



POLITICAL USES OF SPORTS DURING THE GREEK CIVIL WAR: THE PERIOD AFTER THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND BEYOND, 1947-1949

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Abstract:

During the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), the issue of political initiative was contested between the Greek urban governments, allied with the USA following the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine, and the Communist Party of Greece (CPG), supported by the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In this initial Cold War phase, sports were instrumentalised by the Greek government according to the developments in military operations. Three battles were pivotal for the outcome of the Civil War: the Battle of Konitsa, the Battle of Grammos, and the Battle of Mali Madi. During the first two, the government side, under the guise of social contribution through sports, aimed either at preventing the flow of citizens towards enlistment with the Democratic Army controlled by the CPG or at the 'national-patriotic' and anti-communist homogenization of the Greek population. In the Battle of Mali Madi, sports were used, as openly stated, to economically support the government's military efforts against the CPG.

Keywords: Greek Civil War, Truman Doctrine, Communist Party of Greece, sports

1. Introduction

In this research the period of the Greek Civil War is examined, particularly during its second phase, from the Truman Doctrine onwards, attempting for the political and sports developments of the period to be correlated. Specifically, this correlation is investigated

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through the study of three crucial battles that significantly influenced the course of military and political developments: the Battle of Konitsa, the Battle of Grammos, and the Battle of Mali Madi. The research questions are laser focused on the role of sports during: a) the Battle of Konitsa, b) the Battle of Grammos, and c) the Battle of Mali Madi. The research was based on the press of the time, specifically the newspapers *Ethnikos Kirykas*, *Kathimerini*, and *Athlitismos* (Mager, 1957, pp 123-189; Droulia & Koutsopanagou, 2008).

Methodologically, in terms of source search, archival material was sought from various entities such as the clubs Panathinaikos, Olympiacos, and AEK, the Hellenic Football Federation, the Harilaos Florakis Education Centre which constitutes the archive of the Communist Party of Greece, and the Army History Directorate. These efforts did not bear fruit either due to communication difficulties, the lack of a structured archive, or the absence of relevant sources pertaining to the issue under investigation. Given the historical context concerning the period after the triple occupation of Greece by the Axis powers, during which many archives were destroyed, and due to the Civil War, maintaining archives was not a priority for some entities. Consequently, the conclusions of this research are more of a working hypothesis meant to open the field for further academic investigation.

2. Historical Context: From Greece's Involvement in WWII to the Greek Civil War, 1940-1949

The Greco-Italian War marked Greece's involvement in World War II on the side of the British against the Axis powers (Cartier, 1966). Following the victorious Greco-Italian War, Germany's involvement led to Greece's subjugation by the German, Italian, and Bulgarian occupation forces. In occupied Greece, resistance and compliance trends emerged towards the occupiers. The National Liberation Front (NFL), established on the initiative of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG), became the largest resistance organisation against the occupiers from the left, while the bourgeois resistance was mainly expressed through the National Democratic Greek League (NDGL), which had pro-British tendencies while the most part of the bourgeois collaborated with the conquerors. As for the government, upon the advent of the occupation, they fled to the Middle East, leaving Greece under the rule of the appointed by the Germans' occupation governments. After liberation, power was claimed by both the Greek bourgeois class, in cooperation with the British and the exiled government, and the left, specifically NFL (Mazower, 1994).

Eventually, with British intervention and the help of the Greek bourgeoisie, the country fell under British influence, resulting in a period of persecutions, social exclusions, and exiles of NFL members and democratic citizens orchestrated by the Greek bourgeoisie in collaboration with the British colonisers. This led the CPG to regroup and form an army to combat these persecutions (Publisher of Free Greece, 1947). They were initiated by the Gialta agreement, British guardianship was extended until early 1947,

when the country came under American guardianship following the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine, which established anti-communism as an international policy. Concurrently, the Marshall Plan provided American economic support for Greece's development and reconstruction (Vetsopoulos, 2007). The Greek Civil War, which began in March 1946 and lasted until August 1949, was the first Cold War phase where the two major WWII victors engaged in a proxy war in post-occupation Greece. The National Army (NA), supported by America after the Truman Doctrine, represented government and pro-American aims to displace Soviet influence, while the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) reflected the CPG's objectives to establish a people's democracy (Rafailidis, 2010). At this point, it should be pointed out that the core of DAG consisted of members of the National Liberation Front who as democrats, were prosecuted and subjected to social exclusions from the Greek bourgeois governments, which, from their part, represented the British interests in Greece. The Greek Civil War concluded with a victory for the government and the pro-American front. The primary reason for the DAG's defeat was the cessation of military support from Yugoslavia of Tito, where DAG kept supply bases and the Soviet Union. The rupture between the two states (Yugoslavia and Soviet Union), along with the blatant prosoviet stance of CPG, constituted the main cause for the cessation of support from Yugoslavia to DAG ("The struggle of DAG", 1997 p. 8). During the current research, in which the period of study starts from the Konitsa battle in December 1947, Greece was found under American guardianship.

3. The Battle of Konitsa and Its Football Celebration

On 24 December 1947, the DAG formed the Political Government, or the Provisional Democratic Government (PDG). The DAG's plan included capturing Konitsa to establish it as the PDG's headquarters. This large-scale operation for the DAG faced the NA and gendarmerie forces. The battle, the second part of the 'Lakes' plan, was crucial for both the CPG and the government. Through the plan 'Lakes' ratified by the decisions of the third plenary session of CPG in September of 1947 in Yugoslavia, DAG aimed at the creation of a state under its control with Thessaloniki as its capital and with parts of Thrace, Epirus and Albania around. In case of its victory DAG would be able to recover significantly, to refuel and recruit new members for its ranks. Even more so, the fact that the capturing was starting right after the formation of PDG it could boost greatly the morale of DAG. For the above reasons, the Konitsa battle was considered of key importance not only for the part of CPG but also for the government's part which was determined under any circumstances to suppress the full sail of DAG. After less than ten days, despite suffering more losses, the NA ultimately prevailed over the DAG (Voglis & Sakelaropoulos, 2021).

This large-scale victory of NA was celebrated in about ten days following the end of the fight with a football event on 18 January 1948, involving the team of the Technical Education Center of the Air Force and Olympiacos, the previous year's champion. The match, held at Panathinaikos' stadium, was stated to be supported with its proceeds

Konitsa residents financially ("The aviators", 1948). The match secretly aimed at subtly fostering social cohesion towards government pursuits. This intention was not negligible if it is taken into account that in 1947 and in 1948, 20 percent were enlisted in the DAG in the cities, while in the year to follow, this percentage declined dramatically (Roviros, & Karabinis, & Moriatis, 1999). The event was attended by the Prime Minister, government members, and Queen Frederika, who awarded the Cup to Olympiakos popular player, Yannis Vazos whose team won by 2-1. The Queen's presence in the stadium was far from random. Frederika had taken over the 'soldier's jersey' foundation, whose aim was raising funds for the government's cause against DAG. Therefore, her coming to the stadium rendered the match meaningful and nationally advantageous.

The cup was established as an award by the Aviation, while a series of events emotionally charged the match. The arrival of konitsa fighters into the stadium gave rise to the 15000 fans bursting into cheers. The event featured more emotional moments like a minute of silence for Konitsa's battle-fallen footballers, Christos Katsouras of Olympiakos and Orestis Makridis of Panathinaikos, with Olympiakos players wearing black bracelets and the ceremonial ball drop from a warplane accompanied by the aviation music band performing and a swarm of aircraft looping sensationally.

In this pivotal NA victory, the football celebration was incumbent for two main reasons. Firstly, due to the Konitsa inhabitants' reinforcement which could influence the local community in favour of NA, given that DAG aimed at enlisting them in its classes. Secondly, again in relation to the curbing of their enlisting in DAG, the match might affect the Athenian society likewise as long as there was still an urban population moving towards enlisting into the DAG. In other words, the football match, in addition to its sociopolitical dimension, could communicate a strong governmental message to the Greek people and win them over through ceremonial acts. Apparently, Frederika's presence in awarding the medal, the mournful atmosphere emitted from the black bracelets and in general, the whole organisation of the event intertwined sports with political propaganda in favour of NA. The latter was highlighted as a defender and guarantor of peace and restoration.

4. Awarding the Olympiakos star footballer by Frederica, Yannis Vazos

The Battle of Grammos and the 'National-Patriotic' Homogenisation of the Population
Following the Battle of Konitsa, significant political and military changes occurred, including the DAG's bombing of Thessaloniki on the 9th February 1948 ("The United Nations", 1948), the presence of military operations of DAG in Parnitha ("The DAG", 1996), or even the occupation of all the heights south of Mourgana by the Greek Army a month later constitute some significant military events. Meanwhile, on the political level, the differences between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union were chronic, culminating in Tito's expulsion from Cominform. The alignment of the CPG (Communist Party of Greece) with the Cominform marked the first rift between the two parts, which would prove fatal for the CPG with Tito's later decision to close his country's borders to the CPG,

where the DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) had supply bases. All of the above do not seem to have had any impact on the sports events of the period. Sports matches continued normally without any direct at least, references to their connection with the broader context.

Where there is a noticeable increase in sports events after July 1948, which may be related to the Battle of Grammos, the military operations of which began in late June 1948. The battles lasted all summer, and at the turn of July-August, at height 1843 of 'Kleftis', the operations peaked, during which a Greek Army plane was shot down. After that, the DAG retreated and moved to Vitsi, where the headquarters of the DAG was located (Roviros, & Karabinis, & Moriatis, 1999).

In this context, a movement of sports matches can be distinguished, particularly those involving the social contribution of the families of those fighting alongside the Greek Army at the municipal level. Specifically, the municipalities of Nikaia, Kaisariani, and Poros seem to be engaging in sports activities aimed at the aforementioned goal. Thus, on the initiative of the Mayor of Nikaia, Potis Albanis, a football match was organised between the Royal Navy and a mixed team of first-category clubs of Nikaia ("Football match", 1948). Similar events were held in Kaisariani between a mixed Kaisariani team and the army ("Army team faces", 1948), while in Poros, the army competed with Pantrizinakos ("Army – Pantrizinakos", 1948).

These matches took place from July to August 1948, precisely during the period of the Battle of Grammos, one of the most significant battles of the Civil War. The common denominator of these matches is not that they are organised by the respective municipalities, as this is not known beyond the case of the Navy-mixed Nikaia teams' match, but the fact that the armed forces' teams, which participated in all three matches, play a leading role. The participation of the armed forces in serving this political and social purpose might be seen, on the one hand, as paying tribute to their fallen comrades, but also as a means to shape public sentiment in favor of the government side. It is not certain if these matches are indeed connected to the military operations of the Battle of Grammos, but the social aim of the matches may indicate the need for these events to function within the framework of a 'national-patriotic' homogenisation of the Greek population. In the rhetoric of the left, patriotism and national-patriotic sentiment in the Greek case, beginning with the Greek Civil War, were equated with government ambitions that aimed to turn the country into an American colony. On the other hand, in the government narrative, communists were portrayed as 'bandits.' In this sense, the 'national-patriotic' homogenisation concerned the 'initiation' of the Greek population into the common governmental and American goal, which was none other than the displacement of the DAG and the transfer of political initiative to the Americans. As will be seen in the following chapter, the goal of social contribution soon shifts towards strengthening the Greek Army, something connected to broader political and military developments.

5. The occupation of Mali Madi and the mobilisation of football in support of the Greek government

In September 1948, the Greek government recaptures Murghana (Tzoukas, 2012). During the same month, Panathinaikos takes the initiative to organise matches aimed at financially supporting the Greek government. Two events this month are considered crucial and can provide an interpretation of Panathinaikos' decision to assist beyond mere participation and to contribute on an organisational level to the support of the Greek government, as will be explained below. Therefore, in September 1948, the Democratic Army (DA) occupied Mali Madi. From the government's perspective, this occupation by the DA was perceived as a national disaster. For this reason, Prime Minister Themistoklis Sofoulis and the Minister of the Interior travelled to Kastoria and interpreted the situation as extremely unfavorable, despite the fact that the National Army had significantly superior military equipment. The NA's inability to end the war, despite strong American assistance, led to an open threat from American General Van Fleet to cut off American aid to Greece, a threat that was overturned in November 1948 by assurances from Marshall himself, the U.S. Secretary of State, regarding the opposite during his visit to Athens. (Alvanos, 2012). Taking into account that Marshall's assurances for supporting the NA came two months after the occupation of Mali Madi and considering Van Fleet's statement, which left the government side in a difficult position regarding the financial support of the NA, finding economic means to support the government's struggle became a top priority.

In this climate, on October 6, 1948, Panathinaikos announced its initiative to organise a series of matches under the auspices of Frederica, who, as mentioned earlier, led the 'soldier's jersey' initiative. The invitation was accepted by the Athenian and Piraeus clubs, while an army team was invited to participate. Moreover, according to the newspaper *Ethnikos Kirikas*, the matches would be attended by the king and queen as well ("Panathinaikos for", 1948). Although the matches were announced just one month after the occupation of Mali Madi and one month before Marshall's statement in favour of the continuation of American aid, they eventually took place in December of the same year, following Marshall's assurances of continued American support. Thus, on December 22, a football match was held between a mixed team of Panathinaikos, Olympiacos, and AEK against the army team, with the proceeds entirely benefiting the 'soldier's jersey' ("Athletic movement", 1948).

Ultimately, in the only match organised by Panathinaikos, the attendance was notably sparse, as only 1,500 spectators attended the match, and the royal couple was absent, although according to the aforementioned publication, they had planned to attend not just one but a series of matches. The small attendance at the stadium is primarily attributed to the fact that the match was held on a weekday, while at the same time, holiday matches were attracting more interest. The second explanation, which seems to be prevailing, is that although several matches were initially planned to support the NA following Marshall's intervention, these matches were not considered crucial as

the government had American economic guarantees for the continuation of its struggle. Eventually, the series of football matches involving Athenian and Piraeus clubs and the army team was transformed into a football match between these same teams but with a different composition. This case is also supported by the fact that the match was downgraded since it was scheduled on a weekday and not during the weekend, and it was not sufficiently promoted with the participation of the royal couple, which could have given a different dimension to the match and attracted a large audience. Instead of the couple, army officers were present ("The army's team", 1948).

6. Conclusion

Sports during the Civil War were utilised by the government side, depending on the circumstances. Following the Truman Doctrine's announcement, the Greek government was supported by the U.S. to achieve victory against the CPG. During critical battles like Konitsa, Grammos, and Mali Madi, sports were leveraged according to the period's objectives. In the Battle of Konitsa, the football stadium reflected the government's effort to celebrate a major victory for the National Army, under the guise of social contribution and being promoted as a guarantor of peace. Most likely, the real aim of this football event involved curbing conscription not only of the citizens of Konitsa but also in general into DSE. The Battle of Grammos did not demonstrate a clear correlation between sports and military developments. However, the organisation of matches in the municipalities of Nikaia, Kaisariani, and Poros during this period likely aimed at uniting the Greek population on an anti-communist and 'national-patriotic' basis.

Regarding the Battle of Mali Madi, things were clearer. On the one hand, there was a willingness among certain sports clubs, notably Panathinaikos, to support the fight against the communists, while Olympiacos and AEK also willingly participated in this effort. On the other hand, the use of football, the most popular sport among the Greek people, was interpreted in relation to its ability to unite the masses and raise substantial economic resources, which could be directed towards the government's and American fight against the CPG. One might argue that beyond the economic resources gathered, Panathinaikos' matches possibly aimed to awaken 'national-patriotic' consciousness, as attempted during the matches following the Battle of Grammos. However, this claim is debunked due to the fact that after Marshall's assurances of continued American support for the National Army, the matches were downgraded. This downgrade was evident in the reduction from a series of matches initially planned by Panathinaikos to a single match without the presence of the Queen, as initially announced.

In conclusion, sports were utilised by the government side at times to strengthen 'national-patriotic' sentiment, at other times to curb recruitment momentum towards the DAG, and sometimes as a means to gather economic resources. In reality, both the Konitsa celebration match and those following the Battle of Grammos were attributed to gilded social dimensions that acted as covers for their true intentions. Conversely, the matches organised under Panathinaikos were made obvious on their actual basis, a fact

proven by their downgrade following the U.S.'s assurance of support for the National Army. In each sub-period, these matches served the government's goals, which were no different from the victory of the National Army over the DAG, a victory that was to place the country under the regime of American guardianship. Finally, as previously mentioned, this research examines a period that did not favor the preservation and maintenance of archival material, especially on issues not related to the political and military fields, which, due to wartime conditions, held primacy. For this reason, the conclusions mainly fall within the framework of a research hypothesis that aspires to open the field for further study on the subject.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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