

'Ceasefire in Greece' from Le Monde (19 October 1949)

Caption: On 19 October 1949, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the suspension of hostilities in Greece and considers the political future of a bloodstained country devastated by three years of civil war.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 19.10.1949, n° 1.472; 6e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Armistice en Grèce", p. 1.

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Ceasefire in Greece

The news of the suspension of hostilities by the Greek partisans has been received cautiously in both Washington and Athens. It simply confirms the facts on the ground: after their serious defeat in the Grammos-Vitsi mountains in late August, the rebels seem unable to continue the fight for the moment. But they have not given up. Yesterday their radio announced that 'the guerrilla army is still intact, strong, and in a state of alert.' Their numbers in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania are estimated at 15 000 to 20 000.

If, on their own admission, the rebels are prepared to resume action when able to do so, why give the order for a ceasefire? It is apparently not intended for their own troops but to impress the government in Athens and its protectors.

Various more or less credible hypotheses have been offered. It is naturally assumed that the ceasefire order came from Moscow, that the Kremlin is provisionally abandoning support for a rebellion whose results are unsatisfactory and that it will be turning its full attention to Yugoslavia. It has even been suggested that the partisans might be used in that country — not impossible, since many of them originally come from Macedonia. In addition, a number have been transferred to Czechoslovakia, perhaps with view to building up a reserve force.

Another, less plausible, explanation is that the Soviet Union is trying to do a deal with the United States and, in exchange for abandoning the Greek rebels, to persuade America to drop its support for Yugoslavia's candidacy for the Security Council. Since the election will take place on Thursday, America's attitude will soon be clear. For the time being, Yugoslavia appears to have the necessary majority.

The Soviets would certainly be very happy to see Britain and the United States withdraw from Greece, since that would allow the Communist offensive to resume under the best possible conditions when circumstances were again favourable. However, that withdrawal will not happen overnight. A number of issues need to be clarified first. What will happen to the Greek partisans and Communists? What guarantees will neighbouring countries give that they will no longer afford them aid and shelter?

As we know, these issues have been referred to the United Nations, which has appointed a Conciliation Committee to try and resolve them. According to the latest news, the efforts of its Chairman, Carlos Romulo, have not borne fruit: the only prospect of an agreement is between Belgrade and Athens: there is apparently no hope of agreement with Bulgaria and Albania, and the Committee has apparently decided in the end not to ask the Political Committee to prolong its mandate.

While the United Nations appears justified in intervening in an international problem of interference by neighbouring states in Greece's affairs, its involvement is perhaps more questionable if it starts to discuss what attitude the Greek Government should take to a rebellion that has been subdued for the time being after devastating the country and causing widespread bloodshed for three years. No one has the right to force the Greek authorities to grant an amnesty: they alone must be the judge of that. Given the failure of previous amnesties, it is for the Greek Government alone to see what clemency measures should be taken and at what pace the gradual pacification of the country can best proceed.

It seems likely that those who chose this unfortunate people as the victim of their trouble-making are already turning their attention elsewhere and that Greece will now have time to catch its breath after enduring blows that, in the absence of British and American support, would have proved fatal.