

SOVIET RELATIONS WITH GREECE

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Ideas originating in Greece, a country in southeastern Europe that occupies the southernmost part of the Balkan Peninsula and is bordered by the Aegean, Mediterranean, and Ionian seas, first influenced Russian culture as early as the tenth century, during the golden age of Kievan Rus'. Prince Vladimir (978—1015) chose Eastern Orthodoxy, which reflected his close personal ties with Constantinople, a city that dominated both the Black Sea and the Dnepr River, Kiev's busiest commercial route. Adherence to the Eastern Orthodox Church had long-range political, cultural, and religious consequences for Russia. The church had a liturgy written in Cyrillic and a corpus of translations from the Greek that had been produced for the South Slavs. The existence of this literature facilitated the East Slavs' conversion to Christianity and introduced them to rudimentary Greek philosophy, science, and historiography without the necessity of learning Greek. Russians began to look to the Greeks for religious inspiration and regard the Catholics of Central Europe as schismatics. This tendency laid the foundation for Russia's isolation from the stream of Western civilization.

Seeking warm-water ports, Russian explorers were attracted to Greece (in Greek *Hellas*, officially known as the Hellenic Republic (*Ellinikí Dimokratía*). No part of mainland Greece is more than 100 kilometers (60 miles) from water. Islands

constitute about one-fifth of the country's land area. By the nineteenth century as the Russian Empire expanded to the southwest, its population grew more diverse and included Greek Orthodox peoples.

After Russia's defeat by Japan in 1904-5, the government began to take a more active interest in the Balkans and the Near East. The decline of the Ottoman Empire ("sick man of Europe") encouraged nationalist movements in Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. In 1912 the "Balkan League," which included Greece, defeated the Ottoman Empire in the First Balkan War. A year later, the alliance split, and the Greeks, Serbs, and Romanians defeated Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War. Threatened, Russia tried to extend its influence over the new nations. Greco-Russian relations became strained when Russia sided with Serbia in the contest between Serbia and Greece for control of Albania.

Although Greece fought in both world wars on the side of the Triple Entente and Allies, respectively, tensions arose between the legitimate Greek government and the Soviet Union during the Greek Civil War. The Greek resistance coalition that developed during World War II, known as the National Liberation Front (EAM), and its army (ELAS) were dominated by the KKE (Communist Party), with which the Greek government-in-exile had long been in dispute. Both Stalin's USSR and (more enthusiastically) Tito's Yugoslavia supported the Greek communists, who had tried to overthrow the legitimate government shortly after liberation by the Allies in late 1944. The heaviest fighting started in 1946 as the communists made one final attempt to seize power in Greece by means of conventional warfare. Great Britain was funding the non-communists. However, the economic commitment

exceeded that country's post-war capabilities, and the U.S. government took on the burden with the announcement of the Truman Doctrine. Massive military and economic aid from the United States came just in time; by the end of 1947 the communists had proclaimed a provisional government in the northern mountains.

Relations between Greece and the USSR cooled with the former's admission to NATO in 1952. Beginning in the mid-1950s, NATO's southeastern flank experienced periodic cycles of international tension. The problem in Cyprus, where the population is split between Greek-Cypriots (approximately 78%) and Turkish-Cypriots (18%) led eventually to an invasion of the island on July 20, 1974 by the Turks, claiming to protect the Turkish-Cypriot minority there.

Nevertheless, Greek-Soviet ties established in the 1980s survived the political upheaval that ended the Soviet Union and appear to have improved. In 1994 Greece signed new protocols with Russia for delivery of natural gas from a pipeline to be extended from Bulgaria to Greece. In April 2008 Greece and Russia signed an agreement including Greece in the Russian South Stream gas pipeline project. The projected South Stream gas transit pipeline starts at the Bregovaya compressor station at the Russian Black Sea coast. It would run through the Black Sea to the Bulgarian port of Varna, where it splits - the southwestern pipe would go to southern Italy via Greece, whereas the northwestern route would go through Serbia to northern Italy, possibly including Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Austria.

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