

Partitioned Island: Cold War and the Cyprus Question in the Years 1960-1974 **[Διχοτομημένη Νήσος: Ψυχρός Πόλεμος και Κυπριακό την Περίοδο 1960-1974]**

JAN KOURA

(Translated by COSTAS TSIVOS)

Athens: Alexandria Publications, 2021

pp. 224

ISBN 978-960-221-922-5

This is an important book historically and academically because it is a ‘first’. It is a first in exploring, even in a limited and specific manner, East European declassified documents from the official archives of the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic about its relations with the Republic of Cyprus. This is attempted in the wider context of the Cold War. The closest to Jan Koura’s *Διχοτομημένη Νήσος* is the work of the late Balkan scholar Spyridon Sfetas, *Cyprus and Yugoslavia: Documents from the Yugoslavian Archives 1967-1974*.¹ However, these archives, which explore Cypriot-Yugoslav relations during the Cold War, were from former Yugoslavia. Tito’s Yugoslavia cannot be said to have been an Eastern European State and, most importantly for the purposes of this review, not part of the Eastern Communist Bloc controlled by the Soviet Union.

Koura’s work is the first that comes out of the Soviet Bloc. It draws on three sets of archives. Two State ones, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMZV, *Archiv Ministerstva Zahrancnich Veci*) and the State Security (ABS, *Archiv Bezpecnostnich Slozek*), and those of the Communist Party (KSC, *Komunisticka strana Ceskoslovenska*). There appears to be another bunch of documents (NA) which are not listed in the abbreviations but which almost certainly belong to the Communist Party (*Mezinaarodni oddeleni*, NA, AUV, KSC, p. 100).

From the contents of the book, one assumes that the parts of the archives that are specifically, though not exclusively, explored are about the well-known issue of the repeated importation of arms from Czechoslovakia by the Nicosia government dur-

¹ *Κύπρος και Γιουγκοσλαβία: Έγγραφα από τα Γιουγκοσλαβικά Αρχεία 1967-1974* (Θεσσαλονίκη: University Studio Press 2016).

ing the 1960s and early 1970s; and this is, after all, the original contribution of the work by Koura. Therefore, it would have been useful if the author provided potential researchers with details of the process by which he acquired access to these archives, precisely because they are a 'first'. Is access, in what is now the Czech Republic, institutional or gained through the efforts of private researchers like himself? In other words, is there a declassified government policy, akin to those that exist in the West? Is it access open or privileged? Can copies be made or is only note taking allowed? Can non-citizens who speak the language have access to such documents?

I raise these questions, because the author makes much of the opening of such archives in the former Communist Bloc, as well as of their potential for revising the bipolar nature of the Cold War and indeed, for example, of the post-independence history of the Republic of Cyprus. He is also critical of the 'over-reliance' on Western sources in interpreting post-WWII history. Even though I do not want to belabour this point, I must stress that at least in the United States –besides the voluminous federal archives (National and Presidential) that are accessible even before the end of the Cold War– research projects² have made available voluminous archives from the former Soviet Bloc States as well as through collaborative publications. There may be nuances of the Cold War of which scholars may not be aware. However, we do know what happened in the bipolar post-WWII Cold War period and of its impact on regional conflicts.

Now back to Cyprus. Czechoslovakia only opened an embassy in Cyprus in 1964. Until then, it covered Cyprus through its legation in Athens. Here, it must be pointed out that Moscow, Bulgaria (and Romania) had full legations in Cyprus in 1960 because newly independent Cyprus was 'assigned' to Sofia in the context of Moscow's Cold War 'management'. The Czechoslovak ambassador in Athens was accredited to Nicosia as well. From 1964 until March 1973, it only had one accredited diplomat (*chargé d'affaires*) in Nicosia. From 1964 to 1970, this person is not named, although he may have been Joseph Manis (sp.? at p.150, in Greek). In 1970, Joseph Gregra was appointed as *chargé*. He was promoted to ambassador in 1973. Koura describes him as operating in a dual capacity, as a diplomat and as a veteran agent of Czechoslovak intelligence (SiB, *Statni bezpecnost*) with the code name 'ABDUL'. He began his career in Beirut in the 1950s. Koura also credits him with establishing,

² Such as the truly remarkable National Security Archive of George Washington University (founded in 1985 by journalists) or the also excellent 'Cold War International History Project' of the Woodrow Wilson Center (1991), to mention just two out of many.

within months after his arrival, contacts with high-ranking Cypriot politicians. It is also claimed that he had established an asset in the Presidential Palace (p. 162-3).

The Czechoslovak government exhibited a keen interest in Cyprus from the 1960s onwards. The presence of British bases on the island and the proximity of Cyprus to the Middle East and Africa were the main reasons. SiB agents were regularly sent there from the Athens embassy or from Prague (p. 86). In Cyprus, unlike in Greece, they could operate more freely. They also cooperated with AKEL communists, with whom they had maintained brotherly relations since the 1950s (p. 86). This cooperation, implemented through the communist party of Czechoslovakia, is made evident throughout the book and played a significant role in the arms deals. After his arrival in Nicosia, it is clear that a super-active Grega had taken over from Athens entirely.

As already suggested, the value, interest, and contribution of this work lies in the documentation provided of the deals concerning the arms supplied by Prague to Nicosia from 1966 to 1973. The need for these arms supplies —mostly light weapons— arose from the urgency and double need of Nicosia to defend itself from coordinated international as well as local machinations against its independence and territorial integrity. Originally, these machinations commenced in 1964 by the directly aggressive behaviour of Turkey, a NATO country that bombed Cyprus in 1964, as well as the indirect aggression by Greece, another NATO State, which —after 1967— became the first NATO member to be governed by a military junta. The United States and the United Kingdom governments, and the whole NATO mechanism, were the ones aiding and abetting (that is pulling the strings) these Turco-Greek machinations

What was in fact happening in Cyprus from 1964 to 1974 was an orchestrated attempt to eliminate Cypriot independence, based on the bogus claim that the nascent Cypriot Republic could potentially endanger the security of the Atlantic Alliance by 'going communist through the ballot box' because it had a strong communist party. The 'strategic' argument behind this reasoning upheld that in the same way that Czechoslovakia went communist in 1948 with the so-called Prague coup so would Cyprus. There is significant irony here. Before US Army intelligence officer T.W. Adams (author of the first U.S. Army *Area Handbook on Cyprus* and of *AKEL: The Communist Party of Cyprus*),³ coined the sexy, propagandist moniker 'Cuba of the Mediterranean' for Cyprus and 'Cassocked Castro' for President Makarios, the Re-

³ In the early 1980s, while serving as Press Counsellor of the Republic of Cyprus in the American capital, I befriended T. W. Adams, who had retired by then. He admitted to me proudly that it was on his policy suggestion that that the moniker 'Cuba of the Mediterranean' for Cyprus was adopted by the US intelligence community.

public of Cyprus was called the 'Czechoslovakia' of the post-WWII era. To this effect, Koura entitles one of his chapters 'Cuba of the Mediterranean'.

With an arms embargo by the West against it, Cyprus turned to the East to ward off Atlantic schemes against its independence. Indeed, initially Greece sent arms and men to Cyprus in 1964 for defence against an overt attack by Turkey. However, it soon became patently clear to all, and certainly to the Cypriots, that the Greek forces were there on a double mission, namely to also 'prevent', even by force, Cyprus from 'going communist'. Through the subterfuge of NATO, the strategic objective aimed at eliminating Cypriot independence and imposing over it a tri-partition/tri-condominium of Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. It was all about the vivisection and Natoisation of the newly independent State.

Cyprus first sought arms from the Soviet Union in 1964 –three agreements were signed in August, September, and December respectively– and a deal was consummated for anti-aircraft missiles to be delivered through, friendly to Cyprus, Nasser's Egypt. Cypriots were also sent to Egypt for training. Nonetheless, with Athens pressuring Nicosia as an instrumentality of the West, these weapons never reached Cyprus. Significantly, Czechoslovakia had no part in this first deal.

It was on 30 November 1966 and onwards, that Prague became the chief supplier of mostly light weapons to the Cypriot State. There is a significant political nuance highlighted by Koura here. Unlike 1964 when, under Khrushchev, Moscow stood firmly with Cyprus, by 1966, under Leonid Brezhnev, a rapprochement with Ankara was under way, so Czechoslovakia was given the green light to respond to official Cypriot requests for Eastern arms; basically, Prague fronted for Moscow.⁴ However, Prague also had its own reasons, which were economic, as Cyprus paid promptly and upfront in foreign exchange. Koura does make the point that (in 1966) Moscow pretended to Ankara that it had no knowledge of the 1966 deal (p. 138-51).

The 1966 deal produced a major crisis between Athens and Nicosia with Ankara, the West, and Greece, demanding that the light arms imported be placed under UN custody; apparently, not all of them were (p. 157). With the junta taking over in Greece in 1967, the fears of a similar coup in Cyprus became widespread. Urged by AKEL, Moscow revised its stand. In turn, it counselled Prague –all this done through the communist party mechanisms– to meet new Cypriot requests. However, it was now the turn of Prague to refuse delivery, as it was concerned with Turkey's reaction

⁴ Prague's role, experience, and existing arms industry in supplying arms to Israel in 1948 and to Egypt in 1955 were probably the key parameters.

(p. 144-5). Koura highlights this as a unique incident of Prague's defiance of Moscow (p. 144-5). Yet, according to Czechoslovakian documents, Soviet arms reached Cyprus in 1967 through Egypt, as part of a secret deal. Apparently, fears of aggression by the Greek junta overrode all other concerns. The tergiversations of the Soviet Bloc on arms supplies to Cyprus were repeated yet again, in 1969, when Prague cancelled another deal. The main excuse given was that, in the aftermath of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the new communist leadership did not want potential international problems.

Two other cases of important arms supplies by Czechoslovakia, in 1971 and 1973, are recorded. By then, the Greek junta had been sponsoring the EOKA B terrorist organisation as an instrumentality for the assassination of Makarios and the overthrow of the Cypriot government. The danger was very real, and a junta now existed in Turkey as well. Both juntas were in cahoots and determined to rein in or overthrow Makarios. A 1971 arms deal and the delivery of Czechoslovakian arms were used as an excuse by the Athens junta to force Makarios out, by force if necessary (on 14 February 1972). This junta move was preempted, literary at the last minute, through local and international action. Pro-government forces, partly armed with Czechoslovakian weapons, and thousands of civilians surrounded the *Archiepiskopi* in support of President Makarios, who, resided there at the time. This prompted the Secretary General of AKEL in 1972 to thank publicly Czechoslovakia for helping avert a coup (p.160, No 30). Again, the 1971 arms ended up under UN control; but (yet again) not all of them. By 1973, the domestic situation had deteriorated dangerously and both the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia responded to Nicosia's urgent arms requests by delivering small bunches of automatic weapons from April all the way to the week before the Greek junta organised the coup of 15 July 1974. Readers should be aware that Koura's work on the 1966 and 1971 deals especially are complemented by two important Cypriot protagonists of the arms deals, Andreas Azinas and Glafkos Clerides. Both were once ministers and confidants of Makarios, and they detail the arms deals in their memoirs.⁵ Needless to say that there was extensive coverage of the attendant crises in the local and international press as well.

There is one particular incident in the documentation provided by Koura, which puts to rest existing speculation about the underlying facts and it is thus worth mentioning. After the 1971 importation, the terrorist organisation EOKA B led by George

⁵ *Fifty Years of Silence (50 Χρόνια Σιωπής*, Nicosia: Airwaves Ltd, 2001/2008) by Azinas and *My Testimony (Η Κατάθεση μου*, Nicosia: Aletheia, 1988/1989) by Clerides.

Grivas was reported to have received Czechoslovak light arms from Lebanon. At the same time, there was rife speculation that Prague was double-dealing. Gregra, in Nicosia, denied this vehemently. However, Prague was so concerned that it assigned the head of SiB to investigate (p. 161 Nos 35-36). In his report to his superiors, he concluded that the Greek junta urged a well-known Greek shipowner and supporter of Grivas who, with the help of local bishops opposing Makarios, provided the funds for the purchase of the weapons from the black market in Beirut. Nevertheless, they spread the disinformation to rattle Prague and Nicosia (p. 161 Nos 35-36).

The worth of Jan Koura's book lies in the documentation it provides readers on the arms deals between Prague and Nicosia and the political and ideological motivations that prompted the various parties to act, including their tergiversations –those of Prague and Moscow– when they had to make choices. Prague and Moscow aided Cyprus to ward off western machinations up until the Greek junta unleashed massively the Greek contingent stationed in Cyprus (under the 1960 Accords) against the government of a State, whose independence it was supposed to protect. The bloody coup provided the excuse for another NATO State –ostensibly another protector of the Republic– to attack, forcefully partition the country, and implement an ethnic-cleansing policy against its autochthonous population in the northern part of the country. In the meantime, a third NATO State, the United Kingdom, another ostensible protector of Cyprus, stood by and watched the Turkish army running amok on Cyprus and killing one percent of the population of the country in the space of one month. Thus was Cyprus vivisected and partitioned. This brings us to the title of the book with which I take issue., Jan Koura has titled his book *Διχοτομημένη Νήσος*. I do not know if this is an exact translation of the original, but I presume that the closest translation would be *Partitioned Island*.

The author presents his analysis under the umbrella of the Cold War and adopts the western conventional wisdom about Cyprus lock, stock and barrel. This is evident from most of the secondary sources he uses. He concludes, *inter alia*, that East European arms supplies did not help solve the Cyprus Problem but may have made it worse. Like most, he treats Cyprus merely as an island, as an object and as an appendix of the West, lacking any standing of its own, an autonomous existence and an international personality. Yes, Cyprus is an island, but it is a lot more than just that. It is a country. It is a State with a population that emerged from a struggle against colonialism and imperialism, like so many other Afro-Asian States in the 1960s. It is not just an island at the mercy of the winds and of others' whims.

Neither is it, by the way, a small State. It is a State, albeit a weak State in the international system of sovereign and equal States. However, like most weak States in the international system, it has sought protection by membership in international and regional organisations and through political alliances. Cyprus is today *de facto* partitioned. On the other hand, the attempt to destroy its independence and sovereignty has spectacularly failed – at a huge human cost, nonetheless, to its people. It would therefore behoove those in the West who care about an international rules-based system to reflect and act on this. The late Christopher Hitchens, one of the most perceptive students of Cypriot history, has written that no other people have gone through – in the space of one generation – an anti-colonial guerrilla war, a civil war, a coup, and an invasion. Cypriots seek security above all. In this endeavour, they deserve support and respect; and they certainly do not see themselves as the satrapy of any power or powers, all trying to ‘solve’ Cypriot internal problems through *diktats* and coercion.

A final comment to make; even though I have, as a reviewer, overlooked some translation misprints, especially of names into Greek, one factual mistake must stand corrected. The author repeatedly states that due to political differences between the President and the Vice-President, the Cypriot Army, as called by the 1960 Accords, was not established, and that its non-establishment led to the establishment of paramilitary groups (p. 89). A Cypriot Army was established and functioned until 1963. Its first commander was the Cypriot-born retired General of the Greek Army, Menelaos Pantelides. His deputy was the Cypriot-born retired General of the Turkish Army, Kemal Gursel.

Marios L. Evriviades