

Konstantinos Tsivos

Department of Greek and Latin Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague
kostastsivos@seznam.cz

The Greek Emigres in Czechoslovakia and Their Life in the 1960s

The article acquaints the reader with the structure of Greek political emigration in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, drawing on Czech as well as Greek archives. It follows primarily demographic, social, and cultural aspects of the emigre group that was closely linked to the Communist Party of Greece. In particular, it pursues the issue of the forming of emigre identity in the era of De-Stalinisation. The article is concerned with social developments in the emigre group and their gradual integration into the Czechoslovak society of the 1960s. It pursues the complicated process of building a new identity, the national and linguistic structure of the emigre group, its standard of living and employment, their educational system, the process of the formation of their own intelligentsia, and generation issues. Individual topics are examined on a socio-cultural level in the context of political developments in Czechoslovakia and Greece.

Key words: Czechoslovakia, Greek emigration, Communist Party of Greece, Greek diaspora, identity

Грчки емигранти у Чехословачкој и њихов живот у шездесетим годинама XX века

Овај чланак упознаје читаоца са структуром грчке политичке емиграције у Чехословачку шездесетих година XX века, чија се анализа заснива на подацима из чешких и грчких архива. Примарно се прате демографски, социјални и културни аспекти емигрантске групе која је била блиско повезана са Комунистичком партијом Грчке. Конкретније, чланак се бави питањем формирања емигрантског идентитета у ери дестаљинизације. Разматра се друштвени развој емигрантске групе и њена постепена интеграција у чехословачко друштво шездесетих година прошлог века. Прате се сложени процеси изградње новог идентитета, национална и језичка структура емигрантске групе, њен стандард живота и запослења, систем образовања, процес формирања њене властите интелигенције, као и генерацијска питања. Појединачне теме разматрају се на ширем социокултурном нивоу и у контексту политичких дешавања у Чехословачкој и Грчкој.

Кључне речи: Чехословачка, грчка емиграција, Комунистичка партија Грчке, грчка дијаспора, идентитет

To this day, the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) is one of the longest and bloodiest conflict in Europe's post-war history. The end of the war led, among other things, to the involuntary departure of nearly a hundred thousand Greek inhabitants to the Soviet Union and “peoples'-democratic” countries (i. e. Soviet Bloc states). The largest group of Greek emigres headed to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, whereas the second most numerous group, of 12,000, went to post-February 1948 Czechoslovakia.¹ This resulted in the formation of new Greek communities in Czechoslovakia as well as other Central- and East-European countries which are to this day considered an integral part of the greater Greek diaspora.

The specificity of Greek political emigration lies in that it came about after extensive population movements in the rest of Europe had already ended. In the era of socialist Czechoslovakia, Greeks were the largest group of “friendly foreigners”², without being a nation that had traditionally inhabited the Czech lands (Rychlík 2007, 60). The new communist regime in Czechoslovakia received the incoming Greek emigres very positively, as they represented fellow ideological comrades with an aureole of fighters who have fought with arm in hand against Anglo-American imperialists. Initially, their stay in Czechoslovakia was considered temporary, but the cold-war atmosphere and the different political orientations of Greece and Czechoslovakia convinced Czechoslovak authorities as well as Greek communist leadership that the stay of the emigres in Czechoslovakia would be an extended one.

This article is concerned with the example of some 13,000 Greek emigres in Czechoslovakia, focusing on the formation of their identity in exile. In this regard, the article constitutes an empirical case study in the making of which the author sought to apply, above all, the method of historical analysis. The issue of Greek political emigration poses a complex research question. To answer it, the author employs methodological instruments not only from history, but also from other social disciplines (social anthropology, political science, ethnology, etc.). The article strives to acquaint the reader with the issue of the community of Greek political emigres in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, in particular with whether the composition of the group, their identity, and social status confirm the generally accepted stereotype that it was a closed community of Greek communists.

It presents the national and linguistic structure of the emigre group, their family status, age stratification, and level of education. Furthermore, it explores issues related to the location of the emigre groups and summarises the most important issues in their cohabitation with the majority Czech population in the early stages of their adaptation (the 1950s) as well as later, once most emigres had integrated into the Czech environment. In his work on the article, the author used relevant materials from the Prague National Archive (NA) and from Czechoslovak Red Cross

¹ There is a decent bibliography on Greek emigration in Central and Eastern Europe, in Greek and in Czech (less so in English), which continues to expand. This article draws, among others, on the following titles: Hradečný 2000; Králová & Tsivos 2012; Tsivos 2012; Botu & Konečný 2005; Voutira Eftihia et al., 2005.

² Greeks accounted for about a half of all foreigners living in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

(ČSČK) which dealt with organisational issues related to the stay of Greek emigres. On a supplementary basis, relevant secondary literature and testimonies of the emigres were used.

Two opposing tendencies accompanied the process of the adaptation of the Greek emigration after the mid-1950s. On the one hand, the group had acquired certain unifying features through the formation of a new identity of a Greek political emigre, related to the specific conditions in their new home. Greek emigres, or more precisely, emigres from Greece were distinguished from the majority population by their language, cultural tradition and – to a lesser extent – social status and a religion. On the other hand, the internal differentiation of the emigre group deepened, due to their greater geographical dispersion as many emigres had decided to leave their initial locations (rural areas in the districts of Krnov, Žamberk, and in the Jeseníky Mountains), heading to larger cities, primarily Ostrava, but also Brno and Prague. In the later 1950s, most of the emigres no longer considered themselves “soldiers of the Party” and strove to adapt to the style of living of Czechoslovak society. The leadership of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) had lost direct control over the masses of emigres. Although the KKE had regular data about the status of the emigration, obtained through a paid apparatus and an extensive network of party organisations, in 1962, the leadership of the Greek party asked the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ) for an analytical survey to obtain detailed data about the composition, location, and financial income of the emigres.³ The “questionnaire survey” was carried out as a cooperative venture of the KKE and the Social-Care Department of the Czechoslovak Red Cross in 1962 and yielded important findings about the status of Greek emigration.

Demographic Indicators, National Composition and Origin

According to the survey, there were a total of 13,039 Greek emigres in Czechoslovakia, including 4,465 children under 15 years of age and 8,574 adults who completed their own questionnaires.⁴ Of adult emigres 8,452 stated Greek citizenship,⁵ only 116 stated Czechoslovak citizenship and 6 emigres stated no citizenship. The second questionnaire box pertained to the nationality of adult emigres. Of those 6,752 persons claimed Greek nationality, 1,812 claimed Macedonian nationality, 6 persons listed some other nationality and 2 persons did not indicate any.

The emigres constituted a diverse mosaic of nationalities as well as languages and cultural backgrounds. Approximately one quarter of the original emigres (approx. 3,000 people) were Macedonians – Slavic inhabitants of Northern

³ *Stin KE tu KK Tsechoslovakias 20. 10. 1962*, ASKI (Archives of Modern Social History), *Aligrafia KKE – KK Tsechoslovakias*, box 386, archival unit (a.u.) 20/37/166.

⁴ Archive of the Czech Red Cross (ČČK), Collection *Řecká emigrace – Výtah z dotazníkové akce ke dni 20/3/1964*.

⁵ Ironically, most emigres had no citizenship at the time of the survey as post-war Greek governments withdrew Greek citizenship from emigres, by 70 Royal decrees and other regulations.

Greece who were intensively involved in the communist DSE army during the civil war, hoping to gain autonomy or to separate from the Greek state. There were also some Aromanians (Vlachs), i.e., members of the nomadic tribe of shepherds speaking a dialect close to the Romanian language, several dozen Sephardic Jews from Thessalonica, speaking a Spanish-Jewish dialect (*ladino*), and several Turkish-speaking members of the Muslim community from Greek Thrace (Sloboda 2006, 22–24).

Among Greeks themselves, “prosfyges”, refugees from Asia Minor and the Black Sea region who settled in Greek Macedonia after the 1923 large population exchange between Greece and Turkey, constituted a significant group. One of the groups of these refugees were the *Karamanlides*, a Turkophone group from inland Asia Minor, whereas other groups differed depending on whether they came from Greek enclaves around the Caucasus or the Black Sea. These emigres spoke in a distinct dialect, whereas refugees from Asia Minor (*Mikrasiates*) spoke “pure” Greek. Another large group of emigres were “the locals” (*dopii*), i.e., Greeks who had always lived in compact groups in various regions of North-Western Greece. There were also smaller groups of individuals from other regions of Greece among the emigres.

Stratification of the Emigration – Problems in Cohabitation with the Czech Population

The vast majority of emigres came from poor mountain villages in North-Western Greece. Most of them were farmers and shepherds. Approximately one tenth of the emigres had mastered a trade – they were bakers, barbers, masons, etc.⁶ University graduates were absolute exceptions. The emigre intelligentsia consisted of several dozen teachers, of whom most had graduated from a two-year teaching academy, and about two dozen doctors and lawyers (Voutira Eftihia et al., 2005, 10).

In terms of family status, the above-mentioned “questionnaire project” discovered a total of 8,574 adult emigres, 2,974 men and 2,608 women (i. e., 2/3 of the total number of adults) lived in purely “emigre” marriages; 229 men and 75 women lived in mixed marriages; 37 men and 48 women were separated; 106 men and 548 women were widowed; 1,216 men and 733 women were single (emigres older than 15 years were considered “adult” for the purpose of the questionnaire).

Emigre families in the 1950s and 1960s were of an endogamous nature. The first mixed couples started to emerge hesitantly, with young emigres being the first to enter into mixed marriages. Most of these were university graduates living outside of areas with high emigre concentrations. Whereas a relationship of a male emigre with a Czech woman signified a rise in his social status in the eyes of emigres, the relationship of a female emigre with a Czech male was not looked upon

⁶ About 80% of the first generation of emigres were farmers from Greece’s mountainous regions while 10–15% were workers or craftsmen, most of them also from rural areas (Sultania 1980, 77).

approvingly as it was assumed that a woman would adopt her husband's culture and would therefore be "lost" for the emigre community (Spanosová 2009, 35). The equal status of Czech women and the level of their social and sexual emancipation were at first seen by Greek emigres, who came from rural areas with very conservative views, as very suspicious and a sign of questionable morals (Spanosová 2009, 87).

These stereotypes were gradually overcome, primarily as the second generation came of age, as many of them adopted the Czech way of life despite their family traditions. In the mid-1960s, mixed marriages proliferated dramatically and in the 1970s and 1980s, they prevailed significantly over endogamous marriages (Spanosová 2009, 39). In 1967, for example, 137 marriages were entered into by Greek emigres in Czechoslovakia, of which 79 were mixed (Botu and Konečný 2005, 367). In any event, Greek married couples were more conservative than Czech ones. Divorce or philandry were condemnable phenomena, especially in the eyes of the older emigre generations. But with gradual adaptation to the Czech environment and the increasing number of mixed marriages, also tolerance to divorce increased. In the early 1960s, the number of separated emigres was very low (only 85 persons). On the other hand, the percentage of widows was abnormally high. This can be explained by the adverse consequences of the war era in Greece, which started in 1940 and continued through to 1949. These women, many of whom were of fertile age, never remarried and adhered to the Greek rural tradition that requires widows to wear black and remain faithful to their deceased husbands for the rest of their lives (Heroldová 1986, 135).⁷

According to the questionnaires, 4,465 of the Greek emigres were younger than 15 years in 1962, meaning that the majority of them were born in Czechoslovakia or arrived at a very young age. This is the second generation of emigres (33.85%)⁸ that comprised one third of the emigre group and stands as testimony to the reproductive dynamics of emigres, not only in Czechoslovakia, but in all Soviet Bloc states. This trend was confirmed five years later (October 1967) by the KKE convention devoted to issues of the emigre youth. According to the conclusions of the conference, 51% of the emigres were under 30 years of age, and 30% of them were aged 16 to 30, whereas 70% were children under 16, i. e. persons the vast majority of whom was born in emigration and hence, had no direct memories of Greece (*Agonistis* 4, 16 February 1968).

While in exile, young emigres had to overcome many traditions and superstitions that were the norm in Greece. One of these was matchmaking, when an in-

⁷ Some contemporary witnesses (e.g., Tomáš Kosta, the head of the ČSČK Social-Care Department) reported the masses of female Greek emigres wearing long black dresses made the strongest impression on them. Black attire was not reserved to widows, it was also worn by women mourning the death of a loved one.

⁸ Whereas Greek children under 15 constituted one third of the emigres, the same age category in the Czechoslovak population "only" accounted for one quarter (precisely 24.9%) of the population according to a demographic survey of the *Czechoslovak Statistical Office* of 1 March 1961 (Czech Statistical Office, www.czso.cz/sldb.nsf – Accessed February 20, 2019).

termediary in agreement with the parents arranged a meeting of the groom- and bride-to-be, for the purpose of entering into matrimony (Danielidu & Mañas 1986, 158). The sons and daughters of emigres had far more opportunities to meet and arrange the establishment of a family themselves when in emigration. The tradition of providing a bride with a dowry was also abandoned as well as the tradition requiring that newlyweds should come from the same village. These superstitions and local restrictions were overcome in emigration, as all of a sudden, all emigres became compatriots in Czechoslovakia.

Similarly, prejudices about entering into mixed marriages with Czechs, especially Czech women, were overcome. Whereas in 1958, only 23 out of the 370 Greek married couples were mixed, a reversal came in 1963, as mixed couples prevailed over endogamous ones. The trend continued to strengthen in the 1970s and prevailed in the 1980s. Until 1971, marriages of Greek men with Czech women prevailed in the mixed marriage group over those of a Greek woman with a Czech man; later, the ratio nearly levelled out (Botu & Konečný 2005, 371). An interesting fact is that Greek emigres in mixed marriages did not take the opportunity to obtain Czechoslovak citizenship. The first applications for Czechoslovak citizenship from Greek emigres were noted in 1960, by 60 people. In 1974, only two hundred emigres had Czechoslovak citizenship.

Another factor in the formation of a new emigre identity was their territorial concentration and the formation of relatively strongly introverted communities that had their clubs, organisations, and social rituals. Even at the time of emigration, the life of Greek emigres was unimaginable without numerous ceremonies that took place in an absolutely Greek spirit. It is known that there were at least three orthodox priests among the emigres, who were stationed in Albrechtice and invited to Ostrava as well as other places until the mid-1960s for various emigre social events (baptisms, weddings, funerals) to perform their liturgical duties. According to ethnologist Iva Heroldová, the orthodox religion played an ambivalent role in the lives of emigres: even though KKE members did not profess it, in many situations, they preferred the rituals linked to orthodox traditions. The author also states that the teaching of religion alongside school instruction in the first three years after their arrival was prevented by “external intervention” and the importance of religion to emigres waned (Heroldová 1986, 137). Greek emigres found their own way to cope with situations when religious rituals could not be performed, for example attending a wedding, although it was not at church but at town hall, was considered a priority, not only for close as well as distant relatives, but for the entire Greek community.

The questionnaire showed that three quarters of Greek emigres, about 9,500, lived in Northern Moravia and Silesia. Smaller groups of Greeks lived in Brno, Prague, Trutnov, Jablonec nad Nisou, and elsewhere. Specifically, 7,000 emigres lived in the Ostrava Region, with Krnov, 2,384 emigres in the Šumperk district, with Jeseník, 1,522 emigres lived in Brno, 542 in Prague, 482 in Trutnov, 430 in Jablonec, 240 in Dvůr Králové, 110 in Beroun, 90 in Hradec Králové, 60 in Ústí

nad Labem, and 40 in Slovakia (Botu & Konečný 2005, 339).⁹ In the early 1960s, the process of spontaneous outflow from the original areas of settlement peaked, with Žamberk District being nearly depopulated by Greek emigres, whereas in certain rural areas of Krnov and Jeseník, compact communities of emigres remained. The vast majority of Greek emigres worked in heavy industry and metallurgy in the Ostrava conglomerate and in Brno. In Krnov, Šumperk, and Trutnov most emigres worked in the textile industry. Many of them were highly qualified as in the meantime, they had attended the appropriate vocational schools and other technical training courses.

Occupations and Standard of Living of Emigres

Detailed information about the occupations of Greek emigres is provided by the report *Situation and problems of political emigres* presented at the KKE conference held in June 1964 in Ostrava.¹⁰ The report starts with the finding that Greek emigres, of whom nearly 95% were farmers in 1959, had become, “thanks to the warm hospitality and brotherhood of international assistance from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, industrial workers, engineers, and scientists”. Of the total of 13,000 Greek emigres reported in 1964 – 6,512 were employed and 1,782 retired. Of the working emigres 3,933 worked in industry, with 119 of them being in management positions, 1,676 worked in various enterprises and 903 persons in agriculture.

According to the same report, 150 people who worked as scientists and engineers had graduated from a higher-education institution (and passed at least matriculation). In the same year, 93 persons were studying at higher-education institutions and 9 people were doing research assistantship. Greek party functionaries noted with satisfaction that “in addition to the changes in social composition, the level of education, and the political and cultural level of emigres had risen”.¹¹ The transformation of back-country shepherds into proletarians was no easy matter. According to their testimonies, the greatest obstacle was getting accustomed to the discipline and work rhythm at factories. Until then, their lives had flown with the flow of time in Greek rural rhythms. No wonder that the alarm-clock became a scarecrow for the emigres (Dritsios 1990, 89).

For the emigres, this was the first time they received pay for their work, as in Greece, they had either worked in self-sufficient households, helping one another or exchanging their own produce and products. Their belief in the building of socialism led most of them, like most newly ordained enthusiasts, to a high pace of

⁹ A similar survey of the composition of the Greek emigre group was conducted in 1974, showing that there were 11,634 Greek emigres in Czechoslovakia in 1974, of whom only 36 were living in Slovakia.

¹⁰ NA Praha, Collection 100/3 MO ÚV KSČ (unprocessed part), Box 237. With minor deviations, the report copies the ČSČK 1962 survey results.

¹¹ Ibid.

work and productivity, and oftentimes, to exceeding set standards. After the adaptation stage, Greek workers became invaluable to many companies. In later years, however, the initial revolutionary zeal waned, and most emigres adapted the pace of their work to the work standards of the locals (Voutira Eftihia et al., 2005, 4).

For most of the emigres, coming to Czechoslovakia meant a certain social rise compared to their standard of living in the Greek countryside. They had flats with electricity and running water, certain employment, and a prospect of an old-age pension. In Czechoslovakia, the emigres discovered a better consumer society than they had been accustomed to, and clearly attributed this fact to achievements of socialism (Voutira Eftihia et al., 2005, 12). This kind of consumer rise was systematically supported by the emigre weekly *Agonistis* which regularly informed for example about the first emigres to be able to purchase a car or a motorbike.¹² Greek party functionaries copied the socialist model of prosperity from their Czechoslovak comrades. “In the country that hosts us, caring for the happiness and prosperity of the people is at the centre of attention. Continuous increases of the standard of living of our fraternal Czechoslovak people reflect in an increased standard of living of our emigres,” said a March 1961 report of the leadership of the KKE in Czechoslovakia.¹³ The emigres were well aware of their superior social status compared to their compatriots in Greece, where there was no electrification and first television sets only appeared after 1967.¹⁴ At the same time, a new wave of emigration got well under way in Greece, with over a million Greek citizens leaving in search of better jobs for Australia, Germany, Belgium, or Sweden.

Cultural lives of the emigres and the formation of their intelligentsia

Amateur music, theatre, dance, and sports groups played an important role in maintaining national identity and in developing an emigre identity. Such groups emerged in the mid-1950s and gradually sprung up in all emigre communities. Hundreds of emigres, most of them young, who adopted important aspects of Greek culture and learning this way, participated in them. Members of these groups became active carriers of traditions, able to present them in a manner comprehensible for the majority society, thereby raising their credit with that society and helping the two societies become closer and remove mutual prejudices and suspicions. Emigre ensembles performed at diverse celebrations that became an integral part of emi-

¹² See e.g., the report on page one of the emigre newspaper reporting the purchase of a new car by young tractor driver Kostas Akritidis in the Krnov area (*Agonistis*, 30 /553, 2 August 1957).

¹³ To illustrate the standard of living of emigres, they presented the following facts: 400 families had a TV, all families radio, every 2.5th family had a sewing machine and a washing machine, 21 emigres owned a car, 411 a motorbike, 1,300 a bicycle, 6,100 a watch, etc. (*Zpráva z IX. konference stranické organizace KS Řecká v ČSSR z 4/3/1961*, NA Praha, Collection 100/3 (MO ÚV KSČ), vol. 137, a. u. 539).

¹⁴ The main KKE report referred to the 1957 UN Economic Commission report that stated that “in regions of Greece inhabited by refugees from Asia Minor, primarily worker families, 64% of dwellings do not have a kitchen, 92% a toilet, 82% only comprised one room, housing 3-4 persons on average” (NA Praha, Collection 100/3 (MO ÚV KSČ), vol. 137, a. u. 539).

gres' social life. These celebrations pertained to national anniversaries shared by all Greeks regardless where they happened to be living. From the early 1960s, "Greek celebrations" in the largest centres of Greek emigration were organised in grand style and were attended on a mass scale not only by all emigres, but also by numerous groups of Czechs. The ensembles bore Greek names, such as *Akropolis*, *Prométheus*, *Athény*, etc. A very specific and unique feature in relation to the formation of a new identity of an emigre is the modification of typical regional Greek dances such that everyone could participate. For example, it is unimaginable for a "Greek" that the solo dance *zeibekiko* has turned into a collective matter at emigre celebrations, or that women took part in the exclusively male war dance, which took on an entirely new form and nature among emigres.

In the early 1960s, competitions and festivals started to be held where these ensembles had an opportunity to present their art to hundreds or thousands of emigres from all of Czechoslovakia. Very successful were *Greek and Macedonian Youth Festivals* held in July 1962 and August 1965 in Ostrava, which were attended by 5,000 emigres and dozens of artistic and sports ensembles from all of Czechoslovakia, as well as by the musical ensemble of the legendary composer Mikis Theodorakis. The appropriate report of the Central Committee of the CP of Czechoslovakia noted that the three-day festival "helped solidify the unity of party organisations and all emigration in Czechoslovakia", and reports from the event were broadcast live by *Czechoslovak Television*.¹⁵ Emigre festivals alternately took place in all Soviet Bloc states, such as in Uzbekistan (Tashkent), in Poland, and Hungary.

In the 1960s, patriotic education of Greek children assumed a different form than ten years before, when emigre organisations had to fight prevailing illiteracy among children, most of whom had no experience with school attendance (Mitsopoulos 1979, 63).¹⁶ The leadership of the emigres had minimal means to assist them in this effort. They were fighting the lack of qualified teachers and the non-existence of Greek textbooks. The situation improved significantly in 1953 when Greek children switched to Czech schools, even though this also involved problems related primarily to the lower level of knowledge among Greek children and to their language barrier (Papadopoulos 1998, 92). With their transition to Czech schools, the structure of Greek children's instruction changed fundamentally (Bontila 2004, 29–84). The number of Greek-language classes in grade one was reduced in order to increase the number of Czech classes. At secondary schools, the curriculum was identical to the Czech curriculum, with the addition of four classes of Greek and two classes of Greek history and geography. Instruction was thus very demanding on Greek children as they had to learn two languages and from grade four also Russian. About one third of Greek children of Slavic origin also had to take Macedonian (Chabová 2010, 199–210).

¹⁵ NA Praha, Collection 100/3 (MO ÚV KSČ) (unprocessed part), Box 237.

¹⁶ According to the statistic of teacher Thanasis Mitsopulos from the year of 1950, "60% of the children were totally illiterate and only 4% had experience with higher grades of elementary school" (Mitsopulos & Ellines 1977, 63).

Later, Greek language became an “extra” class and together with Greek geography and history classes, it became more or less optional. In the meantime, Greek children identified far more with their Czech peers and naturally, they did not want to spend that much time in school. In smaller Greek communities, there was a shortage of Greek teachers and young emigres only studied in Czech.¹⁷ Great displeasure among emigre organisations was caused by a *Ministry of Education, Science and Art* decree from November 1962 which reduced the number of Greek classes to four a week. Instruction no longer took place in classroom form, but in ten-member groups which were not mandatory and the grades were no longer included in students’ overall results (Zissaki-Healy 2009, 174–175). In the 1960s, a lack of interest in instruction in their mother tongue was caused by the unclear prospects of repatriation for themselves and their parents. Furthermore, second-generation emigres manifested a clear tendency to identify with the local environment and not set themselves apart from their Czech peers – sometimes with their parents’ silent consent, as they lost the hope of near repatriation, at other times accompanied by necessary inter-generational disputes. The urgency of the problem is evident from the frequent meetings and conferences convened to deal with the issue, but also from the many reports with excessive moralising and patriotic content that started to appear on the pages of the emigre newspaper *Agonistis*.¹⁸

As for the overall education of Greek emigres, the 1962 questionnaire indicated that 1,224 of the 8,574 adult emigres were still illiterate, i.e., every seventh; of the 6,831 literate adult emigres, 3,951 had completed elementary education; 591 emigres had completed a secondary or specialised secondary school with matriculation; only 168 emigres had university education, i.e., 1.95% of the total count.

Regardless of statistics, it must be noted that the overall literacy level of Greek emigres was definitely lower than that of Czech society. This is due to many factors, for example the high level of illiteracy in Greece between the wars, whereas there was practically no illiteracy in interwar Czechoslovakia. Other important factors included the rural origin of emigres, the prevalence of a patriarchal family system, lower level of emancipation of Greek women, etc. This also had an impact on the overall general civilizational knowledge and cultural interests of Greek emigres. Whereas relatively many emigres learned to drink beer and go to a pub, a far lesser percentage compared to the Czech majority frequented cinema or theatre performances. KKE party bodies had a relatively good idea of what the emigres were reading as they owned the only printing house which printed the newspaper *Agonistis* and Greek books and distributed them throughout emigre communities through the party organisation.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Zpráva z IX. konference stranické organizace KS Řecká v ČSSR z 4/3/1961*, NA Praha, Collection 100/3 (MO ÚV KSČ), vol. 137, a.u. 539.

¹⁸ See e.g. article “Teaching Mother Tongue” in which the author criticises Greek parents who say “never mind if our kids learn only Czech” (*Agonistis*, 17/590, 4 April 1958). See also an article in the same spirit “Let All our Children Learn their Mother Tongue” (*Agonistis*, 5/683, 19 February 1960).

¹⁹ *Zpráva z IX. konference stranické organizace KS Řecká v ČSSR z 4/3/1961*, NA Praha, Collec-

At the same time (1962), another 165 emigres studied at university whereas 354 adult emigres studied at secondary and specialised schools. There were various preparation courses to help prepare Greek emigres to be accepted at Czech secondary schools and universities, supplementing the gaps in the education of the future students, most of whom were accepted without entrance examinations or in addition to the planned number of students. The newly forming young Greek intelligentsia was hard-pressed to find support and role-models among older expatriates. First, there were very few university graduates among the emigres – fewer than one hundred. And second, even though most of them held high offices at the beginning, they were quickly classified as politically unreliable, resulting in their isolation from the majority of the emigres. Party purges concerned even teachers who had constituted the core of Greek intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia.²⁰

The pressing need to obtain qualified teachers for some 5,000 Greek children resulted in the establishment of the first lectorate of Modern Greek at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. The Greek lectorate undoubtedly helped enhance familiarity with modern Greek culture in Czech society and *vice-versa*. At the initiative of its staff and other philologists, major works of Byzantine and Modern Greek literature were translated into Czech in the 1960s and 1970s, and the first ties with important Greek writers were initiated. Several talented artists and scientist arose from the emigre group, which increased the self-confidence of emigres in the host country. Interest in learning Greek rose significantly after the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, when the longed-after repatriation again became a realistic option.

Concluding remarks

The article has shown that political emigres in Czechoslovakia and other countries constituted the only group of Greeks who had a personal experience with “real socialism” and in whose communities had a unique and specific cross-cultural experience with diverse forms of European communism. The functioning of their communities did manifest symptoms similar to those that characterise other exile groups (closedness of communities, alienation from their original homeland, and ideological and personal conflicts). On the other hand, it turned out that in spite of their closedness, Greek emigres, primarily the young generation, were able to quickly adapt to the life of the majority society and achieve certain social growth. The feeling of being in Czechoslovakia temporarily did prevent them from complete assimilation, but did not dissuade its members from adopting a number of habits and values of the majority society.

After the end of the Cold War, the Greek community consisted of 4,000 people, was finally granted a minority status. Without any doubt, the Greek community is currently the most important and indisputable link between the Czech Re-

tion 100/3 (MO ÚV KSČ), vol. 137, a. u. 539.

²⁰ NA Praha, Collection 100/3 (MO ÚV KSČ), vol. 133, a. u. 526.

public and Greece. The majority of Czech Greeks live in mixed marriages with no ambitions to return to Greece. Today's Greece is more or less a second homeland to them or merely the homeland of their ancestors. Perhaps not surprisingly, there have also been reported returns of several dozens of families of former emigres either from Greece or from another country back to the Czech Republic, i.e., to the country where they were born and grew up. The number of returnees has increased from several tens to hundreds over the past few years. This phenomenon of newly returning Greeks is widely attributed to the effects of the economic crisis that has devastatingly swept through the entire Greek society.

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