

Greece and Europe in the Modern Period: Aspects of a Troubled Relationship

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Greek Polity and the European Community, 1974-1993

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In most analyses of contemporary Greek history, written from whatever point of view, 1974 is seen as a watershed, with the restoration of a full parliamentary democracy after years of dictatorship and repression, a date that in many ways represents a break with the past, in the symbolic sphere, at least. Yet at an institutional level, in terms of the external and international context of Greek foreign relations, less changed. The dominant relationship with the USA in defence partnership remained, although the withdrawal from the NATO command structure as a result of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, Operation *Attila*, caused temporary ructions, later mended with the Greek return to full participation in the alliance. And at an economic and political level, the 1962 Treaty of Association with the European Economic Community remained in place, although numerous credits and economic assistance schemes had been withheld during the junta period, affecting EC capital investment in Greece.¹ The 1962 document envisaged the possibility of future full Community membership, something that was eventually agreed in 1979 to facilitate Greek accession as the tenth full EC member in 1981.

During the years of the dictatorship, Greek relationships with individual Community member countries had varied considerably in warmth and scope, with, for instance, quite close relations with the British Conservative government, or at least some leading members of it, on the one hand, and distant and often hostile relations with other member countries, particularly those with Left leaning governments such as Holland. It is worth bearing this point in mind, for during the early years of this period the European Economic Community was just that, in most senses. The notion of a common Community foreign policy, for instance, or a future unified European state virtually never appears in contemporary documents or newspaper reports of EC activities. Although federalist organisations existed in most European countries - and in Brussels itself there were certainly leading Community officials with serious ambitions towards political unity - by and large

the Community in these years was very much an economic community, and only that. The federalist and integrationist political project that we are now familiar with - post the Maastricht Treaty - was a very small minority position indeed in most member countries, with the partial exception of the Benelux states of Holland and Belgium. Federalists had no influence whatsoever over the main political parties in the United Kingdom and in most other large member countries. The Treaty of Rome was seen primarily as a customs union in virtually all public discussion of its implications. If there was an integrationist political agenda, it was a hidden agenda, and confined to very limited circles, mostly to be found deep within the European bureaucracy itself. Thus there was no need for the strongly pro-European Community politicians who dominated the constitutionalist Greek Right that took power after the fall of the dictatorship to articulate an agenda of political choice for the Greek people that took any cognisance whatsoever of integrationist or federalist concerns. The 'Europe' of the time still had a major commitment to the Steel and Coal Community, and above all to the rationalisation - if that is the right word in view of later ecological and social concerns - of agriculture, leading to the mass departure from the land of hundreds of thousands of peasants in France, Germany and Italy, and their entry into the industrial labour market.

In a very real sense, these three industries - coal, steel and agriculture - were 'Europe'. The institutions that the informed public saw as the 'European Community' seemed to be almost exclusively preoccupied with their management. It is worth noting, for purposes of comparison, in a very different political culture from that of post-dictatorship Greece, the almost exclusive attention on the agricultural issues that dominated British political debate about the EC in the early years, and was a major factor in early rejections of British membership. And colonies were still a major factor in the political life of some major European countries, particularly France and Britain, with associated links in the production and exchange of agricultural products. The disagreement between De Gaulle and the United Kingdom over the question of British membership had elements of conflict in its content and articulation that long predated the foundation of the Community or the signature of the Treaty of Rome.

This political process and intellectual definition was linked with rapidly accelerating rates of economic growth in the EC countries concerned. Given the very large numbers of Greeks still dependent on the land, maybe as much as a quarter of the labour force if indirect dependence is included, EC membership was an attractive prospect for the modernising, technocratic Right in Greece.

Contemporary concerns about EC agricultural development were actually dominated by debates about the rights and wrongs of the relationship of former colonial and Third World countries with EC markets, particularly in the sphere of agricultural exports, market access, harmonisation of consumer protection, closure of derelict rust-belt industries in northern France and Belgium, and so on. It was all a long way from the ambitious political agenda we are familiar with today.

The Mediterranean character of Greek products was largely complementary to a Community whose agriculture in the northern member countries was dominated by dairy-based products, and did not appear to require large amounts of subsidy for its development within an EC and CAP framework. It is also worth bearing in mind that this period had coincided with the development of the motorway network in northern Europe, efficient and reasonably priced air cargo services, and the modern refrigerated lorry, so changes in transport technology were beginning to benefit Greek agricultural exports in any case.² Improved relations with Tito's Yugoslavia meant that international motorways could be used easily to transport perishable goods. At the same time, in the member countries themselves, changes in retailing patterns and the development of the modern supermarket as a widespread phenomenon had meant that marketing of highly perishable fruits produced in large quantities by Greece, such as grapes and peaches, could be approached in a new way. Market changes in many northern countries were increasing demand for other Mediterranean products such as olive oil, and Greece was seen as having a valuable contribution to make to Community resources.

So the 'Europe' that was perceived as a political identity in Greece was difficult to oppose, as its impetus seemed to so completely fit with the dominant economic preoccupations of the elites at the time, and the natural progress of technological development as it affected Greek agriculture. Many of the processes, particularly in agriculture, which the European Community was seeking to encourage through the Common Agricultural Policy had been proceeding for some time, in any event, in Greece. Governments had been trying to industrialise the country and reduce the proportion of people employed in agriculture since long before the Second World War. The aftermath of the civil war had given a considerable boost to the process, with large numbers of people who had left their villages never returning to them, and the decline of traditional agricultural patterns in many areas, particularly transhumance in northern Greece.³ Commitment to 'Europe' was seen as a natural extension of the modernising process. In the only industry where Greece had a major international presence, shipping, there was little direct competition from

fleets of EC member countries, and no prospect of the EC having powers that would restrict the activities of Greek shipowners. Insofar as Community membership brought closer association with companies involved in the steady growth of world trade in this period it was welcome, but in a strategic sense it was largely irrelevant to Greek-controlled business operations in this cosmopolitan industry.

However, in a national political culture where the manipulation of the body politic by larger outside powers is a central preoccupation, and had been for a long time, it was natural for the growing economic power of the EC to be seen in a political context. Greek foreign policy since the end of the civil war had been exclusively determined by the Cold War and the American alliance, with the intermittent exception of independent stances over the Cyprus issue, and to many 'Europe' appeared, in often rather undefined ways, to represent an alternative to this dependence. From the point of view of the moderate Right, and the Centre, the EC had the attraction of being part of a movement that was seen in some circles as a European arm of NATO. The very fact that the EC at the time was generally seen as such an 'economist' body actually made the maintenance of this vital ambiguity easier for the government of Karamanlis to maintain during the membership negotiations and the accompanying public debate. Where necessary, to the traditional hard Right, the Community could be seen as NATO minus military uniforms, in effect something that was required in Europe to balance the growing economic power of COMECON and the Soviet-block countries, whereas to the moderate Right and Centre the Community was simply a means of securing Greek access to vital new markets and a vehicle for basically non-political technocratic modernisation. The actual institutions and decision making processes of the Community were quite remote from the Greek public, both geographically and psychologically. It is perhaps not unreasonable to speculate on the percentage of Greek voters in 1962, or even 1981, who could have said with precision where Strasbourg was, let alone what role any future European parliament might have there.

In this sort of atmosphere, it was naturally easy for politicians to graft onto their views of the European Community much material from the past. As 'Europe' had so little apparent political content, in the present or foreseeable future, in a tangible sense, it could be presented as representing almost anything. Recurrent themes from the Greek political debate, some emanating from the distant past, re-emerged as part of the 'Europe' debate. The most obvious instances of this were at the political extremes, where on the Left the KKE saw the European Community as

merely an arm of the multinationals and NATO, designed to snuff out the last vestiges of Greek economic independence and to ensnare the country ever more firmly in the arms of the West, while the traditional Right, including Karamanlis himself on occasion, saw the Community as the natural field for the expansion of Hellenism, a modern version of the *Megali Idea* that had dominated Greek politics in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ Many of the northern European countries which dominated the EC had substantial elements of Hellenism in the cultures of their political elite and it was up to Greece to join them and assist their development away from northern mists and darkness and towards the clear Greek light. This modern version of institutional Philhellenism was more important than it may have seemed at the time in obtaining full membership for Greece, in terms of the response of some key northern European leaders towards the Greek application. When the 1976 internal Commission report on Greek membership was produced there was substantial and entrenched opposition to Greece in some quarters. The Commission wanted a settlement of the Cyprus problem, in particular, before allowing Greece full membership. But traditional Phillhellene politicians such as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in France had an emotional commitment to the restoration of democracy in Greece that went well beyond the immediate political needs of the EC at the time, and were determined to elevate Greece to full membership, in part as an expression of cultural affirmation and elite identity.⁵

But while very welcome to Greece and her government at the time, this approach contained seeds of future problems. In reality Greece was entering the Community with an almost entirely 'economist' agenda, while those most welcoming Greek membership had a cultural agenda, in part linked to a vision of Greek democracy as a threatened and fragile artefact. When democracy was firmly established in Greece, as it soon became, there was little in the way of an articulated and shared *political* agenda between Athens and its northern partners to bridge the gap between elite cultural affirmation and what was increasingly seen in Brussels and elsewhere as ruthless pursuit of economic self interest. In the transition period, this did not emerge as an important problem immediately. The difficulties of the Greek economy in the immediate post-1974 era were compounded by rapidly increased military costs following the Cyprus-crisis inspired mobilisation, a matter of national self-defence that Community partners could hardly object to. There were also many costs arising from the transition to democracy itself. The EC was able to release credits held up during the dictatorship years and this element of

support was wholly uncontroversial, on both sides. It was not until 1981, with the coincidental time of full EC accession and the election of a PASOK government, that serious political problems began to arise.

The Right continued to support membership on the basis of technocratic modernisation described above, coupled with the implicit linkage between NATO commitments and economic union, and with the additional premise, post the Cyprus crisis, that Greece had an advantage over Turkey in that she was a member of both NATO and the EC, whereas Turkey was not. The KKE continued to oppose Greek participation on its normal fundamentalist grounds that were in many senses a mirror image of the Right's agenda, in that the Community was seen as the economic arm of NATO. In a general sense, this has remained the position of these parties ever since, with some small modifications on the KKE's part in the aftermath of the collapse of communism. As Susannah Verney has pointed out,

during the period from 1974 to 1981, there had been no reasoned exchange of views or substantial discussion of what the EC actually meant. Instead, each of the political parties had taken up a highly ideological position, determined by its perception of where Greece should belong in a bipolar world, rather than by economic practicalities. As a result the EC had assumed almost mythic dimensions, as something more or less wholly good or bad, depending on party preference.⁶

It was only after the election of the 1981, when rhetoric and ideology had had to encounter reality, that this situation began to change. The history of changing Greek attitudes to the Community, as expressed through the political parties, is in many senses exclusively the history of the evolution of PASOK's relationship with Europe during this period.

PASOK's own position in the ideological spectrum had evolved somewhat in the years since its foundation, in any case, unlike the views of the other parties. In the aftermath of the junta, PASOK had taken a strongly rooted stance against the EC on the grounds that it was part of the apparatus of western and capitalist economic hegemony, in tones similar to the KKE, if often using more sophisticated language, and with political assumptions linked to Third World rather than Eastern Bloc preoccupations. A Mediterranean economic area was mooted in the '70s, including the northern African states, as an alternative to the European Community. Most of the origins of these views were rooted in the economic analyses of Andreas Papandreu himself,⁷ in the inherited policy elements from his anti-junta

coalition, the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (PAK), and in the absence of a clear integrationist political project from Brussels, so the Community could be presented to, and by, PASOK activists as an American controlled, multinational dominated, undemocratic apparatus. The principle target of this rhetoric was the traditional Centre, which had been struggling to recover from the ideological and practical disorientation of the junta years. The bitter feelings across the Greek political spectrum in the aftermath of the dictatorship and the invasion of Cyprus had freed deep anti-western emotions, and the Community was caught up in the backwash of the more central preoccupations of the new political forces in their attacks on NATO and United States influence.

But once the traditional Centre was vanquished, PASOK policy began to moderate. In 1978 the PASOK parliamentary group had voted in favour of the deepening of the Association Agreement with the Community and in the following year the party did not oppose Greek entry in the final stages of parliamentary ratification of the Treaty agreement that was to lead to full membership two years later. The party argued that a referendum should be held, to legitimise the surrender of national sovereignty, but the principle of full membership was not opposed. It did not in practice take very long, even as a parliamentary opposition party, for PASOK to accommodate itself to the Community, a process that was to accelerate rapidly in government after 1981. At the level of institutional relationships, there was a good deal of closer convergence, as many of the senior Greek bureaucrats who came into contact with the EC found personal opportunities for influence and advancement that greatly exceeded those available in Athens, and *defacto* became 'communautaire', even if they were originally PASOK appointees and retained a PASOK ideological veneer.

In government, the same process continued. Although PASOK did not get fully involved in the Association of European Socialist Parties at this stage, the PASOK position on a future referendum on Community membership quickly collapsed, and all that was at stake in 1981-2 was whether some special arrangements should be negotiated to make the Greek position easier on a number of issues, such as regional policy, and the pricing structure for Mediterranean agricultural products. The United Kingdom was engaged in a similar quest at the same time, under Margaret Thatcher's budget revision policy initiative. By this time negotiations were under way in Brussels with other Mediterranean countries, particularly Spain, and public opinion had begun to accustom itself to Greek membership: Although unevenly spread, the benefits of membership to Greek agricultural producers were

soon apparent, and many member countries were at this stage willing to show a reasonably sympathetic understanding of Greek economic difficulties. It should also perhaps be noted, in passing, that these were the years of boom in the mass tourist industry and so, in addition to the economic relationship through the EC, there also seemed to be a cultural relationship developing, a popular equivalent of the elite's Philhellenism, albeit one with many economic benefits. So at this time, Greece was drawing closer to the Community in a general sense as more and more Community inhabitants from the northern member countries chose to visit Greece. By the 1984 European election, it was possible for PASOK to claim in its manifesto that the membership issue had been solved, and for the party to ask for credit for having obtained a good deal for Greece in the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes negotiations.

That said, there were many difficulties in relationships between PASOK and the EC over these years, and a full account of them would run well beyond the compass of this paper. In a certain sense they encompass the whole evolution and nature of PASOK in government as a force for 'change' in Greek society itself, and its metamorphosis from being a radical, 'Third World type', party of the Left to a centrist force, from the time of its birth in the '70s to the end of the PASOK government period in a welter of scandals and financial crises in 1989. Policy towards Europe was a key indicator of PASOK's political development as a populist party; 'Europe' could become the necessary scapegoat for many of Greece's economic ills, or the magical force that would solve them, with many points of distinction in between. Although a policy of practical accommodation was evident, from the earliest weeks in government in 1981, and there was never any serious prospect of Greek withdrawal from the Community, the relationship was marked by intermittent conflict and difficulties. As Prime Minister, Papandreou kept to himself many aspects of EC work that in other countries were delegated to ministers or officials, and this practice was inseparable from the politics of the late Cold War period. The Community was seen by Papandreou as a foil for his opposition to many aspects of western policy, particularly where United States interests were concerned. In the process, a particular brand of gesture politics developed, with Greece taking exposed and controversial positions on matters such as the shooting down of the Korean airliner in 1983, although playing a formally constructive role in the Community's internal issues. During the 1980s tensions over these episodes tended to increase, as personality conflicts between Papandreou and other Community leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher and Helmut

Kohl, became increasingly familiar features of the political landscape.

However, there were limits to these mock battles and staged rows. As long as the Cold War continued and Greece was one of the few parliamentary democracies in south-eastern Europe, or the Balkan peninsula, both 'sides' could only go so far within the laid down parameters of international relations and Great Power blocs. Greece remained central to western security policy in the eastern Mediterranean, as the Arab-Israeli Seven Day War had shown years before. It is ironic that the stalled nationalism which PASOK projected did not forestall its fall from power in 1989, the same year that the great changes in eastern Europe led to the end of communism there. The same forces of independence from the blocs that had triumphed in eastern Europe and the communist world seemed to have been extinguished in Greece with the subsequent election of the Mitsotakis-led New Democracy government after a period of unstable coalitions.⁸

A further irony has been the subsequent effects on Greek-EC relations of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the turmoil in the Balkans and the re-emergence of the Macedonian Question.⁹ Before its fall over the latter issue in October 1993, the New Democracy government was forced to carry on many of the most characteristic features of Papandreou's intransigence and 'uncommunitaire' behaviour over Macedonia, despite the emphasis in its 1989 election manifesto on the need to repair relations with the Community and to restore Greece to the mainstream of western European development. Just as the forces of nationalism re-emerging after the end of communism have dominated Balkan politics, New Democracy sought a commitment to the ideals of an integrationist Europe. It was not surprising that the Greek public found considerable difficulty in reconciling the two, and that the government's campaign for support over the non-recognition of the former Yugoslav Republic took such a firm hold on public opinion that it was a major factor in the downfall of the Mitsotakis government.

PASOK represented to many Greeks a movement for genuine national independence, after the problems of the dictatorship years. However distorted this movement became by the development of PASOK in government, it has remained a consistent theme in Greek political life, and in the last two years has fed off the renewal of nationalism in most neighbouring Balkan states.¹⁰ There is every sign that this is a force of considerably greater power in the Greek popular mind than enthusiasm for Maastricht or the integrationist model, and a debate on the value of the European Union may be looming in Greece in the near future. The days of the Community bringing noticeable improvements in the life of the average voter are

now long past. Rather the opposite is true, and the EC is being blamed for the seemingly endless austerity programmes designed to try to reduce the public sector deficit, for high rises in VAT rates and so on. The once distant and vague image of the power of Brussels that hardly seemed to matter at all as a significant factor in Greek considerations of the merits and demerits of Community membership has become all too distinct to many Greeks, and not only in the economic sphere.¹¹ If the current spread of slow disintegration of the southern Balkans continues, Greece will no doubt expect support for its independence and national security should these be threatened. The attitude of EC member states to Greece's interests does not seem to be particularly encouraging to date, with the German-led decision on full diplomatic relations with the Gligorov government in Skopje an inauspicious omen for the assumption by Greece of the rotating EC presidency in January 1994.¹²

It is likely that there will be a cross-party consensus in Greece over the Macedonian issue. Although in the autumn 1993 general election campaign PASOK blamed New Democracy for mishandling the issue *vis-a-vis* the EC, in practice there is likely to be little change of Balkan policy with the new PASOK government. Isolation within the EC appears inevitable, as even if the government was minded to make major concessions to Skopje to try to 'solve' the issue, Greek public opinion would be likely to make such a course very difficult, if not impossible. It will be most ironic if it is perhaps the oldest and most difficult Balkan problem of all which at last brings unity to the Greek polity in its difficult relationship with the EC.¹³

Notes

1. J. Pasmazoglu, 'The Greek economy since 1967' in R. Clogg and G. Yannopoulos, eds, *Greece Under Military Rule*, (London 1972), 100-3.
2. For further material on contemporary agricultural issues, see J. Pettifer, *The Greeks. The Land and People Since the War* (London 1993), 103-24. On the period before the Treaty of Association was signed, see B. S weet-Escott, *Greece: A Political and Economic Survey 1939-1953* (London 1954), and P. Vouras, *The Changing Economy of Northern Greece Since World War II* (Thessaloniki 1962).
3. See J. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Morals in a Greek Mountain Community* (Oxford 1964).
4. See the New Democracy campaign document 1974-1977 (Athens 1977), 10.

5. It does not seem as though this was a reciprocal process, at least in the early years of the dictatorship. In an interview in *The Times* (29 November 1967), Constantine Karamanlis did not mention the European Community, or entry to it, at all in his list of desirable elements in the restoration of Greek democracy.
6. From the «special relationship» to Europeanism: PASOK and the European Community, 1981-89' in R. Clogg, ed., *Greece, 1981-89. The Populist Decade* (London 1993), 131. But it is perhaps doubtful if there was a clear and agreed set of political definitions and objectives to discuss, in any case, at the time. Then and now there have been many different currents of opinion within the Community about its future development and in the Maastricht Treaty process, in some sense the first attempt by the Community to institutionalise its own political future without the lacunae and ambiguities of the Treaty of Rome, massive discord and internal difficulties emerged among the existing members during 1992-3.
7. In the rhetoric adopted by Papandreou in the mid '70s there are often echoes of some Right-wing American criticisms of the European Community, those which were later taken up in the Thatcher-Reagan period.
8. The history of the Mitsotakis period has yet to be written, but it seems that a major theme will inevitably be how far it was possible for a party which had such roots in the later stages of the Cold War period to articulate a convincing agenda to encapsulate the legitimate Greek national interests in a world without the Cold War blocs. The Samaras break away can be seen as an expression of this failure in creating a modern Greek nationalism.
9. See J. Pettifer, 'The new Macedonian Question' *International Affairs* vol. 68, no. 3 (1992).
10. It was a noticeable feature of the 1993 general election results that New Democracy polled much better in rural northern constituencies such as Florina and Kastoria, where traditional rightist candidates stood, with strong local clerical support, than in the large cities. The decline in the living standards of workers was linked to European Community-imposed austerity programmes in the mentality of these groups, and enabled PASOK to capture elements of the nationalist agenda. Another important factor in the north appears to have been the PASOK campaign commitment to set up an assembly of Diaspora Greeks in Thessaloniki. Anti-European feeling may also have been a factor in the reasonable showing of the KKE, whose main campaign platform was anti-Maastricht.
11. Although it is perhaps worth noting the amount of attention given in the Greek press to the arrival of IMF, World Bank and EC financial monitoring missions in Athens in 1989.
12. The attack by PASOK Deputy Foreign Minister Theodoras Pangalos on German Balkan policy, where he said soon after taking office in December 1993 that Germany was 'a giant with the power of a monster and the brains of a child', seems to indicate a revival of previous period PASOK rhetoric in international relations, but this time addressed within the Community, rather than towards the United States, as in the last PASOK government period.
13. The Greek government's legal victory over the EU attempt to lift the 'illegal' blockade of FYROM in June 1994 appears to be likely to play a major role in consolidating public opinion behind PASOK policies.