

The Political Murders of 1958: Historical, Political and Social Dimensions

[Οι Πολιτικές Δολοφονίες του 1958: Ιστορικές, Πολιτικές και Κοινωνικές Διαστάσεις]

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The collective volume *The Political Murders of 1958: Historical, Political and Social Dimensions* is actually the proceedings of a conference held on 18 September 2021, by the Prometheus Research Institute (INEP), which is also the publisher of the proceedings. The co-organiser of the conference was the Antilogos Theatre, which, in the previous months, had staged the play *1958*, choosing the symbolic date of 1 April 2021 for its premier performance.

The subject of the volume, as the title indicates, are specific ‘murders’ of AKEL members in 1958, with the reports going back to 1956 and 1957. The issue began to emerge systematically in the 1990s and especially in the 2000s and has been a point of friction ever since between AKEL and its organisations on the one hand, and the EOKA Fighters’ Associations on the other. In the early 2000s, the formation of the Association of Relatives of those Murdered for their Political Views during the Period 1955-1959 escalated the debate on the matter. The rhetoric is concentrated by AKEL on the demand for the reinstatement of the ‘unjustly murdered’ AKEL members who were victims of ‘extreme right-wing Greek terrorism’. Contrarily, the EOKA Fighters’ Associations assert that EOKA ‘did not murder leftists, but executed traitors’, and that AKEL raises the issue in an effort to ‘benefit politically’; they respond by quoting lists of members of AKEL who contributed to the struggle to dispel the accusations of anti-communism on the part of EOKA.

The volume of 271 pages hosts nine articles by researchers who, with minor differences, echo a common school of thought and view of modern Cypriot History expressed politically by AKEL. This is exactly the importance of this publication in literature; it crystallises AKEL’s view on the specific issues. The first four of the nine articles deal with various aspects of the background of the ‘political murders of 1958’. Only three of the nine articles deal with the essence of the ‘political murder’, while

the last two approach the issue in the light of the theatrical and literary portrayal of specific cases. The effort of some authors to document their writings with references, footnotes and list of bibliography, is noteworthy.

As a preface, an excerpt from the introductory speech at the Conference, by the Chairman of the Board of the Prometheus Research Institute, Menelaos Menelaou, is quoted. The purpose of the publication is also stated in the preface. It's the 'vindication of the memory of people who were murdered for their political beliefs, the need to reveal the motivations that led to the events of 1958, and the goals that this political choice against the Left served'.

In the first text, titled 'Cold War and the Historical-Social Context of the Era', the historian and member of the Board of Directors of INEP, Nikos Kouzoupis, analyses the grid of Cold War realities in the 1940s, while he deals with issues of 'ethnogenesis' and the formation of the Greek and Turkish bourgeoisie. Next, the author records AKEL's positions on the issue of the Union with Greece (Enosis) and the 'split' that arose between the Left and the Right 'on tactical issues' in claiming Union. He concludes by stressing the view, put forward by AKEL since 1955 to justify the policy of refraining from the armed struggle, that the tactic of armed action was a 'wrong tactic' because it served the British policy of 'divide and conquer', which aimed at the violent confrontation of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. He concludes by posing the hypothetical question of what would have happened if the AKEL-proposed tactic of 'massive, political struggle' had been followed.

In the second text, entitled 'How History is Constructed - Censored: The July 1947 Establishment Coup and the Roots of the Greek Cypriot Deep State of the Right', the assistant professor of Sociology at Frederick University, Andreas Panagiotou, further explores the logic of the first article and deals with the background of the 1958 events. Much of the article is spent highlighting the 'censored history' of AKEL's support for Makarios Kykkotis in the annulled metropolitan elections of 1947, and recounting how the victory of the Left, with the election of Archbishop Leontios, was overthrown through the 'suspicious death' of Leontios and the election of the Metropolitan of Kyrenia, Makarios II. The author elaborates on the theory that the events of 1947-1948 had a decisive effect on what he believes to be 'the beginning of a kind of coup in the Greek Cypriot institutions that will lead to the construction and domination of a deep state (which was supplemented by the armed violence of the masked of EOKA and then EOKA B) certainly until 1974, but also in terms of power networks and institutions, until today'.

The third article, by Nikos Moudouros, lecturer at the Turkish Studies Department of the University of Cyprus, is entitled 'Communism will Come this Winter': Anti-communism in Turkey in the 1950s and Cyprus. The article is characterised by scientific methodology and focuses on the 1950s and specifically on the evolution of anti-communism in Turkey, which was the 'most important platform for cooperation' of all the tendencies of the Turkish Right. It is also thoroughly shown that 'the 1950s were the one (decade) characterised by the massification, ideological maturation and diffusion of anti-communism in the core of [the Turkish] society'. The analysis of how Turkish officials perceived the country's geopolitical position during the Cold War, which ultimately led to its orientation towards the West, is interesting. Finally, the way in which the Cyprus issue was dealt with both from the perspective of the country's security issues and the perspective of anti-communism, is highlighted. This explains the spread of anti-communist views in the Turkish Cypriot community, which led to violent attacks against communist Turkish Cypriots. Although the text does not deal with the 'political murders of 1958', it nevertheless sets the stage in a comprehensive way for the sixth chapter, that will deal with the political murders of Turkish Cypriots.

On the following pages of the volume, the article by Alexis Alekou, Ph.D. in History and Political Science, is published, entitled 'The Emergence of Far-Right Violence in Cyprus: From 1948 to 1958'. It is the fourth of the nine articles, and it, too, moves in the logic of the synthesis of the 1958 events' background. The article explains under which conditions the confrontation between Right and Left appeared in the 1940s and analyses the theory that the appearance of organisation 'X' in Cyprus happened as a reaction to the rising of AKEL from 1946 onwards and during the strikes of 1948. He then recounts the strategy followed by Archbishop Makarios III 'on his way to building the title of "Ethnarch"'.

The following ten-page article by Giannakis Kolokasides, Historian and Honorary President of INEP, is entitled 'AKEL's Attitude towards the Political Murders of the Left-Wing Leaders', and it explains the way in which the party handled the unfavourable situation in which it had fallen when it chose to remain outside the armed anti-colonial struggle. The author notes that AKEL initially tried to fend off accusations of treason, by calling for the formation of committees to investigate the evidence of treason, pledging to expel from its ranks any member proven to have betrayed an EOKA fighter. The second issue that, according to the author, AKEL had to face, was to demonstrate why AKEL was being targeted. The third issue that is commented is

the realisation that 'terrorism against the left' did not come from the Right as a whole, but from a fraction of it. The article reproduces the important information recorded in the book by Michalis Poubouris, that the British proposed to arm AKEL but the party refused. The positive thing about the text is that the analysis is interlarded, even though without references, with excerpts from the archival material of the party, despite being inaccessible to most researchers.

The sixth chapter, authored by Niyazi Kızılyürek, professor at the Department of Turkish Studies of the University of Cyprus and entitled 'Political Murders of Turkish Cypriots', is the second text that deals precisely with the specific subject of the volume. The article analyses the successful attempt of the British to split the working class into Greek and Turkish. Next, the context in which the left-wing Turkish Cypriots were targeted is explained and six cases of attacks and murders of Turkish Cypriots by TMT are recorded. The text is interspersed with material that supports the intense anti-communist activity of the TMT, which not only did not hide its anti-communism, but also made sure that it was always proclaimed.

Chapter seven, entitled 'Political Murders of Greek Cypriots, together with chapters six and five, constitute the essence of the volume. Its author, Michalis Michael, historical researcher, and journalist is probably the researcher who has dealt more extensively with the subject of the 'political murders' and has published a monograph and a 45-page booklet with relevant content. The text notes six 'murders' in 1956, one in 1957, and 11 in 1958. The author comments on each case and presents the findings of his research. In some cases, the way the writer presents his findings can be considered sufficient to convince the reader that some executions may indeed have been politically motivated. However, in some other cases, while he proves that the person was a leftist, the findings do not convince that the motives behind the killing were political.

The last two chapters outline the way in which the events of 1958 have been reflected in Greek literature. In the penultimate one, the author Christos Achmiotis, in the most extensive text of the volume (63 pages), presents the way in which he perceives the political developments of the 1940s-1950s and the way in which his personal view contributed to the writing of his novel that deals with the case of Savvas Menikos. The author, employing a deeply emotional and political language, stresses his opinion on the history, not only of the period 1940-1950, but also extends to the very near past, with criticisms of the Anastasiades government, comments on events such as the demonstrations of the 'Os Damai' movement, and expresses his opinion

on the bold and provocative paintings of Giorgos Gabriel. He records his directorial thoughts on the project and his thoughts are condensed into the opinion that ‘the memory of Savvas Menikos has as much weight on many leftists as those of Afxentiou and Matsis on a large part of Cypriots from all factions’.

In the last text entitled ‘The Trauma of 1958: Meeting of History and Literature in the Texts of Greek Cypriot Writers’, Giorgos Myaris, philological writer and ‘Greek neo-Hellenic scholar’, conducts an important recording and provides brief but essential commentary on 12 literature works dealing with the events of 1958. The text is scientific and documented with the necessary footnotes and a list of bibliography at the end. His point of view at the beginning of the article is important and apt, that ‘methodologically in relation to the history of ideas, neither the struggle of EOKA can be approached exclusively with today’s criteria, nor the violent practices (at the expense of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots) can be attributed to the set of leading actors, fighters and followers of EOKA or sympathisers. The reality is more complex’. The 12 works commented on by the author are listed in the first Appendix of the volume.

The second Appendix includes the photos and brief details of the 19 ‘unjustly murdered during the period 1956-1958’, who were ‘reinstated’ by the decision of the Cyprus Council of Ministers back in 2012, while the third Appendix includes the photos and brief details of three Turkish Cypriot ‘victims of murderous attacks of the Turkish terrorist organisation TMT during the period of 1958’.

Both from the analyses and the terminology used by some authors, such as ‘extreme right-wing terrorism’ (with the term ‘terrorism’ strongly reminiscent of the colonial-British charges against the armed struggle), it becomes clear to the reader that through the volume a specific view of the events is expressed, which, in certain cases, becomes problematic. So, reasonable questions are raised. For instance, when the nationalistic and liberation aspects of EOKA’s activities are downplayed, and the organization is instead accused of being anti-Turkish and anti-communist—suggesting that EOKA’s actions were ‘playing into Turkey’s hands’ and designed to ‘foster conflict with the Left’—the reader is left questioning: how many AKEL leaders were actually targeted, why there were no widespread executions of leftists by EOKA across Cyprus, and how many Turkish Cypriots executed by EOKA were not members of the colonial security forces. The reader is also confused by the theory that EOKA ‘murdering local AKEL officials aimed to provoke the indignation of the Party’s base to retaliate and thus give EOKA the opportunity of a generalised armed conflict through which it expected that AKEL would be exhausted’. The confusion is created because

through the volume it is assured that EOKA was the strong side of the 'conflict'. The question that arises is why EOKA did not use its power directly, with decisive blows against AKEL, as it did against the British, but had been, supposedly, playing the bipolar provocation-retaliation? In addition, to consider TMT and EOKA as the same, overlooks many essential factors.

On the essence of the 'political murders', the informed reader is puzzled by the absence, even in the form of a footnote, of any mention that for each case the Associations of EOKA Fighters have provided an answer, while for three executions in 1956 and five in 1958 the Associations have provided evidence that they were executed as traitors and not because of their status as AKEL members (*O Agonistis* magazine, vol. 34, special edition 2013). The absence of any reference to AKEL's newspaper *Haravgi* also raises questions. Any references to *Haravgi* would elucidate how the party dealt with the specific events back then, whether a political tone was adopted from the beginning, or if it was discovered later. In addition, the reader would expect sufficient documentation to be convinced that the 'murders' of eight, 18, 19 or 20 leftists over a four-year period (1955-1959), were intended to lead to the 'annihilation of AKEL'. Moreover, the reader would expect sufficient evidence to prove that the listed killings were politically motivated. For example, the case of Savvas Thoupos is noted only in one sentence: 'On 9 August, Savvas Thoupos, father of eight children, was murdered in Tymbou'. Another example of a murder insufficiently documented is the case of Panagis Tsaros, whom the Fighters' Associations include among the victims of the Struggle and whose name is recorded in EOKA monuments. A third example is Giorgos Polemitis, about whom Michalis Michael in his book admits that 'there is not enough information'. Finally, the fact that there is no agreement on the numbers of 'leftists murdered', even among the supporters of this theory, is puzzling. The volume mentions 'about 30 murders of leftists', while only 18 cases are recorded. On the other hand, when, on 12 December 2012, the Council of Ministers of President Dimitris Christofias, at the end of his term, decided to satisfy AKEL's long-standing request for the reinstatement of the 'murdered' as an 'act of national reconciliation' it 'reinstated' 19 that were 'unjustly killed'. In fact, Giorgos Polemitis, who is mentioned in the reviewed volume, is not included in the list of the 19 who were 'reinstated' in 2012, while the list of the 19 includes Pieris Pistolas and Georgios Polytechnis, who are not mentioned in this publication. What raises further skepticism is the report that the investigation to identify 'politically motivated murders' has not been completed in over two decades.

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