440–1.

39 Hatzivassiliou, *Greece and the Cold War*, 102.

40 S. Linardatos, *Από τον εμφύλιο στη Χούντα*, 524–5.

USSR was on the question of the balance of power.<sup>41</sup> The most serious problem of the Cold War was of course Germany.<sup>42</sup> The Soviet aim was to force the United States to abandon the idea of German unification, to prevent the Americans from installing nuclear missiles in Europe and to force the Western powers into a recognition, even if only de facto, of East Germany.<sup>43</sup> As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the survival of East Germany and its international standing was one of the most important international goals of the Soviet regime in the Cold War and especially in this period.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the Congo crisis in 1960–1 not only marked a new era of Western interventionism in Africa but gave ample opportunities for Soviet intervention in an area which had hitherto been off limits for the Kremlin, even if Khrushchev's policy of rapid intervention was for the moment rebuffed.<sup>45</sup> In October 1962, the world reached the brink of nuclear war due to the confrontation between the two superpowers regarding the Soviet installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba.<sup>46</sup> Khrushchev retreated, but the tacit agreement by the USA to withdraw its Jupiter IRBMs from Turkey led to Ankara's unexpected disillusionment with its Atlantic ally<sup>47</sup> and an improvement in Soviet–Turkish relations.<sup>48</sup> The socialist coalition also faced a serious crisis during this period. Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies created centrifugal tendencies, gradually mending the rift between the USSR and China.<sup>49</sup> These changes also affected the Balkans: the Sino–Soviet split drove Albania into the arms of Maoist China.<sup>50</sup>

Greek–Soviet relations deteriorated in 1959–62. In a letter addressed to the Greek UN delegation, Averoff noted that in the second half of 1960 the Soviet Union had followed the tactic of détente in its relations with Greece; radio or press attacks were minimized, aggressive speeches against Greece in the UNGA were avoided, while efforts to improve political, economic, and educational relations were made by the

41 D. C. Tatum, *Who Influenced Whom?: Lessons from the Cold War* (New York 2002) 3–4.

42 V. M. Zubok, 'Khrushchev and the Berlin crisis (1958–1962)', *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Working Paper 6* (Washington, DC 1993).

43 V. Mastny, 'Soviet foreign policy, 1953–1962', in M. P. Leffler and O. A. Westad (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, I (Cambridge 2010) 309.

44 H. M. Harrison, 'Driving the Soviets up the Wall: a super-ally, a superpower, and the building of the Berlin Wall, 1958–1961', *Cold War History* 1.1 (2000) 53–74.

45 A. Iandolo, 'Imbalance of power: the Soviet Union and the Congo crisis, 1960–1961', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16.2 (2014) 32–55.

46 J. G. Hershberg, 'New evidence on the Cuban missile crisis: more documents from the Russian archives', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 8 (1997) 270–354.

47 P. Zelikow, 'American policy and Cuba, 1961–1963', *Diplomatic History* 24.2 (2000) 317–34.

48 See M. D. Gasimli, *СССР – Турция: от нормализации отношений до новой холодной войны* (Moscow 2008).

49 See V. M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill 2007).

50 See Ar. A. Ulunyan, *Балканский «щит социализма». Оборонная политика Албании, Болгарии, Румынии и Югославии, середина 50-х гг. – 1980 г.* (Moscow 2013); M. Elidor, 'Defying de-Stalinization: Albania's 1956', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13.4 (2011) 4–56.



Soviet ambassador Sergeev. Moscow's tactics had indeed effected a reduction of tensions between Greece and its Balkan neighbours, with the exception of Albania.<sup>51</sup>

But Khrushchev's alternation between threats and openings proved self-defeating. On 26 May 1959, on a visit to Albania, the Soviet leader launched a fierce attack against Greece over its alleged decision to accept the installation of NATO IRBMs. Khrushchev stated that the Soviet missiles were much more powerful and precise, and even stated that Greece and Italy would draw them like magnets. From Korçë, an Albanian town close to the Greek border, he stressed that governments, though transient, could bring about permanent and fatal consequences for their peoples, who might even pay for such bad decisions with their blood. Openly threatening Greece while speaking on its northern border was a very clumsy policy decision by Khrushchev, who thus confirmed fears of the 'threat from the North'. At the time, the Greek government was avoiding public statements on the issue of the IRBMs. As we now know, Karamanlis' government, taking into account the political cost, had decided not to install American IRBMs on Greek soil, but did not give a straight answer even to NATO officials. Hence, Khrushchev could not have been aware of any Greek decision on the subject.<sup>52</sup> In other words, these public declarations by Khrushchev were both unnecessary and politically costly for Soviet policy. The statements infuriated the Greeks, with the Greek prime minister replying that despite the traumatic experience of the Greek civil war, Greece was seeking to develop good relations with the USSR, whereas Khrushchev's statements at the country's borders were poisoning the political climate.<sup>53</sup> After 1960 and the departure of Albania from the Warsaw Pact and subsequent turn to Maoist China, the Soviets were forced to withdraw their naval squadron from the Adriatic.<sup>54</sup> In early 1961, Averoff was dubious whether the new Soviet policy aimed only at preventing the further development of relations between Greece and the Federal Republic of Germany and closer economic cooperation with the West, or whether it heralded a period of a new, more aggressive Soviet policy towards Greece. In other words, Averoff feared that the Soviet Union would accuse Greece of being the last country in the Balkans to oppose détente; the Kremlin would thus try to isolate Greece regionally and push for a change of Greek policy. Averoff concluded that

the Soviet Union's policy so far has shown that, even in a period of détente in its relations with the Great Powers, it has not stopped applying pressure on Greece,

51 DIAYE, 1961/44/6, Averoff to the Greek Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 21 January 1961.

52 For more on the Greek decision see L. Kourkouvelas, *Η Ελλάδα και το ζήτημα των πυρηνικών όπλων, 1957–1963* (Athens 2011); L. Kourkouvelas, 'Denuclearization on NATO's southern front: allied reactions to Soviet proposals, 1957–1963', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14.4 (2012) 197–215.

53 Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής: *Αρχείο*, IV, 86.

54 V. Kontis (et al.), *Σοβιετική Ένωση και Βαλκάνια στις δεκαετίες 1950 και 1960 (συλλογή εγγράφων)*, έγγραφο 81 (Thessaloniki 2003) 321–2.

either in pursuit of its own political objectives, or considering it a vulnerable target.<sup>55</sup>

Averoff also noted that, in addition to launching propaganda attacks against Greece, the USSR seemed reluctant to renew the trade agreement with Greece, which expired on 31 December 1960. Since the Soviet Union was absorbing significant quantities of Greek agricultural products, this could lead to financial challenges for Athens.<sup>56</sup> Tellingly, Averoff was thus effectively admitting that Greece's previous foreign policy decisions, with him at the helm, had led to a kind of dependence on Eastern bloc markets and thus on Soviet decisions. The new Soviet offensive on Greece also coincided with the last phase of the reparation negotiations with Bulgaria (a process that had started in 1954 and was successfully concluded in 1964), which led to a temporary deterioration of Greek–Bulgarian relations.<sup>57</sup>

In January 1961, the Greek ambassador to Moscow, Georgios Christopoulos, had a lengthy conversation with the new director-general of the Fifth European Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Sergei Timofeevich Astavin (who would go on to serve as ambassador to the Republic of Cyprus from 1973 to 1986). Christopoulos referred to the challenges of bilateral relations and attacks in the Soviet press. Astavin claimed that criticism by the press did not reflect the opinion of the Soviet government, but it is rather doubtful that this argument would convince the Greek diplomat. Astavin also stated that the Soviet government merely wanted to avoid bilateral tensions and to ensure good relations between the two peoples, as Khrushchev himself had declared.<sup>58</sup> Still, in the following months, *Pravda* continued to mount strong criticism of Karamanlis' foreign policy regarding NATO and the German question,<sup>59</sup> insisting that the gloomy situation in the Balkans would result in Greece's political isolation. The Greeks considered this an open intervention in their internal affairs.<sup>60</sup> On 22 May 1961, under instructions by Averoff, the director-general of the Greek Foreign Ministry, Christos Xanthopoulos-Palamas, made an official protest to the Soviet ambassador in Athens about what the Greeks continued to describe as 'Soviet press attacks'. For his part, Sergeev did not remain idle. He pointed to a statement by the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, the American General Lauris Norstad, to the effect that 'Greece is ready to respond to an attack by the USSR', even suggesting

55 DIA YE, 1961/44/6, Averoff to the Greek Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 21 January 1961.

56 DIA YE, 1961/44/6, Averoff to the Greek Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 21 January 1961.

57 See E. Hatzivassiliou, 'Negotiating with the enemy: the normalization of Greek–Bulgarian relations, 1960–1964', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4.1 (2004) 140–61.

58 DIA YE, 1961/62/10, Christopoulos to MFA, 27 January 1961.

59 DIA YE, 1961/62/10, Christopoulos to MFA, 13 March 1961.

60 DIA YE, 1961/44/6, Christopoulos to MFA, 19 May 1961.

that Khrushchev would raise this issue in his forthcoming meeting with the US President, John F. Kennedy, in Vienna.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, as the critical summer of 1961 came, relations between Greece and the USSR remained in a rather uncertain state. The impressive development of trade relations had not led to the consequent expansion of political relations. The Greek government continued its policy of placing emphasis on commercial links (which were needed for the Greek development and modernization effort), but remained suspicious about the motives of the Soviet Union and (perhaps more so) its allies. Athens did not want to develop political relations with the Soviet bloc, and felt that the international pursuit of détente merely allowed the Kremlin to isolate Western frontline states, such as Greece or West Germany, from their allies and exert pressure on them.<sup>62</sup> At this moment of doubt and uncertainty, with Greece approaching a general election and with the building of the Berlin Wall bringing a huge crisis in East–West relations, Greek–Soviet relations too would deteriorate following one of Khrushchev’s usual clumsy gestures.

On 11 August – one day before construction of the Berlin Wall was set to begin – during a reception in the Kremlin in honour of Soviet–Romanian friendship, Khrushchev, speaking with Christopoulos, the Greek ambassador, made a thoughtless threat about a potential nuclear bombing of the Acropolis. Khrushchev told Christopoulos that bilateral relations were in tatters due to the entry of Greece into NATO and the installation of US IRBMs (which had not taken place in Greece, though the country had accepted tactical nuclear weapons according to the new NATO doctrine). Khrushchev complained that the United States and Adenauer’s West Germany were intimidating his country in order to deter Moscow from signing a peace treaty with East Germany. As a result, he maintained, all NATO members, including Greece, posed a threat. The Soviets would not hesitate, in the case of an imperialist declaration of war, to destroy NATO bases, which in the case of Greece, Khrushchev stated, were to be found hidden in olive groves. Christopoulos, a seasoned diplomat, evidently laid a trap. The ambassador said:

I believe that the President of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union would never order that atomic bombs be dropped on the Acropolis and other historical monuments in Greece.

Khrushchev readily fell into the trap and answered:

Mr Ambassador, I would not like to disappoint you, but you are quite wrong. I, as President of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, will certainly not order that bombs be dropped on the Acropolis, but we would not hesitate to

61 DIAYE, 1961/62/10, Palamas to the Greek Embassy in Moscow, 22 May 1961.

62 For more on this Greek opinion, see Hatzivassiliou, *Greece and the Cold War*.

attack the military bases of the North Atlantic coalition, which are also in Greece.<sup>63</sup>

The way in which events unfolded obliged Christopoulos to provide further explanations to the Greek government regarding his conversation with Khrushchev.<sup>64</sup> He deliberately referred to the Acropolis and remarked that Khrushchev would not wish to destroy Greek monuments. The latter replied that he would not wish to do so but would be required to in order to protect his country. Moreover, on the eve of the building of the Berlin Wall, Khrushchev clearly had in mind the situation in the former German capital rather than that in Greece. He was evidently trying to invent excuses for an action that he knew would be severely criticized internationally. This is why he made one of his inelegant remarks, which however cost him dearly as far as Greece was concerned. Indeed, reports about his threat to bomb the Acropolis and the olive trees severely damaged not only the Soviet image within Greece but also the Greek Left, at a time when the non-Communist parties were attempting to suppress the leftist vote. Moreover, at a time of major international crisis in Berlin, Athens welcomed the opportunity to show its allies the dangers of its position and indirectly ask for their support against the Soviet bloc. Thus, Khrushchev's statement played into the hands of the Greek pro-Western forces regarding both internal and foreign policy. Christopoulos himself pointed to the impact of this statement in the Greek press and public opinion.<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that the statement was made public by Christopoulos himself, at the very least a questionable move in terms of diplomatic niceties. Indeed, the Minister of the Presidency (and Acting Foreign Minister in cases of Averoff's absence), Constantine Tsatsos, reprimanded Christopoulos for his flagrant breach of the primary rule of confidential correspondence and for publicizing a private discussion with the Soviet leader.<sup>66</sup> However, even if this indiscretion formally put the Greek government in an awkward position in terms of diplomatic practice, Athens still capitalized on the prime opportunity that Khrushchev's threat presented to it. Karamanlis himself was quick to seize the moment and protest publicly:

Khrushchev could destroy the Acropolis, as he threatened with his statements, but he could not destroy the symbolism and ideals of this sacred rock, which are stronger than any missiles.<sup>67</sup>

As might have been expected, the Greek reaction provoked an escalation from the Kremlin. Soviet pressure intensified, and the Soviet press showed no signs of loosening its pressure, even accusing Karamanlis, during the Greek election campaign in the

63 DIA YE, 1961/62/9, copy of N. Khrushchev's speech in the Kremlin on 11 August 1961 regarding the Romanian–Soviet friendship, 4 September 1961.

64 DIA YE, 1961/63/1, Tsatsos to Christopoulos, 21 August 1961.

65 DIA YE, 1961/63/1, Christopoulos to Tsatsos, 22 August 1961.

66 DIA YE, 1961/63/1, Tsatsos to Christopoulos, 24 August 1961.

67 *Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής: Αρχείο*, V(i), 134–5.

autumn, of conspiring against the interests of the peace-loving Greek people. In September 1961, Sergeev protested to Averoff regarding the holding of NATO military exercises on the Greek–Bulgarian border. Sergeev bitterly commented that bilateral relations had gravely deteriorated, despite Soviet efforts.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, in October 1961, eleven days before the Greek national elections, the Soviet government strongly criticized the Greek government:

The Greek government, while declaring in words its desire for cooperation, stubbornly rejects all the proposals of the Soviet Union and other socialist states, aimed at the improvement of relations with Greece, the development of broad business cooperation in the Balkans and the transformation of this European region into a zone free of nuclear and missile weapons.<sup>69</sup>

As usual in such instances, Athens in turn interpreted these Soviet demarches as aggression and as an effort to intervene in the elections by influencing the electorate to vote for EDA. Nevertheless, Khrushchev's threats shocked and infuriated Greek public opinion.<sup>70</sup>

### Preserving relations from a cold distance

After the Greek elections and the triumph of Karamanlis, the new 'cold war' between the USSR and Greece was irreversible. The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Nikolai Pavlovich Firyubin, summoned ambassador Christopoulos in December 1961 and handed him a *note verbale* from his government protesting against what he described as a systematic and ongoing anti-Soviet campaign in Greece, with the support of the authorities, which had severely affected bilateral relations.<sup>71</sup> Again, at a press conference on the occasion of his departure from Greece in January 1962, Sergeev revealed that on 29 December 1961 he gave Averoff a *note verbale* protesting at the installation of both US bases and US nuclear weapons in Greece.<sup>72</sup> Athens replied with a *note verbale* delivered to A. A. Gromyko by ambassador Christopoulos on 5 January 1962. In their long conversation, the Soviet foreign minister explained to the Greek ambassador his country's policy regarding Greece and noted that Moscow had no intention of interfering in Greece's internal affairs. Nevertheless, Gromyko strongly criticized Greece's membership of NATO. The Soviet view was that the sincere development of relations had been precluded since Greece was part of an aggressive

68 DIA YE, 1961/62/9, Conversation between Sergeev and Averoff, 13 September 1961.

69 I. A. Kirilin (et al.), *Внешняя политика Советского Союза и международные отношения: Сборник документов. 1961 год* (Moscow 1962) 467, hereafter *Внешняя политика Советского Союза и международные отношения: Сборник документов. 1961 год*.

70 DIA YE, 1961/62/9, Christopoulos to MFA, 10 October 1961.

71 DIA YE, 1961/62/9, Christopoulos to MFA, 4 December 1961.

72 *Внешняя политика Советского Союза и международные отношения: Сборник документов. 1961 год*, 534–6.

military bloc and thus did not pursue an independent policy. Christopoulos conveyed his government's opinion that these frequent protests from the Soviet government should be discontinued as a sign of good will, or the Greek people would feel that a cold war was being waged against them.<sup>73</sup>

The top-secret note from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the farewell visit of the Soviet ambassador, Sergeev, to the office of the Greek prime minister on 24 January 1962, accurately reflects the difficulties in Soviet–Greek relations. Sergeev attempted to convince Karamanlis that the Soviet government, following the policy of peaceful coexistence and friendship, was working for the maintenance of good relations with Greece. He said that during his eight and a half years in Greece, he had taken pains to improve relations in the educational, artistic, scientific and athletic fields, albeit with little success, though progress in the commercial field had been significant. Karamanlis coldly expressed a wish for an improvement in bilateral relations. According to Karamanlis, the obstacle to improving relations was misunderstanding. The Soviet government speculated that Greece had aggressive plans against the Soviet Union, which was not the case, since Greece did not have the means to attack the USSR. Karamanlis indicated that Greece had allowed no IRBMs on its soil but could say nothing further, so as not to reveal secret military information. He also made direct reference to the legacy of the civil war and the Soviet support of the Greek communists, which, he clearly stated, constituted interference in the internal affairs of his country. Karamanlis authorized Sergeev to assure Khrushchev that Greece had no hostile intentions towards the Soviet Union. But Moscow also had to prove that it was not interfering in the internal affairs of Greece. According to Karamanlis, this would be the most important step which would allow for the improvement of relations.<sup>74</sup>

The new ambassador of the USSR, Nikolai Ivanovich Koryukin, who had served as deputy director of the First European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, arrived in Athens on 16 March 1962. Meeting Karamanlis, Koryukin expressed the hope that there was potential for the development of relations in the commercial, scientific, educational, and even political fields, only to be told by Karamanlis that the keystone of Greek–Soviet relations was non-interference in the internal affairs of each other's country. Karamanlis insisted that the Soviet Union had not respected this fundamental principle, despite its pronouncements concerning peaceful coexistence.<sup>75</sup>

Greek–Soviet relations reached a particularly dismal point in the second half of 1962, owing to the Cuban missile crisis. Indicative of the political environment was the encounter in New York, at a Soviet reception, of the Greek Foreign Minister Averoff and the Greek permanent representative to the United Nations, Dimitrios

73 DIA YE, 1961/100/3, Christopoulos to MFA, 5 January 1962.

74 DIA YE, 1962/108/7, Conversation between Karamanlis and Sergeev, 25 January 1962.

75 DIA YE, 1962/108/7, Note from the Greek MFA, 16 March 1962.

Bitsios, with A. A. Gromyko. The discussion became quite spirited in tone, and both sides were unusually aggressive. Following Gromyko's comment that he saw no convergence of words and actions from the Greek government, Averoff stated that, 'Greece never bows' and that 'We are completely independent of everyone', only to receive Gromyko's ironic 'Certainly, of everyone'. Averoff sent his report of the conversation to the Greek Foreign Ministry in a secret telegram, stressing that the timing of Gromyko's personal attack was inexplicable, since Greece had abstained in the UN vote regarding Hungary, and had even been applauded by other Eastern countries; and his conclusion was that a country could not achieve friendly relations with the Soviet Union unless it became its satellite.<sup>76</sup>

The Cuban missile crisis created a predicament for the security aspect of Greek–Soviet relations. Averoff feared that the Soviet response to a possible American invasion of Cuba might ensue in only two places internationally: either in Berlin or in the Greek region of Thrace. However, a military move in Berlin would mean a third world war, so a localized Bulgarian aggression in Thrace, authorized by the Kremlin, was more likely. Averoff feared that in that scenario Athens would be abandoned by its allies.<sup>77</sup>

The report by the Greek ambassador in Moscow on the overall situation of Greek–Soviet relations during the Cuban crisis explains the Cold War rhetoric and the deterioration of bilateral relations. Christopoulos could think of no way to improve these relations. He noted that the Kremlin could not accept that a small state like Greece could ally with the enemies of the Soviet Union. The Kremlin described a state as democratic if it was at least neutral. Consequently, the obstacles to the development of relations between Greece and the Soviet Union were political and ideological, which meant that it was essentially impossible for Athens to appease Moscow. Christopoulos' general conclusion precisely reflects Athens' logic regarding Greek–Soviet relations in the period 1959–62:

[...] everything depends on our own attitude. Theirs is clear and unequivocal. They aim at our neutralization by any means. The slightest concession on our part, the loosening of resistance, will not satisfy, but will be considered as an admission of weakness, and they will put even more pressure on us.<sup>78</sup>

### **'Why are you afraid of our ballerinas and violinists?' Economic and cultural relations**

Despite the deterioration of political relations between Greece and the Soviet Union, from 1955 to 1959 bilateral trade links witnessed a spectacular rise. It is notable that the largest

76 DIA YE, 1962/107/2, Averoff and Bitsios to MFA, 3 October 1962.

77 E. Averoff-Tossizza, *Ιστορία χαμένων ευκαιριών (Κυπριακό, 1950–1963)*, II (Athens 1981) 295. See also E. Hatzivassiliou, 'Revisiting NATO's stabilizing role in South-Eastern Europe: the Cold War experience and the *Longue Durée*', *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 12 (2012) 515–31.

78 DIA YE, 1962/108/7, Christopoulos to MFA, 15 October 1962.

eastern trade partner of Greece for the period 1950–66 was the Soviet Union, accounting for 28% of total trade with Eastern Europe.<sup>79</sup> According to a trade table produced by the Greek National Statistical Service and reported to the Greek Foreign Ministry, imports from the USSR to Greece amounted to \$1.9 million in 1955 and \$15.9 million in 1959, while exports from Greece to the USSR stood at \$2.2 million in 1955 and \$11.7 million in 1959.<sup>80</sup> However, a temporary stagnation in trade with the USSR followed. In 1961, as the three-year agreement between Greece and the USSR of 1958 expired, and no automatic renewal was foreseen, commercial exchanges proceeded without agreed trade tables. Not surprisingly the Greeks, fearful of the Soviet response to their association with the EEC, tried to assess the developing situation.<sup>81</sup> It is noteworthy that these fears did not materialize. In a telegram of 26 April 1961, Christopoulos stressed that the treaty of association of Greece with the Common Market did not affect its economic relations with the USSR.<sup>82</sup> In late April 1961 a Greek trade delegation met the head of the Trade Department with Western Countries of the Ministry of Foreign Trade of the USSR, Vladimir M. Vinogradov, in Moscow. The friendly conversation outlined the positive course of Greek–Soviet commercial relations and the future of trade between the two sides. For the Soviets, trade was progressing steadily, while on the issue of Greece’s association with the Common Market, Vinogradov noted that this did not affect economic relations.<sup>83</sup> Greek–Soviet trade proved a double-edged sword for Greek policy-makers. The fact that Greece was able to export part of its agricultural production in return for machinery or fertilizers<sup>84</sup> contributed to the political ascendancy of the Left. On the other hand, government hard-liners vehemently opposed such a state of affairs on ideological grounds. Trade relations with Eastern Europe might be a factor in negotiations with the West,<sup>85</sup> but the strategic choice of Athens was to direct the country to the more competitive environment of Western Europe.<sup>86</sup>

Another thorny issue of bilateral relations were Soviet educational and cultural proposals. Both Sergeev and Koryukin repeatedly attempted to promote cultural, educational, and sporting relations, but in vain. In April 1961, Sergeev expressed his resentment at the refusal by the Greek government to accept a mutual exchange of artists. However, the Greek Foreign Minister indicated that the far Left might exploit such events politically.<sup>87</sup> Other important Greek governmental circles had the same approach. In January 1962, the Greek Minister of Defence, Aristides Protopapadakis,

79 S. Walden, *Ελλάδα και ανατολικές χώρες 1950–1967: οικονομικές σχέσεις και πολιτική*, II (Athens 1991) 89.

80 DIAYE, 1961/63/7, Kontogeorgis to MFA, 24 February 1961.

81 Walden, *Ελλάδα και ανατολικές χώρες 1950–1967*, II, 158–9.

82 DIAYE, 1961/63/7, Christopoulos to MFA, 26 April 1961.

83 DIAYE, 1961/63/7, Tzounis to Ministry of Trade, 27 April 1961.

84 Walden, *Ελλάδα και ανατολικές χώρες 1950–1967*, II, 103.

85 Botsas, ‘Greece and the East’, 222.

86 Stefanidis, *Ασύμμετροι εταίροι*, 109.

87 DIAYE, 1961/63/11, Conversation between Averoff and Sergeev, 27 April 1961.



expressed his fear to the Foreign Ministry regarding the proposals made by the Soviet Naval Attaché involving the exchange of visits between Russian and Greek naval officers and the exchange of warship visits. According to Protopapadakis, these might not only damage Greece's image in NATO circles, but raise security issues and benefit the Left's propaganda.<sup>88</sup>

The Greek government made certain compromises regarding the 'Proposals for the 1962 USSR–Greece Cultural and Scientific Cooperation Plan' proposed by the Soviet government on 30 March 1962: Athens accepted the majority of the eleven proposals.<sup>89</sup> But this was just the tip of the iceberg, since numerous schemes had been submitted either by individuals or by associations in Greece to travel to the USSR for sports competitions, concerts, or international competitions for which the Greek government was reluctant to give permission. The dominant trend of political thinking in Greece was clearly reflected, among other things, in the blocking of the UNESCO scholarship programme for work trips to the USSR;<sup>90</sup> complaints over the Greek films shown at the Moscow Film Festival in July 1961, which according to the Foreign Ministry 'defamed the Greek way of life';<sup>91</sup> and the Foreign Ministry's rejection of an application by a Greek citizen to travel to the USSR for health reasons, on the grounds that 'he was a longstanding and unrepentant communist'.<sup>92</sup> The reluctance of the Greek government to strengthen cultural relations with the Soviets was proved on the occasion of the short visit of Yuri Gagarin to Greece in February 1962. In June 1961, the Deputy Minister of the Interior, Evangelos Kalantzis, a person noted for his anti-communist stance, suggested to Averoff that he instruct the Greek Embassy in Moscow to reject Gagarin's visa.<sup>93</sup> Averoff agreed, sensing an opportunity for the rival EDA to benefit in its electoral campaign.<sup>94</sup> When Gagarin finally visited Greece, the Greek intelligence service monitored all of his moves and contacts.<sup>95</sup> In the aftermath of his visit, the Soviet Embassy in Athens officially thanked the Greek Foreign Minister, only to receive the reply that the Greek government was dissatisfied with the involvement of EDA and the Greek–Soviet association in the organization of Gagarin's visit and their politically exploitation of it.<sup>96</sup> Sergeev's question to Karamanlis on the day of his departure, 'Why are you afraid of our ballerinas and violinists?' and the Greek prime minister's reply 'We love them, but we also have to protect the country

88 DIAYE, 1962/108/7, Protopapadakis to MFA, 27 January 1962.

89 DIAYE, 1962/108/7, Proposals for cultural and scientific cooperation between the USSR and Greece for 1962, 30 March 1962.

90 DIAYE, 1961/63/4, Department of Overseas Hellenism and Cultural Relations to MFA, 31 March 1961.

91 DIAYE, 1961/63/4, Department of Overseas Hellenism and Cultural Relations to MFA, 21 July 1961.

92 DIAYE, 1961/63/4, Ministry of Interior to MFA, 30 December 1961.

93 DIAYE, 1961/62/10, Kalantzis to Averoff, 10 June 1961.

94 DIAYE, 1961/62/10, Averoff to the Greek Embassy in Moscow, 14 June 1961.

95 DIAYE, 1962/107/2, Note by Markandonaios, 14 February 1962.

96 DIAYE, 1962/108/7, Note by Tsaousis, 16 February 1962.

from the war propaganda carried out by Greek communism’,<sup>97</sup> clearly reflect the political line of thought of the two sides.

## Conclusions

Greek–Soviet political relations in the period 1959–62 were affected by the aftermath of the Cyprus agreements and the independence of Cyprus, the intensification of the Cold War, Khrushchev’s nuclear intimidation, Soviet press attacks against the foreign policy of the Karamanlis government, Greece’s reservations towards the climate of détente, and the reluctance of Athens to approve cultural relations with Moscow. Khrushchev’s failed maximalist strategy for Cyprus echoed his failed grand strategy for Europe. It is notable that the Soviet positions were expressed only by Khrushchev and, indirectly, by Gromyko, but not by other high-ranking officials of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, thus creating an intractable puzzle for Greek policy makers to solve. It is possible that such intimidation ultimately proved successful: Greece did not accept US IRBMs on its soil, while the IRBMs that were installed in Turkey were subsequently removed. In other words, the Soviet Union accomplished some of its aims regarding Greece, albeit at the expense of provoking the hostility of Athens. On the other hand, it is interesting that the Soviets, who had so strongly protested against Greece’s NATO membership and the installation of US bases in Greece, did not equally vigorously contest Greece’s entry into the European Economic Community, although this was clearly pivotal in determining Greece’s international position. For their part, adopting a more pragmatic doctrine, the Greeks seemed reluctant to accept Soviet proposals for bilateral détente. Greece, a small country on the southeast flank of NATO, found itself in the vortex of international crises and felt that it had limited room for manoeuvre. Regarding its relations with Moscow, Athens managed to achieve its main objective: the expansion of commercial and economic relations. The reluctance of the Karamanlis government to expand cultural relations with Moscow was mainly due to the Greek feeling of Soviet intimidation and vehement Greek anti-communism. However, the government managed to capitalize on Khrushchev’s clumsy threats in 1961 by using them to limit the Greek Left’s influence in the country and to seek more NATO aid. Nevertheless, this victory for Karamanlis would prove to be short-lived, while the Soviet Union managed to deepen the rift between Athens and Washington, capitalizing once again on the Cyprus issue after the Cyprus crisis of 1963–4 and the Turkish threat to invade the island.

## Contributor’s note

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97 DIAYE, 1962/108/7, Conversation between Karamanlis and Sergeev, 25 January 1962.