



### Polish gliders in Greece

Το κείμενο αυτό δεν έχει στόχο το ελληνικό κοινό, αλλά τους Πολωνούς φίλους μας. Γράφηκε εξ αρχής στα αγγλικά, γιατί ένας αυτόματος μεταφραστής μπορεί να μεταφράσει τις λέξεις, αλλά όχι το νόημα.

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The first glider arrived in Greece in 1932 for an aviation exhibition. It was a German Falke. We do not have a single photo of the Falke during the exhibition. Its fate is unknown until the year 1938 when we find it flying in a gliding camp of the Athens Gliding Club.

In 1934 two Ziegling primary gliders were built by technicians of the Air Force. In the summer of 1934 Air Force engineer Nikolaos Koskoros began normal gliding operations in Athens. After 1936 gliding thrives in Greece with many locally built gliders. Most gliders were built in Athens by the Raab factory and the KEA Air Force factory in Faliron. They were given to aero-clubs that started appearing around the country.

#### The Wrona-bis

In what concerns Polish gliders we know that in 1939 the factory of Anton Raab has produced ten Wrona-bis gliders (Wrona2, wrona is the crow). These were primary gliders of Polish design. We do not know the club where each glider was given. We just know that at least two of them went in Thessaloniki (Macedonia).

We also read that Demosthenes Maniatis, the main instructor of the Thessaloniki movement, has been sent to fly in Poland. We do not know in which town he went or anything about his flights in Poland. In the prewar era the main Polish gliding center was in Lvov, so it is possible that he went to fly in Lvov (also known as Lemberg to the Germans).

Very few photos survive today from prewar gliding in Thessaloniki. We have though a full set of photos of the Wrona-bis operation. Engineer Goerge Pangakis was an Athenian glider instructor. In 1940 some months before WW2



reached Greece he has been in Thessaloniki as an enlisted officer. A full roll of negative film was found in his archive. It depicts the Wrona-bis operation on a hill in the north of the town. All those photos are accessible through the "Hellenic Soaring Archive" in the site:

[www.marinaalimos.gr/hsa](http://www.marinaalimos.gr/hsa)

It seems that the Wrona-bis gliders were lucky aircrafts. They are among the very few gliders that survived the war. From the pieces of the two aircrafts that survived in Thessaloniki, a new Wrona-bis was assembled. It flew again many flights during the years 1946-47 as "gria Wrona" (old lady Wrona).

G. Palamidis was a gliding instructor before the war and he was the head of the postwar gliding movement in Thessaloniki. This was a boy-scouts movement.

Unfortunately, in 1947 the youngsters were drafted to fight the war against the local communists. So the glider was stored. It was only in 1952 when it had some more flights.

From 1953 there exists a movie where the Thessaloniki boy-scouts are seen parading with the Wrona-bis and a Gruene-Post. But in 1953 we also read an angry letter by Palamidis to a local newspaper against the local aeroclub. It accuses the aeroclub for prohibiting any more flights of the Wrona-bis. This is the last we know of the Thessaloniki Polish gliders.

There is one more mention of the Wrona-bis gliders in Greece. It seems that one of them

survived the war in Athens but in poor conditions. This is all we know and probably it has never been repaired.

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In the decade of the '50ies the mountain slopes and the bungee chords were abandoned for good. Gliding would not return to the mountain slopes until the '80ies. Even then it would not be considered by the gliding community as gliding. It was considered a lesser sport called hang-gliding.

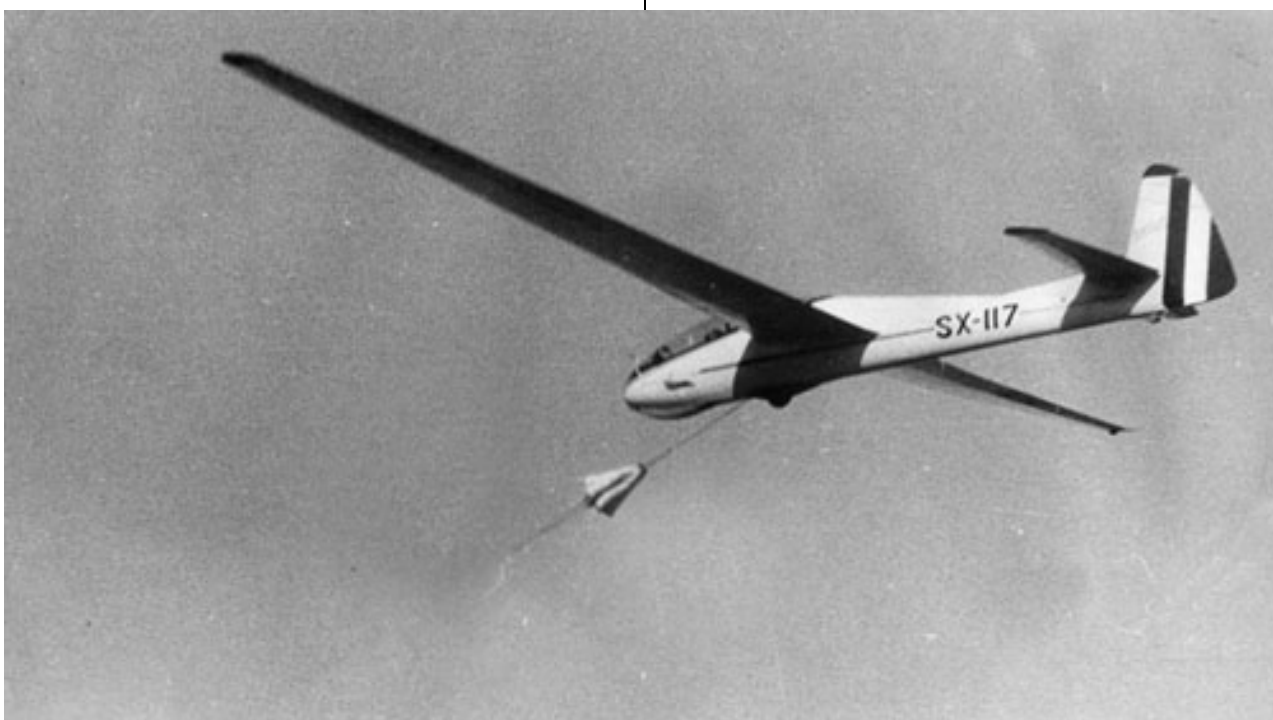
In the '50ies traditional gliding moved from the mountain slopes to flatland airfields. Starting was through powerful winches.

From 1956 to 1960 we had in Greece a very productive gliding school. This was in Tripoli airport (in Peloponese) and had the economic backing of the Air Force. Most gliders were Cavkas built in Greece in the KEA factory. The Cavka glider was a Yugoslav design belonging to the Polish Salamandra family. (For the Cavka glider there is a special bilingual book "The Cavka gliders in Greece" which can be downloaded from the site [www.aerodata.gr](http://www.aerodata.gr)).

Towards the end of the Tripoli era there was need for better gliders. Open cockpit gliders were to be abandoned and three brand new modern gliders have been ordered in Poland by our Royal Aeroclub.

### **The Bocians**

The three new Polish gliders were two Bocian trainers and a Mucha single-seater.



As the Tripoli gliding center stopped operating in 1960 the new gliders never went to Tripoli. They arrived in the Athens Gliding Club in 1961.

The first Bocian was the SX-117 (serial no. P-378). The second Bocian was the SX-118 (serial no. P-367). The Mucha was the SX-119 (serial no. P-534).

The Mucha was short-lived. It had very few flights. It was destroyed in 1965 in an accident during winch-launching.

The Bocians flew for many years as the only trainers of the '60ies. They were winch launched for local training flights. No cross-country flights were attempted in the '60ies. In 1961 there has been a long aero-tow from Athens to Thessaloniki for a brief training operation in the local airport.

In 1970 the Bocian SX-117 has been sent to KEA Air Force factory for general inspection. It was repainted and so we lost the original stork decoration in the side of the fuselage.

In 1972 the SX-118 had an out-landing some short distance before the runway. It landed in a grapevine without any damage to the cockpit and the wings. Its tail though was totally cut from the rest of the glider. The glider was considered reparable and was stored in the hangar but it was never repaired. It was discarded in the '90ies.

In 1974 a brand new ASK-13 was ordered from Schleier. It was a light and agile trainer, perhaps the best trainer that has ever been built. Compared to the ASK-13 the Bocian was considered a heavy battleship.

We were using the ASK-13 for training and we were giving the surviving Bocian to new pilots in order to fly with visitors and acquire flying experience. For solo flights we had an old Yugoslav built Weihe. Some pilots preferred the Bocian for its stable imposing flight.

Some 5-hours duration flights were also achieved on the Bocian. In the beginning such flights were allowed with a passenger on board. Later we changed the rules (as per FAI) and these flights had to be achieved on single-seaters. So the 5-hours flights were transferred to the venerable Weihe.

In the mid-80ies our only Bocian (SX-117) was getting old and needed general overhaul. The wings have been repaired in Athens with amateur work of a Greco-British team. Then a

Macedonian club asked for the glider. It went to Thessaloniki in order to complete the repairs. This is where we lost track of it. It seems that a local Air Force technician intended to transform the Bocian into an airplane, which fortunately he never did. That was the end of the Bocian SX-117.

### The Puchacz

In 1979 our National Aeroclub (the former Royal Aeroclub) had some money for the purchase of a new trainer. The ASK-13 of 1973 was purchased by the Athens Gliding Club and not by our National Aeroclub, so that it could be bought as a direct order to Schleier. The National Aeroclub was dealing with state's money and it had to follow the international bidding procedure.

This was a bureaucratic procedure that many manufacturers were not willing to follow. Manufacturers as Schleier and Scheibe have never sent any offer to our National Aeroclub. Most offers were rather expensive. To our amazement we had a very good offer from the Schweizer Brothers of the USA. The best offer though was by PZL in Poland. Its SZD factory in Bielsko Biala had just produced its first fiberglass trainer (the Puchacz) and was eager to sell.

PZL was represented in Greece by the Golemis group of companies, the well known Goldair group. As an additional friendly gesture the SZD factory has offered to receive C. Pikros of the National Aeroclub to fly the glider in Poland.

In order to fly in Poland Pikros had to submit to the Polish authorities a copy of his Greek flight license and obtain a Polish one. In 1979 we

Warszawa, dnia 11.05. 1979 r.  
MINISTERSTWO KOMUNIKACJI  
Centralny Zarząd Lotnictwa  
Cywilnego

ZASWIADCZENIE Nr 700  
Licencja pilota wyczajowego  
nr H (nazwa)  
wydana przez J. Smarżewski  
dla Konstantinos PIKROS

jest uznana za ważną na terytorium Polskiej Rzeczy-  
pospolitej Ludowej bez ograniczeń \*) z zachowaniem  
warunków i ograniczeń wymienionych na odwrocie  
niniejszego zaświadczenia \*).

Zaświadczenie jest ważne łącznie z licencją do  
dnia 30 lipca 1979 r.

\*) Niepotrzebne skreślić.

DKP 2510/72 1.000 bezdrz. 70 g

were still in the Soviet era. It was probably the first Polish flight license (rather a permit) issued for a Greek citizen.

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The Polish word “puchacz” denotes the owl. The owl though was the bird of the goddess of wisdom Athena, protector of the town of Athens. The owl was the bird of the city of Athens. The ancient Athenian expression “you bring an owl to Athens” (ΓΛΑΥΚΑ ΕΣ ΑΘΗΝΑΣ ΚΟΜΙΖΕΙΣ) had the meaning that “you tell us nothing new”.

C. Pikros went to the SZD factory in Biesko Biala carrying with him a marble owl to be offered to the factory. As Pikros was an engineer he was much interested in the factory and the manufacturing of gliders, establishing good relations with the SZD engineers. In our picture you can see Roman, Pikros, Adam Meus (with the owl on his knee) and M. Zatwarnicki.

Small fiberglass boatyards in Greece were messy places with glass fibers and polyester resin all over the place. Fiberglass glider building in Biesko Biala was an ultra-clean process with the hangars heated through floor air-ducts. The epoxy resin was given to the lay-up teams by the chemists in small pre-measured paper cups and not in large plastic bowls as was done for polyester boat-building.

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The factory seemed to be in a transition

phase. Wood was abandoned and replaced by fiberglass. This was most obvious in the production of the Ogar motor-glider. The Ogar had a fiberglass cockpit but it had wooden wings built in molds, as are the fiberglass gliders.

The Ogar was a dream motor-glider with a very interesting cockpit design. It had a side-by-side seats arrangement, but the right seat was positioned a small distance behind the left one. In this arrangement a cockpit width of only 75 cm was achieved.

SZD test pilot Roman was eager to fulfill the wish of Pikros to fly the Ogar. This was done in a brand new glider that had just been produced and was waiting to be delivered. The Ogar was an exceptional two-seater. Seating on the left seat you almost forgot the right-seat pilot and the stopped engine behind you. A huge canopy gave excellent view and the controls were very friendly.

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Dealing for a week with the people of SZD, Pikros found a deep resemblance of the Polish to the Greek mentality. Both nations were looking to the east with sorrow. Many people in Poland were refugees who came from the east, when they were driven out of the Lvov area after WW2. The prewar center of the Polish gliding was in Lvov. In the same way many Greeks were refugees who were driven out of Asia Minor by the Turks in 1922.

Lately when the Ukrainians arrived in Poland



as draft refugees, a Polish lady was stating "Yes I would give the poor Ukrainians some food but I will never let them in my home". Not many foreigners understood the bitterness of these words.

As Poland was still under Soviet influence, English was not the prevailing foreign language in Poland. German was. Pikros's German was not good enough for Germany but it appeared that the Greek-German and the Polish-German languages were very compatible. Especially in technical matters German speaking was fluent in the SZD factory and in the offices of PZL-Warshawa.

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Flying the Puchacz in Bielsko Biala was a great pleasure.

Biesko Biala is situated where the large Polish plains meet the Carpathian massif. It is an area of green hills with lakes in-between. If in this picture you add a stork turning slowly with you in a thermal, you get the picture. In Greece we do have storks but we do not fly with them in thermals. We mostly thermal accompanied by large flocks of seagulls.

Coming back in Greece, Pikros published some articles in the local aero-press about his visit in Poland. Today he has only one regret from his journey in Poland. He did not know at the time that the "Bolek I Lolek" cartoons were produced in Bielsko Biala. If he knew he would have liked to visit the place.

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After the flight experience in Poland the National Aeroclub decided to give the Puchacz trainer to the Gliding club of Athens as it was operating in a large military airport. We decided to give to Edessa Aeroclub the ASK-13 of Athens. It was lighter and more agile, more suitable for the small airfield of Edessa.

The Pushacz received the Greek registration SX-124 (serial no. B-954 ).

The Puchacz was the first fiberglass trainer of the club. It was used excessively for training. Compared to the ASK-13 the Puchacz had a tendency of dropping a wing when stalling and this made it more suitable in training new pilots in stalls and spins.

In spin training we did not teach full spins, but spin recovery. We would put the glider in a spin and expect the student to recover immediately. Our goal was the recognition of a

spin and the prompt counter-action. We never completed more than a full turn in a spin. We were very pleased with the spin characteristics of the Puchacz.

At the same time in the SZD factory more spinning tests were carried out. It was found out that after a fully developed spin the glider required a little more than two turns of corrective action for recovery. The regulations imposed recovery after less than two turns.

A few months after the arrival of the Puchacz in Greece, a car with a trailer came from Poland to take the Puchacz back to Bielko Biala. This transportation was a chance for Adam Meus to visit Greece. We were very happy to see him again and this was a chance for him meeting the people of Goldair, namely Dimitris Golemis and George Delikaris. He also had the time to meet the Greek gliding community. He even proposed us a better fiberglass layering schedule for our local "ptilon" UL-glider (see book "gliders built in Greece" that you can download in pdf format from the address: [www.aerodata.gr](http://www.aerodata.gr))

The Puchacz stayed for some weeks in Poland where the elevator was moved a little higher on the fin. This gave some more effective rudder area during spins.

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The Puchacz was charged with the main training work in Athens, until the next generation trainers arrived in Greece: Five Twin-Astir for the Air Force and a new ASK-21 for the Athens Gliding Club arrived in 1985. So the Puchacz was used for secondary occupations eg. flying with visitors. As for instructing we always preferred to train students in stalls and spins on the Puchacz.

In 1993 the Puchacz was a total loss during a ridge flying accident.

### **The Jantars**

In 1980 the gliding schools in Greece were in need of two new single-seater gliders for our newly trained glider pilots. The purchase was again through the Hellenic National Aeroclub. All the offers we received were for competition gliders of the standard class.

The best offer economically was for the Polish Jantar Standard, and we ordered two of them. So the Gliding Club of Athens acquired the glider SX-127 (serial no. B-1114 ) and the SX-128 (serial no. B-1115 )



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The Jantars did not fly a lot. The reason was financial. New glider pilots preferred to fly on the two-seaters and share the cost of the tow. The rest of the costless flight could also be shared.

### About new gliders

The twin Astir trainers came to Greece when our Air Force tried to introduce the US training system. The cadets of the US Air force, as well as the US Navy cadets, are first introduced into flight using gliders. This system failed in Greece for reasons that are beyond the scope our brief present analysis. In the end the Grob Twin Astir gliders were offered to our aeroclubs.

The purchase of the Jantars was the last order of Polish gliders for Greece. Later, a brand new Blanik trainer was ordered by the Athens Gliding Club for its needs. Being an all-metal trainer, it was supposed to stay in the open when the club was operating in small airfields around the country.

It seems that there will be no new order for a long time. After our clubs acquired the five trainers of the Air Force there was no need of buying new gliders. Five additional trainers are

more than enough to cover our needs for the near future.

### Greek aeromodelers in Poland

Around the change of the century among the Greek modeling community there was a Polish aeromodeler who was working in Greece. He was named Jurek Pawelek. At the same time in Poland Piotr Piechowski was busy with his aeromodeling internet site [www.pp.de](http://www.pp.de)

Every summer Piotr was organizing an aeromodeling meeting in the airfield of Zar in southern Poland. It was a meeting mainly for Polish aeromodelers living abroad, mostly in Germany. Jurek had the idea to join the event and take with him some Greek aeromodeling friends. So was born a new link between Poland and Greece. The movement grew each year so that in 2008 the Greek aeromodeling group visiting Poland was about 30 persons.

The events were mostly for aeromodeling, but through these events some of the Greek non-flying sportsmen were in contact for the first time with a well organized gliding movement. The pleasure of flying in the green hills of southern Poland is the best introduction to gliding a sportsman can have.\_