

THE GREEK-SPANISH RAPPROCHEMENT AND PAPAGOS'S VISIT TO SPAIN IN 1954: POLITICAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND DIPLOMATIC DIMENSIONS

[El acercamiento Greco-español y la visita de Papagos a España en
1954: dimensiones política, ideológica y diplomática]

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the political, ideological, and diplomatic dimensions of Greek Prime Minister Alexandros Papagos visit to Spain in 1954. It examines the historical context of the bilateral approach, the perception of Papagos in the Francoist regime, as well as the motives and objectives of both the Greek and Spanish sides. The visit did not produce long-term results, as it was constrained by external reactions, particularly from Britain, which was concerned about the potential connection between the issues of Gibraltar and Cyprus. This demonstrated the limitations of their bilateral rapprochement and of the extend of independent foreign policy in both countries during the post-war period.

KEYWORDS: Papagos, Franco, Gibraltar, Cyprus, Britain

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza las dimensiones políticas, ideológicas y diplomáticas de la visita del primer ministro griego Alexandros Papagos a España en 1954. Examina el contexto histórico del enfoque bilateral, la percepción de Papagos en el régimen franquista, así como los motivos y objetivos tanto de la parte griega como de la española. La visita no produjo resultados a largo plazo, ya que se vio limitada por las reacciones externas, en particular las de Gran Bretaña, que estaba preocupada por la posible conexión entre las cuestiones de Gibraltar y Chipre. Esto demostró las limitaciones de su acercamiento bilateral y del alcance de la política exterior independiente en ambos países durante el período de posguerra.

Palabras clave: Papagos, Franco, Gibraltar, Chipre, Gran Bretaña

Introduction

Greece, and even more so Spain, has often been portrayed as an exception within the Western “free world” during the Cold War period. The post-war Greek political regime, although parliamentary in form, remained essentially authoritarian until the mid-1970s, as the king and the army retained substantial powers beyond parliamentary control. In fact, during the years 1967-1974, the army seized power and directly governed the country with the tolerance of the United States. Spain, for its part, remained an authoritarian one-party dictatorship until the death of Franco in 1975. It was excluded from participation in NATO —whereas Greece had joined in 1952— yet at the same time, its diplomatic relations with the Western world were restored. In 1953 the United States and Spain co-signed the Pact of Madrid, which allowed the establishment of American military bases on Spanish territory in exchange for military and economic assistance.

The distinctiveness of the two regimes was rooted, on the one hand, in their prior experiences of civil war (1936-39 and 1946-49) and their pronounced anti-communist orientation, and, on the other hand, in the challenges of the decolonization era, which at times brought them into conflict with the Western bloc —particularly with Britain, over the issues of Cyprus and Gibraltar, respectively. Within this context, an effort was made to promote cooperation between the two countries during the government of Alexandros Papagos in Greece, to address both domestic public opinion and mutual diplomatic support. The peak of this bilateral rapprochement occurred during Papagos’s official visit to Spain and his meeting with Francisco Franco in October 1954, which, although it did not yield long-term results, nevertheless generated considerable diplomatic activity between the two countries at the time, as well as concern abroad —particularly from the British side.

This article examines the political, ideological, and diplomatic dimensions of Papagos’s visit, paying particular attention to the motives and objectives of each side, the limits of bilateral rapprochement, and the scope for independent foreign policy in both countries. In general, contemporary historiography has shown only limited interest in Greek-Spanish relations and contacts. Most relevant studies have concentrated on the period of the two civil wars or on the transition from the Franco and Colonels’ dictatorships to parliamentary rule in the mid-1970s. Earlier periods have received only minimal attention, while research into bilateral relations during the post-war decades (1950s-1960s) is almost non-existent (Sfikas 2000, Hassiotis 2013, 2012, Mais 2015, Kornetis, Cavallaro 2019, Filippis 2020, Fytili 2016, Hassiotis 2022, 2024). This

article aims to address this gap, by drawing on Greek, Spanish, and British diplomatic archives, the contemporary Greek and Spanish press, as well as international historiography.

Greece and Spain after the Second World War

The Second World War and the subsequent foreign occupation were unprecedented experiences for Greece, similar to those faced by all the belligerent nations. The country emerged from the conflict in a state of devastation, marked by significant economic and infrastructural damage, as well as human casualties totaling approximately 500.000 individuals, accounting for 6,5% of the pre-war population. Furthermore, post-war Greece was marked by a pronounced division. Following its liberation, the left, along with the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), which had played a pivotal role in the resistance against the foreign occupiers, sought to claim governance and initiate transformations within the political and social hierarchies. This ambition brought them into direct confrontation with the bourgeois establishment. The ensuing discord escalated into a significant civil war between 1946 and 1949, pitting the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) —supported by the KKE— against the pro-monarchist Greek government, which was backed by most of the bourgeoisie parties and personages. Despite its weaknesses, the government was from the outset in a favorable position against the communist guerrillas: it controlled most of the territory, including all primary urban centers, facilitated humanitarian aid from international sources (which assisted in population management), and received military support from Britain and the United States. Conversely, the Democratic Army's control was mostly limited to mountainous, sparsely populated regions. The Democratic Army could only rely on limited assistance from neighboring people's republics, such as Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania. American economic and military assistance to Greece following the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, along with the Tito-Stalin split in June 1948, ultimately tilted the balance in favor of the government. By August 1949, the National Army had successfully seized the last fortified positions held by its adversaries in northern Greece, effectively ending the armed hostilities. A crucial factor in this success was the assumption of supreme command by General Alexandros Papagos, whose role, as we shall see, was praised by the Franco regime (Close, 1993, 97-213).

After the end of the civil war, the parliamentary regime was preserved, although parallel centers of power (the Palace, the army and security forces, and the American embassy) often exerted greater influence than the elected governments. Several thousand political prisoners remained in

prison and in exile until the early 1960s, while the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) continued to be outlawed. The contradictions of the post-war regime became evident roughly twenty years after the end of the civil war, with the military coup of 1967 and the imposition of the Colonels' dictatorship (Nikolakakopoulos 2013). In foreign policy, Greece became closely aligned with the Western bloc. In 1950 it sent troops to Korea as part of the UN forces, and in 1952 it formally joined NATO. However, its relations with its traditional "protecting power", Britain, began to deteriorate due to the Cyprus issue. The Greek Cypriot community challenged British rule on the island, demanding union with Greece. This claim was opposed both by Turkey, which asserted its rights over the island as a former Ottoman province and spoke of its right to protect the Turkish Cypriot minority, and by Britain, which refused to relinquish Cyprus due to its strategic significance for British interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. (It is worth noting that British and French forces involved in the Suez Crisis used the island as their base of operations.) These disputes damaged Britain's image in Greek society and politics, leading to a deterioration in Greek-British relations, which, however, were never completely severed (Hatzivassiliou 2006).

After the end of the Second World War, Franco's regime found itself in a precarious position as the last surviving fascist dictatorship in Europe. This was not only because it had emerged victorious in the Spanish Civil War with the support of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, but also because during the global conflict Spain (although officially neutral) had maintained a friendly stance toward the Axis powers by supplying raw materials, allowing the refueling of German submarines, and participating in Operation Barbarossa with the Blue Division. When the war in Europe concluded with Germany's surrender, the victors demanded Franco's removal from power and the restoration of representative government. This fueled the expectations of Spanish anti-fascists who believed that, following the downfall of Mussolini and Hitler, Franco's turn had come. These expectations, however, were soon disappointed. The Soviet Union and its satellites even called for military intervention to overthrow the regime, but the Western powers adopted a different approach. France, despite initially taking a hard line (by closing the border and allowing anti-Franco activities to be organized on its territory under pressure from left-wing parties that participated in its early governments), was unwilling to act independently of Britain and the United States. The British Labour government agreed to Spain's diplomatic isolation but rejected permanent sanctions or the prospect of Franco's forcible removal. The United States was even more reluctant to act against the Franco regime, though it initially accepted its diplomatic isolation. At the same time, Western

businessmen with interests in Spain, conservative politicians, religious leaders, military figures, and diplomats undermined the policy of isolating the regime. Spain's international isolation reached its peak with UN Resolution 39 (I) of 12 December 1946, which branded the country's regime as fascist, called for the restoration of parliamentary democracy, and urged member states to withdraw their ambassadors and diplomatic representatives from Madrid. In practice, however, the resolution had little effect on Spain's international position or the stability of the regime. Only a few countries (mainly in Eastern Europe and Mexico) fully severed relations with the Iberian state, while domestically the regime's supporters mobilized to prevent the return of their opponents. Franco introduced mostly superficial changes, such as abolishing fascist salutes and symbols, and reopening the Cortes as an advisory body. In any case, the onset of the Cold War brought an end to Spain's international isolation. With Resolution 386 (V) of 4 November 1950, the UN General Assembly rescinded its earlier recommendations to member states, allowing for the full restoration of diplomatic relations with Madrid. Greece was among the first European countries to adopt this new resolution (Lleonart y Anselem 1983, Payne 1987, 356-420, Portero 1989, Hassiotis 2010, 233-264).

As a counterbalance to the political, diplomatic, and economic isolation imposed by the European powers, Spain sought to strengthen its ties with the states of Latin America (maintaining already close relations with Perón's Argentina), as well as to elaborate a Mediterranean policy oriented primarily toward the Arab world, but also toward Greece and Turkey. The main objective of this strategy was to enhance Spain's international reputation by forming alliances that could transform the country from an outcast of the Western bloc to a valuable partner in the global fight against communism. The rapprochement with the Arab states initially achieved some success, due to the regime's pro-Arab and anti-Israeli orientation, its rhetorical opposition to Western liberalism, and its relatively moderate colonial policy in Spanish Morocco. The latter encouraged the dissemination of Arabic education while also showing a degree of sympathy and tolerance towards Moroccan nationalist organizations that were banned in French Morocco. This policy provoked displeasure on the part of the French. Nevertheless, these initiatives failed to produce any significant diplomatic gains. At the same time, Spain's bilateral agreement with the United States and its subsequent reintegration into the United Nations reduced the need to strengthen ties with Arab states, some of which (especially Nasser's Egypt) were increasingly aligning with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the independence granted to French Morocco reduced any remaining advantage Franco had in North Africa.

Concurrently, Madrid intensified its diplomatic campaign for the restitution of Gibraltar. The Axis defeat in the Second World War had extinguished Spain's ambitions to reconquer the territory and establish itself as a Mediterranean power. In late 1951, Franco proposed to the British government the establishment of an Anglo-Spanish condominium over Gibraltar for a period of fifty years, after which sovereignty would revert to Spain. London's rejection of the proposal prompted the Franco regime to mobilize domestic propaganda, impose a temporary blockade of Gibraltar from Spanish territory, and advance the idea of a Mediterranean pact designed to exert pressure on Britain (Delgado Gómez-Escalonilla 1995, 285-304, Algora Weber 1995, Huguet 2010, 215-230, Pardo Sanz 2001, 45-68).

The Perception of Papagos in Francoist Diplomacy

In the immediate post-war years, Greek-Spanish relations remained extremely limited, due both to Spain's international isolation and the traditionally minimal level of diplomatic, political, economic, and cultural exchange between the two countries. Nevertheless, Greece held a significant place in Spain's plans to form a Mediterranean alliance for three reasons. Firstly, the Spanish government viewed the post-war Greek political regime as genuinely anti-communist. Secondly, it aimed to draw parallels between the civil wars of both countries to gain legitimacy within the international community, especially among the "free world" states. Thirdly, by the early 1950s, Madrid believed that collaborating with Greece could help further Spanish ambitions concerning Gibraltar. For its part, the Greek government viewed Spain's attempts to construct a Mediterranean pact favorably, though initially it refrained from committing itself, preferring to wait "until positions on the matter were taken by our major allies".¹ Two figures played a central role in these designs: the Spanish diplomatic chargé d'affaires in Athens, Sebastián de Romero Radigales, and General Alexandros Papagos, who later became Prime Minister of Greece.

Sebastián de Romero Radigales was a career diplomat who first served in Athens during the Spanish Civil War. He informally represented the Burgos government, after taking over the Spanish embassy with the tolerance of Ioannis Metaxas's dictatorship (1936-1941). He left Athens

¹ Greek Diplomatic and Historical Archive = (DHA)/Central Service, 1951/d. 74, 1.1: Kl. Sindikas to Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madrid, 30 June 1951, and DHA/Central Service, 1952/d. 65, 6.1: Spain's domestic and foreign policy: M. K. Melas to Greek Embassy in Madrid, Athens 30 July 1952. Cf. Hassiotis 2010, 243-63.

in 1939 but returned in 1943 as Consul General. During the years of the Occupation, he and his Greek-born wife engaged in philanthropic work and established close ties with prominent Athenian families. They also assisted in the rescue of approximately 500 Jews from Athens and Thessaloniki, despite the obstacles imposed by the Franco regime on their emigration to Spain.² After the liberation of Greece, Romero Radigales retained his post as minister plenipotentiary of the second class, although he had not been formally accredited by the Greek government. In the years following, until the conclusion of his tenure in Athens in 1954, the Spanish diplomat worked vigorously to secure official recognition by the Greek state, fully restore and advance Greek-Spanish relations, and end Spain's international isolation. He fostered closer relationships primarily with conservative politicians, military leaders, journalists, and publishers, as well as with King Paul and Queen Frederica. Perhaps his most significant achievement was the revival of the Greek-Spanish League in 1948. The League had remained dormant since the Spanish Civil War. The membership of the League included representatives from all major political parties of the time, as well as prominent figures from the Athenian economic and intellectual elite. The revival of the League, as he himself observed, "constituted a veritable plebiscite in favor of our regime".³ Among its members was the then Court Chamberlain Alexandros Papagos, with whom Romero Radigales claimed to have maintained a "personal friendship",⁴ according to repeated references in his correspondence with the Palacio de Santa Cruz. During the years of the Greek Civil War, when diplomatic contacts between the two countries were limited, Romero Radigales became the principal source of information for the Franco regime regarding developments in Greece. Consequently, his assessments of Papagos largely shaped the official Spanish perception of the Greek general and future political leader.

When Papagos assumed command of the government forces in January 1949, the Spanish diplomat appeared confident in an improvement in the military situation, and he shared the general's optimism regarding the complete expulsion of the DSE from Greek territory by the end of the

² Archivo Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (Madrid) = (A.M.A.E.)/R 3115/20: Grecia: Actividades de la representación diplomática de España (1946-1952): Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 21 July 1949, 29 and 30 December 1950. Cf. Filippis 2007, 145-63, and Morcillo Rosillo, 2008, 24-32.

³ AMAE/R 3115/21: Españoles en el extranjero, Grecia (1948-51): Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 10 May 1948. Cf. Hassiotis 2010, 253-58.

⁴ AMAE/R 2042/1: Grecia: Informaciones sobre legislación griega (1946-49). Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 26 January 1949.

year.⁵ In the following months, he regularly reported to his superiors on Papagos's successes against the guerrillas. He emphasized that "the morale of the army is good, and both officers and soldiers appear satisfied with the measures taken by the Commander-in-Chief".⁶ In October of the same year, he sent a detailed report on the unprecedented conferral in Greece of the rank of Field Marshal to Papagos. The connection drawn with Franco is explicit:

The pacification of Greece is solely attributed to the wise conduct of the war by Commander-in-Chief Papagos, and this is acknowledged by all, even by those who had previously not regarded him as a general of the first rank. For all these reasons, the distinction he has received is fully merited and bestows upon him the honor of being the second general to have defeated the monster of communism on the battlefield, following in the glorious footsteps of our own illustrious Caudillo.⁷

This approach was further strengthened after the end of the Civil War, in anticipation of Papagos's entry into political life. For Romero Radigales, the ideal outcome would have been a dictatorship led by Papagos: "If he could establish a dictatorship—something impossible due to the opposition of the American and British governments—he would have the support of all impartial forces outside the political parties".⁸ The Spanish diplomat nonetheless recognized that such a development was unattainable, given Greece's dependence on the Western powers, and above all the United States. Consequently, Papagos would have to operate within the framework of parliamentarism. Romero Radigales recorded the conflict between the Greek general and the king, as well as the attempted coup in May 1951 by officers of IDEA (Sacred Bond of Greek Officers), which was thwarted thanks to Papagos's intervention; his subsequent entry into politics; and his later accession to the premiership in November 1952—an event for which he showed great enthusiasm. The accession of Papagos, who had supported the Francoist regime from the beginning, now indicated an improvement in bilateral relations. This promise was

⁵ AMAE, *ibid*, Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 26 January 1949, 18 February 1949, and 3 June 1949.

⁶ AMAE *ibid*, Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 16 May 1949.

⁷ AMAE *ibid*, Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 18 October 1949.

⁸ AMAE/R 3115/20: Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 20 December 1949.

fulfilled in March 1953, when the Greek diplomatic mission in Madrid was upgraded to the status of an embassy.⁹

Romero Radigales's successor at the Spanish embassy in Athens, Luis Martínez de Irujo, Marqués de Los Arcos, adopted the same line of attitude. In an interview with the Athenian newspaper *Vradyni* in March 1954, he characterized Papagos as "one of the most dynamic personalities of our time... because thanks to him Greece has attained freedom and progress", drawing a parallel with the Caudillo, who, he asserted, had earlier saved Spain. He further expressed the view that "the cooperation between the two military leaders who today guide the destinies of our nations may yield significant results. Both Greece and Spain are confronted with issues that concern not only the Mediterranean, but also collective peace and security". The conflation of Franco with Papagos suggested that the former was thereby accorded a comparable degree of legitimacy on the European and international stage. At that specific juncture, moreover, this parallel was extended to the issues of Gibraltar and Cyprus, the two British colonies that the Spanish and Greek governments, respectively, were actively claiming during this period. According to the Marqués de Los Arcos, these constituted "two just claims that must be satisfied without delay... Cyprus and Gibraltar must be returned".¹⁰

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Spanish newspapers presented Alexandros Papagos in highly favorable terms, likely reflecting guidance from the Greek embassy in Madrid. Reports highlighted his military achievements during the Greek Civil War and his strategic acumen. An article from *La Vanguardia Española* in January 1949 described Papagos as "an intelligent soldier and a great strategic mind... considered among the most brilliant military personalities in the Balkans".¹¹ Following the end of the Civil War, the Spanish media increasingly focused on Papagos's

⁹ AMAE/R 2340/1: Información sobre política interior de Grecia (1950): Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 20 February 1950, AMAE/R 2998/1: Informaciones sobre Defensa Nacional en Grecia (1949-53): Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 24 August 1951, AMAE/R 2408/53: Grecia, Información política interior y exterior (1950-52): Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 16- January 1952. See also, Archivo General de la Administración = (AGA) / Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores = (MAE) (Archivo Renovado), 82/8547: informacion politica exterior (1952). Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 30 November 1952, and 66/3861: Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 15 August 1953.

¹⁰ AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/8547: informacion politica exterior (1954). Porrero de Chávarri to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 17 March 1954.

¹¹ «El Consejo Supremo de Defensa griego, disuelto. El general Papagos asume la jefatura del Ejército», *La Vanguardia Española*, 21 January 1949.

political emergence, portraying him as a bulwark against communism. By December 1951, *ABC* journalist Andrés Révész was praising Papagos for his contribution “to the defeat of communism in the Mediterranean”.¹² *La Vanguardia* likewise acclaimed him as “the number one national hero” upon his entry into politics, underscoring his decisive role in suppressing communist insurgency. Such positive appraisals continued following the electoral victory of the Greek Rally party in November 1952.¹³ Révész later noted that Papagos’s premiership signified not merely a change of government, but rather the advent of a “new regime”.¹⁴

The Motives Behind Papagos’s Visit

Officially, Greek and Spanish diplomacy maintained that, in November 1953, Franco invited Papagos to visit Spain with the aim of enhancing bilateral relations. This account was corroborated by both the British ambassador in Madrid and his counterpart in Athens.¹⁵ The latter noted a month later that the true instigator of the visit was Romero Radigales, then seventy years old, who was seeking to defer his retirement and departure from Greece.¹⁶ Papagos and Diamantopoulos did request an extension of Romero Radigales’s tenure, noting “his significant contributions to strengthening ties”. They thought he could accompany the Greek prime minister, although the eventual postponement of the visit to the autumn led to the Spanish diplomat being replaced in March of the same year.¹⁷ However, according to a confidential report from the Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, it was the Greek government that formally requested the Spanish authorities to invite the Marshal. This is also reflected in the correspondence between the Greek ambassador in Madrid, Christos Diamantopoulos, the Director of Western European Affairs at the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Georgios Koustas, and Papagos himself. At

¹² DHA/Central Service, 1952, d.65, 6.1: Spain’s domestic and foreign policy: Sindikas to Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madrid 21 December 1951.

¹³ «La robusta figura del mariscal Papagos», *La Vanguardia Española*, 24 August 1951, and «Papagos triunfa en las elecciones griegas», 18 November 1952.

¹⁴ Andrés Révész, «El milagro helénico», *La Vanguardia Española*, 21 December 1953.

¹⁵ National Archives (UK)/Foreign Office = (NA/FO) 371/113035: Political relations between Spain and Greece: visit by Greek Prime Minister, Field Marshal Papagos, to Spain (1954): John Balfour to N.J.A. Cheetham, Madrid 26 January 1954, and Telegram to Foreign Office, Athens 12 February 1954.

¹⁶ NA/FO 371/113035: C. Peake to John Balfour, and Peake to Cheetham, 15 February 1954.

¹⁷ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 3: Koustas to Diamantopoulos, Athens, 1 December 1953, and Diamantopoulos to Koustas, Madrid, 6 December 1953, *ibid*: Diamantopoulos to Koustas, Madrid 21 February 1954.

the end of October 1953, Papagos expressed agreement with the idea of a Mediterranean pact, adding that "provided the Spanish Government consents, we could lay the foundations for closer cooperation between the two countries, and for this purpose, I could make an official visit there".¹⁸

The visit was part of a more outward-looking foreign policy that Papagos initiated after becoming prime minister. In 1953-54, the Greek prime minister embarked on a series of visits to European countries. The goal was to secure European capital following the end of the Marshall Plan and to bolster Greece's defense against the Soviet threat through agreements complementary to NATO, such as the Tripartite Balkan Pact with Yugoslavia and Turkey (Hatzivasileiou 2006, 28, 33, 36-38).

At the same time, escalating tensions with Turkey and Britain over the issue of Cyprus's decolonization and potential union with Greece prompted Athens to seek alliances outside the confines of NATO. As Diamantopoulos pointed out, Papagos's visit would strengthen Greece's position "against both enemies and friends" (i.e. Turkey and Britain). In regard to Cyprus, he noted that for the Spanish people, the island "holds the same characteristics as Gibraltar".¹⁹ Diamantopoulos was a strong supporter of the Franco regime, stating that "whatever one may think of General Franco and the Spanish regime, one cannot deny the service he has provided to the free world through the suppression of communism in Spain". He also argued that Madrid was "our supporter in the Mediterranean, whether it be regarding Cyprus or the Arab countries." He believed that Papagos's visit would be "flattering" to the Spanish and could be a "valuable political capital for us".²⁰ Additionally, he suggested that Spain could help promote the Greek claim for Cyprus's union with Greece among Latin American countries, which would be crucial if Athens brought up the issue at the UN – as it did in August 1954.²¹ These views seem to have been shared by Koustas, who belonged to the "hardline" faction of Ambassador Alexis Kyrrou at the UN, advocating for the internationalization of the Cyprus issue (Stefanidis 1999, 50, 263).

From the perspective of the Franco regime, the visit of the Greek prime minister presented multiple advantages. Papagos was to be the first

¹⁸ DHA, *ibid*: Papagos to Diamantopoulos, Athens, 24 October 1953, and Diamantopoulos to Koustas, Madrid, 13 November 1953. Cf. AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317: Subsecretaría de Asuntos Exteriores to the Spanish Embassy in Adis Abeba, Madrid, 23 October 1954.

¹⁹ DHA, *ibid*: Diamantopoulos to Koustas, Madrid, 13 November 1953.

²⁰ DHA, *ibid*: Diamantopoulos to Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madrid 4 February 1954.

²¹ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.41, 14: UN-Cyprus: Diamantopoulos to Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madrid, 4 August 1954.

European political leader to make an official visit to Spain since 1936, a milestone that had propaganda value both domestically and internationally. The event could symbolize Spain's definitive emergence from post-war isolation and its increasing acceptance within the Western bloc. Moreover, the visit was viewed as a potential means of advancing Madrid's broader regional ambitions, specifically the promotion of a Mediterranean pact involving Spain, Italy, Greece, and possibly Turkey and Egypt. Such an alliance would not only facilitate cooperation among Mediterranean and European states but, in conjunction with Spain's agreement with the United States, could strategically position Spain favorably in relation to France and Britain on outstanding issues concerning the Mediterranean and Morocco.²² Additionally, Romero Radigales assured Madrid that both the Greek government and populace supported Spain's policy on Gibraltar and advocated for its return, aligning with Greece's own calls for the self-determination of Cyprus.²³

By December 1953, both parties had commenced preparations for a formal agreement to be signed by their leaders. Evidence suggests that the initiative primarily originated from the Greek side, as the prime minister's diplomatic office (presumably Koustas himself) drafted a preliminary version of a five-year treaty. The draft was then forwarded to Diamantopoulos for discussion with the Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores. It encompassed provisions for cooperation among Mediterranean nations, underscoring the importance of maintaining peace, defending freedom, and upholding the independence and territorial integrity of both states against any threats. It also expressed a desire to foster bilateral relations. The first article of the draft committed the signatories "to ensure permanent cooperation", and "to consult each other on all issues of common interest that may affect the Mediterranean basin". The second article stipulated that neither party would undertake "any international commitments in the future that may conflict with this Treaty". The third article clarified that the agreement would not alter Greece's rights and obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) and the Ankara Treaty (the Balkan Pact). The fourth article provided that external

²² AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317: Marques de Deslo to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Rome, 17 January 1953. British diplomats made similar assessments, see NA/FO/371/113035: Balfour to Foreign Office, Madrid, 26 January 1954. Cf. Pardo Sanz 2001, 48-68, Ybarra 1998, 86 ff., and Huguet 2010, 222.

²³ AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 66/3861: Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 8 August 1953.

members could join the treaty with the consent of both contracting parties.²⁴

The Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores approved the draft as a basis for negotiations during Papagos's visit to Madrid. At the same time, it proposed the preparation of contacts between the military authorities of the two countries to establish permanent bilateral military cooperation. It also suggested the signing of a cultural agreement "aimed at supporting Spanish students engaged in Greek humanism and offering Greeks elements of Spain's global cultural projection". Additionally, there was a proposal for the exchange of information and know-how to counter communist activity in both countries. The relevant (unsigned) report noted that the ambiguity of the declaration's terms, the insistence on the term "Mediterranean", and the reference to agreements potentially linked to the declaration aimed "to provoke Italy's curiosity, Egypt and Turkey's interest, and the suspicion of France and Britain".²⁵ However, discussions regarding the signing of a bilateral treaty were frozen, due to external reactions, as we will see.

Reactions in Greece and Europe

The announcement of Papagos's forthcoming visit to Spain elicited mixed reactions within Greece. According to Spanish diplomatic correspondence, members of the ruling Greek Rally party uniformly supported the visit, viewing closer cooperation with Spain favorably — except for Emmanuel Tsouderos, who was considered pro-British. Conversely, opposition centrist parties and the Greek Democratic Left expressed strong opposition, rejecting any form of official collaboration with the Franco regime. Notable figures such as Georgios Kartalis and Georgios Papandreou were specifically mentioned as being opposed. Criticisms directed at the Greek government centered on the dictatorial nature of the Spanish regime and concerns over a possible rupture in Greek-British relations.²⁶ The British ambassador in Athens, Charles Peake, reported that King Paul was also opposed to the visit and had unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Papagos to postpone it. However, Peake noted that, through the king's intervention, Papagos included Lisbon in his itinerary, presumably to attenuate the diplomatic implications of the visit to Madrid.

²⁴ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 3: Koustas to Diamantopoulos, Athens 1 December 1953, and Diamantopoulos to Koustas, Madrid 6 December 1953.

²⁵ AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317: Acuerdos a que se refiere la declaración, n.d. unsigned, report by the Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores.

²⁶ AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), *ibid*: Fernando Rodríguez-Porrero de Chavarri to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 21, 27 and 29-10-1954.

Additionally, Peake indicated that business and banking circles in Athens were similarly perturbed by the visit, likely due to apprehensions about its potential impact on Greek-British relations.²⁷

Similar patterns were observed in the Greek press's response to Marshal Papagos's visit to Spain. Generally, right-leaning and pro-government publications perceived the visit favorably, asserting that the dialogue between the two leaders would strengthen Western defense, particularly in the Mediterranean region. For example, a February 1954 article in *Kathimerini* suggested that Spain's involvement in defense alliances aligns with the Atlantic alliance's declaration for cooperation among the nations of the free world.²⁸ Conversely, centrist and left-wing publications were critical, frequently characterizing the Spanish regime as "totalitarian". They emphasized the potential negative impacts on Greece's relations with Britain, France, and Yugoslavia. The liberal newspaper *Eleftheria* frequently argued that the visit could seriously damage Greece's diplomatic ties with Britain, France, and Yugoslavia, cautioning from late January that "Greece has no interest in aligning its policies with the methods of Spanish politics".²⁹ The left-wing publication *Avgi* drew parallels between Franco and Papagos, describing both as fascists, while the communist radio station "Free Greece", broadcasting from Bucharest, was similarly critical of the Greek government on this issue.³⁰

The stance of Western diplomacy toward Papagos's visit to Spain is particularly interesting. In Greek and Spanish sources, American diplomats are portrayed as supportive, sometimes even enthusiastic about the upcoming visit.³¹ In contrast, French diplomats seemed more concerned and expressed their displeasure to the Greek authorities.³²

The primary response, however, emerged from British diplomacy, which openly expressed its dissatisfaction and even issued warnings to

²⁷ NA/ FO 371/113035: C. Peake to Foreign Office, Athens, 15 September 1954.

²⁸ AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 66/3861: Romero Radigales to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 10 February 1954.

²⁹ «Reactions against the Prime Minister's visit to the Spanish capital», *Eleftheria*, 31 January 1954.

³⁰ AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317, Telegram to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 1 February 1954, and Fernando Rodriguez-Porrero de Chavarri to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens 21 and 27 October 1954. See also NA/FO 371/113035: C. Peake to Foreign Office, Athens 8 October 1954.

³¹ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 3: Diamantopoulos to Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madrid, 15 and 22 December 1953, *ibid*: I. Sossidis to Diamantopoulos, Athens, 19 March 1954.

³² AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), *ibid*: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Nota para el señor Ministro, Madrid, 29 October 1954. See also «GRÈCE: Le maréchal Papagos est parti pour Madrid, Paris et Lisbonne», *Le Monde*, 8 October 1954.

Athens. The strengthening of Greek-Spanish relations and the possibility of a Mediterranean pact during a period of strained relations between London and both Madrid (due to Gibraltar) and Athens (over Cyprus) raised concerns in London. As early as February 1954, Nicolas Cheetham, Head of the Western and Southern Department, reminded the Greek ambassador in London, Vasileios Mostras, of Papagos's unfavorable image in British public opinion. He wryly remarked that "it would be a pity if the old cries for 'Monarcho-Fascism' [a term used by communists during the Greek civil war] were renewed".³³ A few months later, Cheetham explicitly stated that any association between Gibraltar and Cyprus could irreparably harm Greek-British relations. Mostras assured him that he would promptly inform the Greek government.³⁴ Peake intervened with both Alexandros Kyrou and Papagos, urging either the cancellation or at least the postponement of the visit. He commented that the Greek prime minister "is not exempt from that vanity which besets successful Field-M Marshals and other commanding generals when, having won their victories, they believe they have a vocation to save their country".³⁵ Additionally, he warned Papagos personally that "if the idea got about that he and Franco had met to divide the British Empire between them, Anglo-Greek friendship might well fade overnight".³⁶

The interventions by the British, and to a lesser extent the French, ultimately led to the postponement of Papagos's visit from the spring until October, and effectively diminished any diplomatic significance it might have held. The Greek government attempted to reassure both London and Paris by emphasizing that the visit was merely of a formal nature, while conveying a similar message to Madrid.³⁷ Koustas instructed Diamantopoulos to avoid any further discussion regarding the draft Greek-Spanish treaty and to let the matter rest temporarily. Although disappointed by this development, Diamantopoulos quickly reassured Koustas, stating: "As for the text of the Greek-Spanish treaty, remain calm. Its sleep will last as long as you wish".³⁸ Peake expressed satisfaction, noting that "we have got the situation under control", although diplomatic pressure continued in the ensuing months.³⁹

³³ NA/FO 371/113035: Cheetham, Record of Conversation, London, 8 February 1954.

³⁴ NA/FO 371/113035: Cheetham to Peak, London 29 September 1954.

³⁵ NA/FO 371/113035: C. Peake to Foreign Office, Athens, 15 February 1954.

³⁶ NA/FO 371/113035: C. Peake to Foreign Office, Athens 30 September 1954.

³⁷ NA/FO 371/113035: Cheetham to Peake, London, 29 January and 8 February 1954.

³⁸ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 6: Koustas to Diamantopoulos, Athens, 18 February 1954, and DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 2: Diamantopoulos to Koustas, Madrid, 26 February 1954.

³⁹ NA/FO 371/113035: Peake to Cheetham, Athens 15 February 1954.

Papagos's Visit: Program, Features, and Outcomes

The Greek Prime Minister's visit to Spain was scheduled for October 16-21, 1954, and was meticulously prepared by the Spanish diplomatic service. Spanish officials gathered detailed information regarding Papagos's gastronomic preferences, his appreciation of local folklore, and "anything related to military training", as well as his views on security issues and international alliances. His biographical sketch, widely circulated among the offices involved in organizing his reception, highlighted both his anti-communist credentials and his political achievements:

Marshal Papagos represents a military hero, a strong, honest and incorruptible man for the Greek people, and all nations with national pride. He is a symbol of resistance against invaders and the victor over Balkan communism. Greece sees in Papagos the military leader capable of saving it from the perils of war, and the politician able to guide it towards a prosperous and secure future, in peace. This will be achieved through a robust political organization, a healthy economy and a wise and logical foreign policy.⁴⁰

Papagos traveled aboard the American Export Line ship *Excalibur*, arriving in Barcelona on the afternoon of 16 October 1954. He was accompanied by Foreign Minister Stefanos Stefanopoulos, Minister of the Presidency Georgios Rallis, Georgios Koustas, and Ioannis Sossidis, the director of the Prime Minister's diplomatic office. The Greek delegation was greeted by Franco himself and the Spanish Foreign Minister, Alberto Martín-Artajo Álvarez. The next day, Papagos arrived in Madrid, where he was awarded the Order of Carlos III and hosted by Franco at the Palacio de El Prado. He also visited the mausoleum of José Antonio de Rivera, the founder of the Spanish Falange and "martyr" of the regime, at El Escorial, as well as the Valle de los Caídos, a memorial to the fallen of the Spanish Civil War, the city hall, and the university campus, notable for its role in the siege of Madrid by Francoist forces between 1936 and 1939. Following these locations, he also visited the Military Academy in Toledo, the legendary Alcázar, which holds a place of prominence in Francoist war mythology, and the Casa del Greco, a museum dedicated to the artist

⁴⁰ AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317: Jose Rojas y Moreno to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores Paris, 4-2-54, *ibid.*, Marqués de los Arcos to Don Juan de las Barcenas, Director General de Política Exterior, Athens, 12 August 1954, and AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/10703: Programma de la visita a Espana a S.Eel. Mariscal Alejandro Papagos, Presidente del Consejo de Ministros de Grecia, October 1954.

Doménikos Theotokópoulos. On 20 October he traveled by air to Granada, and departed for Paris the next day, before he proceeded to Lisbon.⁴¹

The Spanish press gave considerable attention to the visit of the Greek Prime Minister, with detailed reports, editorials, and numerous photographs showing well-organized, enthusiastic receptions. Both Franco and Papagos were depicted in military uniform, emphasizing their matching appearances and highlighting the connections between the two men and their regimes.⁴² *La Vanguardia Española* remarked:

The most important aspect of this "similarity" is the active anti-communism of both countries, expressed on the battlefields to prevent the two nations from falling victim to Marxism... both nations emerged victorious under the leadership of their Caudillos, Marshal Papagos and General Franco. There is, therefore, a clear and obvious parallel between the glorious figures of these two anti-communist soldiers.

The newspaper also expressed Spain's gratitude for Greece's stance at the United Nations during the period of the "anti-Spanish conspiracy".⁴³

In a similar vein, *Arriba*, the official publication of the Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista, published an article titled "Two Peoples: Spain and Greece". This article reiterated the narrative of a supposed communist conspiracy in the Mediterranean, allegedly thwarted by the leaders of the two countries. José Luis Gómez Tello, a veteran Falangist and former volunteer of the Blue Division during World War II, provided an exaggerated assessment of the visit's significance, reflecting party expectations and rhetoric: "Few meetings will have such millennial impact as this one between General Franco and Marshal Papagos. The two leaders have 'revitalized' their peoples and serve as 'two beacons of vigilance from one end of the Mediterranean to the other'".⁴⁴

The leaders themselves reinforced this narrative. In a press conference, Papagos expressed his admiration for the Caudillo, noting, "General Franco, as Commander of the Spanish Army, and I, as Commander of the

⁴¹ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 3: Official announcement by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 15 October 1954, and AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317: Madrid, 23-10-54, Report by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Cf. *La Vanguardia Española*, 18, 19, 20 and 21 October 1954.

⁴² AGA/Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores to embassy in Athens, Madrid, 18 October 1954.

⁴³ «S. E. el Jefe del Estado recibió ayer al Mariscal Papagos», *La Vanguardia Española*, 19 October 1954.

⁴⁴ Luis Gómez Tello, «Dos pueblos: España y Grecia», *Arriba*, 16 October 1954.

Greek Army, have worked toward the same common goal”.⁴⁵ During the official reception and decoration at the Palacio de El Prado, Franco welcomed Papagos as “one of the most distinguished military figures of our time”. He highlighted the cultural affinities and shared histories of the two peoples, emphasizing “parallel struggles against communism” and the crucial role of the military in recognizing the “dangers and responsibilities of the present moment”.⁴⁶

However, despite the anti-communist rhetoric, mutual compliments, and attempts at international legitimization of the Franco regime, Papagos clearly intended to avoid any discussion of a Mediterranean pact or any linkage between Gibraltar and Cyprus. During his press conference upon arrival in Spain on October 18th, he emphasized the ceremonial nature of the visit. He stated:

My visit is not political in nature. It is a courtesy visit to reaffirm and strengthen the bonds of close friendship that unite us. I am accompanied by my Minister of Foreign Affairs, who will engage in discussions with his Spanish counterpart, but these discussions will not be related to politics.⁴⁷

During the reception in Barcelona, Franco discreetly expressed his desire for closer cooperation between the two countries. He stated:

I am convinced that friendship and understanding among the Mediterranean nations, as promoted by your policy, along with the common sentiments of love for peace, justice, and freedom shared by the peoples of our Mediterranean region, provide a positive basis for establishing firmer foundations for general understanding among nations...⁴⁸

Interventions regarding the connection between Gibraltar and Cyprus were minimal. Both British and Turkish embassies also approached the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the same reason.⁴⁹ According to John Pilcher, the British chargé d'affaires in Madrid, some newspapers displayed photographs of crowds welcoming Papagos with banners

⁴⁵ Fernando Vázquez Prada, «Llega a España, por Barcelona, el jefe del gobierno griego Mariscal Papagos», *Arriba*, 17 October 1954.

⁴⁶ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 3: Franco's address to Papagos, Madrid, 19 October 1954.

⁴⁷ Fernando Vázquez Prada, «Llega a España, por Barcelona, el jefe del gobierno griego Mariscal Papagos», *Arriba*, 17 October 1954.

⁴⁸ DHA/Central Service, 1954/d.32, 3: *ibid*.

⁴⁹ NA/FO 371/113035: British Embassy to Foreign Office, Madrid 18 October 1954.

reading "Greece-Spain, Cyprus-Gibraltar, Papagos-Franco", though Spanish press coverage largely avoided addressing the issue during the visit.⁵⁰ The joint statement issued by the two governments at the conclusion of Papagos's trip made a general reference to the topics discussed (the international situation and key Mediterranean issues), the atmosphere of sincere cordiality, and both parties' desire to develop bilateral relations.⁵¹ Nonetheless, even at this level, results were limited. Even so, the visit likely facilitated cultural and, to some extent, military exchanges.⁵²

Predictably, British diplomacy appeared content with these developments. They viewed Spanish expectations, the Greek Prime Minister's visit, and its coverage by the Francoist propagandist media with a sense of irony. Pilcher commented that the concept of a Mediterranean pact was merely "a mirage, which the most extreme Falangists wish to see", aimed at pushing Britain out of the Mediterranean. However, it had failed "thanks to Papagos's prudence", as he "did not allow himself to be associated with Spanish irredentism".⁵³ Referring to Spanish newspaper commentary on the Cyprus issue, he noted: "The Greeks had gained a friend at little or no cost to themselves". He also observed that the Spanish "feel compelled to show exaggerated friendship towards a member of an exclusive club [i.e., NATO], which they long to be invited to join, but with the majority of whose members they know themselves to be far from popular".⁵⁴ His assessment aligned with the prevailing view at the Foreign Office, that the visit primarily provided an opportunity for domestic self-promotion and propaganda.⁵⁵ Pilcher's conclusion was particularly sardonic regarding official Spanish propaganda:

The Spanish press has been whipping up a fine frenzy of self-congratulation... about the glorious role Spain under the Caudillo's aegis is now playing in international affairs. If the visit of a Greek Prime Minister can induce such a state of euphoria, I conclude that the Spaniards must "au fond" be feeling very much out in the cold.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ NA/FO 371/113035: British Embassy to Foreign Office, Madrid 27 October 1954.

⁵¹ Madrid, 22-10-1954, MAE, oficina de informacion diplomatica.

⁵² AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 82/9317: Joint statement by the two governments, Madrid, 22 October 1954, AGA/MAE (Archivo Renovado), 66/3871: Marqués de los Arcos to Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Athens, 31 July 1955, and DHA/Central Service, 1957/ d.24, 5.1: Spain's domestic and Foreign policy: Diamantopoulos to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madrid 3 June 1957.

⁵³ NA/FO 371/113035: Pilcher to Foreign Office, Madrid, 18, 20 and 21 October 1954.

⁵⁴ NA/FO 371/113035: Pilcher to M. Young, Madrid, 27 October 1954.

⁵⁵ NA/FO 371/113035: Pilcher to Foreign Office, Madrid, 18 October 1954.

⁵⁶ NA/FO 371/113035: Pilcher to Young, Madrid, 21 October 1954.

Conclusion: False Alarm?

What, ultimately, came out of Papagos's visit to Spain in 1954? The outcomes were far from impressive. Bilateral relations remained relatively limited, with the notable exception of the marriage of Princess Sophia of Greece and Denmark to Infante Juan Carlos in 1962 —a development, however, unrelated to Papagos's visit. Papagos's death in October 1955 prevented any continuity in bilateral discussions, and his successors appeared reluctant to forge close ties with Spain or its policies.

The visit was leveraged by Spanish propaganda as evidence of international recognition of the Franco regime. However, its usefulness in boosting domestic prestige was short-lived. This was due to the limited importance of bilateral contacts and, more significantly, Greece's relatively minor role on the international stage. On the Greek side, Papagos gained little in terms of public opinion or political leverage. He was constrained by criticism from the opposition and disagreements within the Palace, especially since far more pressing issues occupied the country at the time.

At the diplomatic level, Franco's "invitation" initially triggered alarm in London. There was fear that the two leaders might link the issues of Gibraltar and Cyprus, demanding British withdrawal from both territories. British diplomacy regarded Franco as incorrigible and was concerned that Papagos might also take an uncompromising stance on Cyprus. Notably, this concern coincided with the escalating Greek-British dispute over Cyprus in 1954, placing bilateral relations under unprecedented strain (Stefanidis 1999, 47-82). London made it clear from the beginning that linking these two issues could lead to a breakdown in Anglo-Greek relations, prompting Athens to quickly back down.

Thus, while the visit had initially aimed to negotiate a bilateral friendship pact and discuss "Mediterranean issues", it was gradually reduced, under British pressure, to a courtesy occasion focused on exchanging compliments and making anti-communist declarations (yet, even in this respect, no formal agreement appears to have been concluded). This development demonstrated that Papagos was unwilling to jeopardize relations with London (and Paris) during a delicate period, given ongoing negotiations over Cyprus at the UN. It also revealed the limitations of Franco's attempt to pursue an independent policy by establishing a Mediterranean pact aimed at pressuring Britain over Gibraltar and France over Morocco.

A critical question concerns the stance of the United States, which, according to available sources, appeared either indifferent or even

favorable to the possibility of such a pact. Were there behind-the-scenes pressures not recorded in Greek, British, or Spanish diplomatic sources, or did the U.S. tacitly support—or at least tolerate—Papagos's visit to Spain in order to exert pressure on Britain and France to advance the process of decolonization, thereby creating space for American strategic and economic interests? This question remains open and could potentially be addressed through research in the relevant U.S. archives.

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