



GEORGIOS GRIVAS STATUE

Limassol, Cyprus

34.8035, 32.3946



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Executive Summary

From 1955 to 1960, the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA) waged a campaign of violence and terror against the British authorities occupying Cyprus with the goal of *enosis* — union with Greece. Under the leadership of Georgios Grivas, EOKA was an insurgent group that carried out tactical sabotages, riots, and attacks against law enforcement and opposition both to undermine British authorities as well as establish union with Greece as the primary goal of Cyprus, ignoring the objections of the prominent Turkish Cypriot population. Although EOKA and specifically Grivas were instrumental to Cypriot independence in 1960 and are widely memorialised throughout the country, the legacy of the violent right-wing group continues to cause controversy in Cyprus, particularly among the left and the Turkish population. This case study examines the tensions regarding the role of Grivas in gaining independence at the cost of brutal violence and marginalisation towards a portion of the country.

Introduction

General Georgias Grivas, known for his military name Dighenis, holds a contentious position in Cypriot history. On one hand, he was the leader of the movement for independence from the British Empire; on the other, he led a group responsible for acts of terrorism, and incited ethnic violence against the Turkish Cypriot population even after independence. One British soldier stationed in Cyprus during the occupation even remarked being impressed with EOKA, noting ‘the sheer savagery, brutality and viciousness of Grivas and the assassins of EOKA’ who ‘had no conscience or compunction whatever about who they might kill in pursuit of their political and nationalist aims.’¹ Therefore, while the outcome of his campaign brought about the widely desired outcome of independence — but notably not *enosis* — the means through which he achieved that goal are decried for their unethical methods.

A number of monuments to EOKA and its members are situated throughout Cyprus, and every year on April 1 supporters of EOKA still commemorate the anniversary of the beginning of their campaign. As a result of this double-edged legacy, commemorations to EOKA — and specifically Grivas’s statue in Limassol where he died in hiding — have continued to elicit protests from those who oppose his ideology and ethics. Grivas’s statue was vandalised in 2019 and 2022, and in 2023 violent fights took place at the site of the statue during a memorial service for the general.² Other disputes, such as protests against government funding for the Grivas Museum adjacent to the statue, have also taken place in recent years, attesting to ever-present tensions surrounding a figure who died in 1974 and whose movement largely ended in 1960.

In both cases of the statue’s vandalism, it has been cleaned and maintained, accompanied by statements condemning the vandalism from EOKA supporters and government officials, particularly those from right-wing parties. This case study explores the present tensions in Cyprus that continue to yield disagreements over Grivas and the movement he represents as well as why that statue still remains standing to honour his legacy.

Background

The British occupation of Cyprus began in 1878. When it was annexed by the British in 1914, leading to its military occupation and then categorisation as a Crown colony in 1925, 80% of the population constituted by Greek Cypriots were in favour of *enosis*, whose desires for union with Greece reached full swing when EOKA staged a revolution in 1955. Whereas the British faced similar insurgencies in Malaya and Kenya, they were more willing to promise those countries independence than Cyprus because of broader global interests that Cyprus entailed. Britain viewed Cyprus as a ‘fortress’ colony, which was ‘essential for the security of the British Empire in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.’³ The island’s role as a fortress colony became even more critical during World War II, serving as an air base, then an increasingly important

¹ Simon Robbins. “The British counter-insurgency in Cyprus,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4-5 (2012): 724.

² Nikolaos Prakas. “Anastasiades condemns ‘unacceptable incidents’ at the Grivas rally (Updated),” *Cyprus Mail*, December 9, 2022.

³ Simon Robbins. “The British counter-insurgency in Cyprus,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4-5 (2012): 721.

military base after Britain's forced withdrawal from the Suez Canal in 1954⁴ — concurrent with the growth of insurgency movements. Regardless of the brimmings of revolt, British authorities were unwavering in their decision to maintain their occupation of the colony.⁵

Goergios Grivas

Georgios Grivas began his military career in Greece, where he joined the Hellenic Army in 1919 and fought in the Greco-Turkish War, which instilled in him an anti-Turkish sentiment that would pervade his military escapades in the coming decades. He continued to serve in the Hellenic Army during World War II; afterwards, he retired, attempting instead to enter the political sphere but with little success.⁶ Once it became clear that the British had no plans to leave Cyprus — even though desire for *enosis* was steadily increasing — in January 1955, Archbishop Makrios, who was simultaneously Archbishop of the Cypriot Orthodox Church and the First President of Cyprus, reached out to Grivas to 'initiate a campaign of confrontation and sabotage' against the British.⁷ Whereas Makrios appointed him with visions of a short but chaotic conflict to drive out the British that would be largely symbolic, Grivas had plans for 'a protracted guerrilla insurgency, for a shooting war, that would take years before victory could be accomplished.'⁸ His disagreements with Makrios and other leaders for Cypriot independence represent the one-minded track he envisioned for independence, even if at odds with his superiors.

In 1955, 18 bombs were dropped on the island of Cyprus, accompanied by the following statement signed 'The Leader, Dighenis:'

With the help of God, with faith in our honourable struggle, with the backing of all Hellenism and the help of the Cypriots. WE HAVE TAKEN UP THE STRUGGLE TO THROW OFF THE ENGLISH YOKE, our banners high, bearing the slogan which our ancestors have handed down to us as a holy trust – DEATH OR VICTORY ... Greeks, wherever you may be, hear our call: FORWARD ALL TOGETHER FOR THE FREEDOM OF OUR CYPRUS.⁹

From the onset of the revolutionary attacks, Grivas emphasised the extent to which Greek nationalism motivated the drive for independence, proving that he was willing to resort to any level of violence to realise his goal. This rebellion, however, 'came as a complete shock to the British,' who assumed the Greek Cypriots were not capable of the violence they promised, simply ignoring their dissent about the occupation instead.¹⁰ Grivas heavily recruited Cypriot youth, and at its height had approximately one thousand members in various guerrillas across mountains, towns, and villages.¹¹ Although a small force, they carried out terrorist acts to remind the British troops of their unwanted presence, shooting soldiers in bars, in crowded urban areas, or even in

⁴ David M Anderson. "Policing and communal conflict: The Cyprus emergency, 1954-60," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21, no. 3 (2008): 189.

⁵ Newsinger, John. *British Counterinsurgency* (Palgrave Macmillan London, 2016), 88.

⁶ John Newsinger. *British Counterinsurgency* (Palgrave Macmillan London, 2016), 93.

⁷ Simon Robbins. "The British counter-insurgency in Cyprus," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4-5 (2012): 722.

⁸ John Newsinger. *British Counterinsurgency* (Palgrave Macmillan London, 2016), 93.

⁹ *Ibid.* 95

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 88

¹¹ *Ibid.* 94

the safety of their homes.¹² Furthermore, the small army was so successful because it was enabled by a practically universal support for *enosis* that allowed the army 'to penetrate every area of Greek Cypriot activity, organising a network of informants that invisibly surrounded the British.'¹³

EOKA's Legacy

EOKA's reign of terror also had repercussions for Cypriot society, eliciting anxiety from the Turkish community who feared living under Greek rule, as well as disagreement from those Greek Cypriots who supported *enosis* but disagreed with EOKA's methods of violence.¹⁴ On top of his project to rid the British from the island, Grivas also committed acts of violence against the Turkish population starting primarily in 1958 to create an exclusively Greek Cypriot population.¹⁵

Ultimately, the British withdrew having suffered considerably more damage than EOKA. Neither side emerged from the conflict with complete failure or success. EOKA's violent methods forced the British to retreat and give up sovereignty, and while the British did not dismantle EOKA, they forced a 'compromise solution of an independent Cyprus with a power-sharing constitution,'¹⁶ with the British ceding power to the Cypriots but maintaining select military bases, and prevented *enosis* from taking place. Even these concessions on behalf of the British, however, demonstrates how successful and precise EOKA was under Grivas's leadership, as their relatively meagre army was able to force an entire empire to retreat.

After the war, Grivas retreated to Greece and then arrived back to Cyprus in 1971, where *The Observer* reported he was hiding in the mountains and 'methodically preparing for a last campaign that could involve Cyprus in another reprise of the EOKA struggle, dragging in Greece and Turkey and producing a fresh confrontation between the United States and Russia in the Near East.'¹⁷ It was then that he organised 'EOKA B,' which attempted to overthrow Makrios but resulted in inciting more violence.¹⁸ Therefore, he continued planning his goals of *enosis* in hiding during the years leading up to his death in 1974 in Limassol.

Grivas Statue and EOKA Monuments

In the decades since Cyprus gained independence, a number of monuments to EOKA and its most prominent figures have spawned across the country. The Liberty Monument, built in 1973 in honour of the 1959 release from prison of EOKA fighters, depicts two EOKA fighters opening the

¹² Simon Robbins. "The British counter-insurgency in Cyprus," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4-5 (2012): 724.

¹³ John Newsinger. *British Counterinsurgency* (Palgrave Macmillan London, 2016), 100.

¹⁴ Andrew R. Novo. "Friend or foe? The Cyprus Police Force and the EOKA insurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 3 (2012): 417.

¹⁵ Mehmet Kemal Firik. "Greek Cypriot move to convert terror group leader's hideout into museum stirs outcry," *Anadolu Ajansı*, September 11, 2022.

¹⁶ Simon Robbins. "The British counter-insurgency in Cyprus," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4-5 (2012): 735.

¹⁷ *The Observer*. "Grivas plans his last campaign," *The Observer*, October 29, 1972.

¹⁸ Markides, Dana. "The Politics of Honour and the Greek Divide at Cypriot Independence," *The Cyprus Review* 22, no. 2 (2010): 124.

prison gates to release Greek Cypriots literally from prison and symbolically from British rule.¹⁹ The first announcement of the Liberty Monument stated that it would 'dominate the whole area with its volume and grandeur.'²⁰ The Heroes Statue of the Fighters of EOKA, located in the village of Spilia, commemorates four EOKA fighters who died while training in how to use land mines.²¹ A 1985 memorial commemorates the EOKA fighters of Avgorou in the form of a Greek Corinthian tomb-like entrance following a path flanked by cypress trees to a Greek theatre structure, with plaques of the fallen soldiers along the way.²² Several other monuments to EOKA span the island, demonstrating the widespread range of their memory that permeates this country.



Figure 1: "Liberty Monument" Image by Mboesch via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

The statue to Grivas himself was inaugurated on January 27, 2002, at the site of his hideout in Limassol on the 28th anniversary of his death. The Council of Historic Memory of the EOKA Struggle and the Association of EOKA Fighters chose the winning design of a competition they held for a statue honouring Grivas. Although symbolising a polarising figure, the erection of the Grivas statue was relatively uncontroversial and attracted little media attention. Originally located directly in front of the water but now moved to a fenced area further from the coast, the statue is a realist depiction of Grivas in unassuming military attire. It follows a standard trend in memorial depictions of Grivas:

Realistic features — aged, wrinkled face, loose posture and natural movement of the body, ordinary peasant clothes — render the idealized heroic pattern 'accessible' in the sense that the hero is 'one of us' — hence, facilitating identification with the members of the Greek Cypriot community.²³

Even in his memorialised depictions, Grivas encompasses a figure of the Greek Cypriot people who fought for the civilian cause. The relatively unassuming monument went without considerable scrutiny until a series of recent vandalisations and protests revisited Grivas's and

¹⁹ Chrystalleni Loizidou. "On the Liberty Monument of Nicosia." In *Re-Envisioning Cyprus*, ed. Peter Loizos, Nicos Philippou, and Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert (University of Nicosia Press, 2010), 89.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 93.

²¹ Solea, "Heroes Statues of the Fighters of EOKA," Solea.

²² Visit Famagusta, "Avgorou Village," Visit Famagusta.

²³ Vicky Karaiskou. "'Deep' in memory: Urban Space and 'visuality' in Cyprus." In *Heritage and Sustainable Urban Transformations: Deep Cities*, ed. Kalliopi Fouseki, Torgim Sneve Guttormsen, and Grete Swensen (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2020), 82.

EOKA's legacy in Cyprus, highlighting tensions both between the right and the left as well as between the Greek and Turkish populations.

History of the Contestation

Given their violent and often discriminatory nature, controversy surrounding the work of Grivas and EOKA has been present since the group's inception. Political scientist Glen D. Camp explains that this division stems all the way from NATO during Greek and Turkish disputes surrounding the 'Cyprus crisis':

... it also split NATO by pitting Greek against Turk, Athens against Ankara. Such a split had ominous implications for the resolution of the Cyprus crisis, for any effort to establish union with Greece or independence under self-determination required the support or benevolent neutrality of both Turks and Turkish Cypriots.²⁴

Given the Greek Cypriots' continuing discrimination against the Turkish population, this support never materialised. In fact, as international legal scholar Emete Gozuguzelli told the Turkish publication *Anadolu Ajansı*, Grivas had a history of 'actively committing unacceptable crimes against humanity and massacring Turkish Cypriots.'²⁵ That tension has pervaded Cyprus for decades, leading to intermittent protests and public disagreements. At the 2018 Justice for Cyprus rally, for example, members of the right-wing group 'United Greece' brought banners depicting Grivas, leading to heated discourse and the notification of the police.²⁶

In recent years, this distaste for Grivas has taken the form of defacing his monument. In 2019, an unknown party vandalised his statue in Limassol, where *Cyprus Today* reported that 'pink and red paint was thrown on the statue.'²⁷ In response to the incident, the president of the foundation for the monument notably told the publication that it was 'not the first time that the monument has been desecrated,' adding that the vandalism was carried out by 'frivolous youngsters' and not an organised protest group.²⁸ While the motivation for this particular incident is unknown, it can be presumed that those who vandalised the monument were making a statement against Grivas and EOKA's terrorism, his targeting of Turkish Cypriots, or both. The statue was cleaned and was relatively unbothered for two years.

In 2022, the controversy stirred up in an event that paralleled that of 2019. In January, a 'nearly identical' incident took place, in which the 'statue of General Georgios Grivas "Dighenis"' was found vandalised with pink paint.²⁹ Notably, this defacement took place the day before Grivas's 48th commemoration was to take place. Authorities promptly cleaned the statue in preparation for the event, but that was unsuccessful in quelling more protests.

²⁴ Glen D Camp. "Greek-Turkish Conflict over Cyprus," *Political Science Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (1980): 46.

²⁵ Mehmet Kemal Firik. "Greek Cypriot move to convert terror group leader's hideout into museum stirs outcry," *Anadolu Ajansı*, September 11, 2022.

²⁶ Dean Kalimniou. "Tensions at the Justice for Cyprus rally," *Neos Kosmos*, July 22, 2018.

²⁷ *Cyprus Today*. "Grivas statue in Limassol defaced," *Cyprus Today*, February 9, 2019.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Nick Theodoulou. "Grivas statue vandalised," *Cyprus Mail*, January 26, 2022.

In July 2022, left-wing party AKEL proved successful in blocking state funds for a Grivas museum, eliciting even more political uproar. Those on the left disdained a memorial in his honour, calling Grivas the ‘destroyer of Cyprus,’ whereas those on the right accused AKEL members of merely spreading propaganda.³⁰ Even so, the Greek Cypriot administration was attempting to move forward with the museum, which Turkish Cypriot historian Hatice Sahin called ‘a horrifying decision’ as it ‘further fuels the already existing separation and confidence crisis between Turkish and Greek Cypriots.’³¹ Parliament officially passed this decision in December, leading to a pro-Grivas rally of more than 300 people holding signs with slogans such as ‘He lives and guides us, Georgios Grivas Digenis,’ protesting the decision that deemed him ‘unworthy of any honor from the homeland.’³² Protesters escalated to violence, throwing stones at the Parliament building and even starting a fire; speaker Annita Demetriou and Parliament universally condemned the event.³³ Then-president Nicos Anastasiades also condemned the protest over Twitter.³⁴ Police eventually stopped the protest, but more have continued to arise, demonstrating the extent to which this unresolved tension pervades the country.

In January 2023, riots broke loose once again when fans of two opposing football teams became hostile during a commemoration event for Grivas, leading to the throwing of stones, Molotov cocktails, and clubs.³⁵ The conflict appeared to be over a sports issue independent of Grivas, but the fact that it took place during the commemoration seems hardly a coincidence, especially considering ‘The Eoka Fighters’ Associations had warned of unrest at Grivas’ memorial service a few days ago and had asked for a police presence.’³⁶ Since these events, the uproar surrounding Grivas has become less intense, and there has been no action regarding the status of his state in Limassol as of the date of this case study.

Decision-Making Processes

Despite the frequent resurges in contestation surrounding Grivas and his memorialisation — both via the statue and events in his honor — Cyprus leaders have not made any definitive decisions as to the status of the statue itself; instead, their decision-making has focused on its accompanying museum. The opposition was led by the AKEL party that objected to using the €43,000 reserved for the museum; using the funds was ultimately rejected via a majority vote.³⁷ According to Minister of Foreign Affairs Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu, the desire to set up the museum in the first place was ‘a clear demonstration of [the Greek Cypriots] attempt to keep alive the racism and animosity towards Turks and to feed their soul with this animosity.’³⁸ With the strong sentiment against

³⁰ Knews. “Parliament goes off script over controversial museum,” *Knews*, July 1, 2022.

³¹ Mehmet Kemal Firik. “Greek Cypriot move to convert terror group leader’s hideout into museum stirs outcry,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, September 11, 2022.

³² Kelsey. “Cyprus: Tension outside the Parliament on the occasion of a resolution for Georgios Grivas Digenis – Watch video,” *News Bulletin 247*, December 8, 2022.

³³ Elias Hazou and Sarah Ktsitsi. “House maintains ‘Grivas funds’ in budget as unruly protest rages outside (Updated).” *Cyprus Mail*, December 8, 2022.

³⁴ Nikolaos Prakas. “Anastasiades condemns ‘unacceptable incidents’ at the Grivas rally (Updated).” *Cyprus Mail*, December 9, 2022.

³⁵ Katy Turner. “Fighting breaks out in Limassol during Eoka memorial (update 2),” *Cyprus Mail*, January 22, 2023.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Knews. “Parliament goes off script over controversial museum,” *Knews*, July 1, 2022.

³⁸ *Cyprus Today*. “‘Grivas Museum’ decision slammed,” *Cyprus Today*, November 12, 2022.

commemorating Grivas, Parliament's decision also had larger implications, The State was called upon to stop funding any memorial events in honor of this man "whom history condemned as unworthy of any kind of honor from the homeland."³⁹

All decisions regarding the memorialisation and contestation of Grivas and EOKA have been top-down; in the case of the museum funding, Parliament voted without considerable polling or research from public opinion. Nevertheless, even if not consulting the public officially, the protests and dialogue surrounding EOKA in Cyprus has an indubitable determinant in the voting process as politicians were able to recognize the harm it represents for those that do not fall under EOKA's right-wing and Greek umbrella.

Given that the monument itself is privately owned by Council of Historic Memory of the EOKA Struggle and the Association of EOKA Fighters, and EOKA veteran associations still adamantly support the figure, it is unlikely that the statue will be removed. While State-funded celebrations have been rejected by parliament, these private groups of EOKA veterans and supporters are those who keep commemorations of Grivas alive, as in the form of the January 2023 memorial service that devolved into chaos. Furthermore, protests regarding the statue itself have not surpassed vandalisation with paint, and the lack of intensity in protests precludes the need for immediate action. Also, given that the vandalisations of the statue itself did not reach high levels of media coverage, there does not seem to have been a large demand for communication with the public about decisions regarding the preservation of the statue. Rather, most official announcements and media attention has surrounded protests regarding EOKA's legacy as a whole and the struggle to reconcile Grivas's presence in Cyprus. Dynamics to consider in decision-making around the Grivas statue include reconciling the relationship between fundamental leaders with polarising politics, the relationship between the state and private groups in driving historical monuments and celebrations, the response (or lack thereof) that the vandalisation of a monument entails, and equally honouring the memory of a society which is demographically unbalanced. This contestation in Cyprus has highlighted the uneven representation of voices between the Turkish and Greek communities, as well as the role of the state in sanctioning figures and people worthy of historical commemoration.

Summary and Conclusions

Although Cyprus's Parliament's decision to stop backing commemorations of Grivas speaks to the state's position in his legacy, right-wing political groups and present-day EOKA supporters will continue to avow and memorialise him, allowing the polarisation deeply seeded in Cyprus to persist. The riots that took place as recently as 2023 demonstrate the extent to which this figure holds a contentious place in Cypriot society and memory culture despite having passed away decades ago. Given the permanence of his statue as well as political ideology in Cyprus, it is unlikely that the tensions at the root of this dispute will disappear; however, Parliament's decision to block funding for his museum represents a political move to condemn his legacy. In order to

³⁹ Kelsey. "Cyprus: Tension outside the Parliament on the occasion of a resolution for Georgios Grivas Digenis – Watch video," *News Bulletin* 247, December 8, 2022.

demonstrate respect for the Turkish Cypriot community as well as those affected by Grivas and his followers, it is crucial that decision-makers continue to take a position on Grivas to help dissolve the polarisation that characterises the country.

Like many other cases, the statue of Grivas deals with a figure who was at once responsible for the progress of the country — through his efforts in achieving independence — while also committing disdainful acts against his fellow citizens. With a history as divided as that of Cyprus, his case can serve as a useful tool for decision-makers grappling with the double-edged legacies of their figures, as well as how to navigate dissipating conflict among a political divide that remains salient even long after its leader has passed on.

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Many contestations have been over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces in recent years. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions, whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

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