

## Acting European, but thinking 'Balkan'?

Is Greece on a secure road to converging again with the rest of Europe? The Prime Minister proclaims that the country is ready to 'stand on its own feet' once more. He's keen to emphasise the economic progress being made and he needs to head-off the populist threat from SYRIZA by proclaiming the end of the Troika. But what kind of track is Greece on and is the system changing for the better? My friend ΛΟΥΚΑΣ ΤΣΟΥΚΑΛΗΣ wrote recently in Kathimerini that: Παρά τις όποιες μεταρρυθμίσεις έγιναν τα τελευταία χρόνια, κυρίως κάτω από την πίεση των ξένων δανειστών, το σύστημα πολιτικής και οικονομικής διακυβέρνησης της χώρας είναι περισσότερο προβληματικό σήμερα απ' όσο ήταν πριν από την κρίση.

He may well be correct, but even the past may have been worse than this comment acknowledges. The World Bank compiles indices for how governments across the world perform in basic tasks, drawn from a variety of international sources. These include both public opinion polls and expert assessments, covering the period 1996 to 2012. Such data are not infallible, but they can suggest important patterns and differences. They may also warn of trajectories.

Across each of the most relevant measures, the main trend is that Greece is shown to be moving away from most of its European Union partners and firmly towards the position of its Balkan neighbours. The graph lines significantly converge on government effectiveness; the quality of regulating the market; the application of the rule of law; and the control of corruption. These are not trivial indicators: government effectiveness refers to the perceptions of the quality of public services and the public administration, for example. On each, Greece moves away from the position of France and Germany. Nor is there a southern European pattern: the same trends are not evident for Spain or Portugal – though, interestingly, Italy joins Greece, Turkey and the Balkan states in the same distinct grouping.

There are, of course, many important historical and cultural differences between Greece and her neighbours. Historically, there is no Balkan 'state tradition' in the sense of the 'Republican' model in France or the notion of the 'Rechtsstaat' in Germany. Instead, there has been external dependency, domestic vulnerability, and the emulation of foreign types. Greece has been no exception: with its importation of German jurisprudence and a Napoleonic administrative culture.

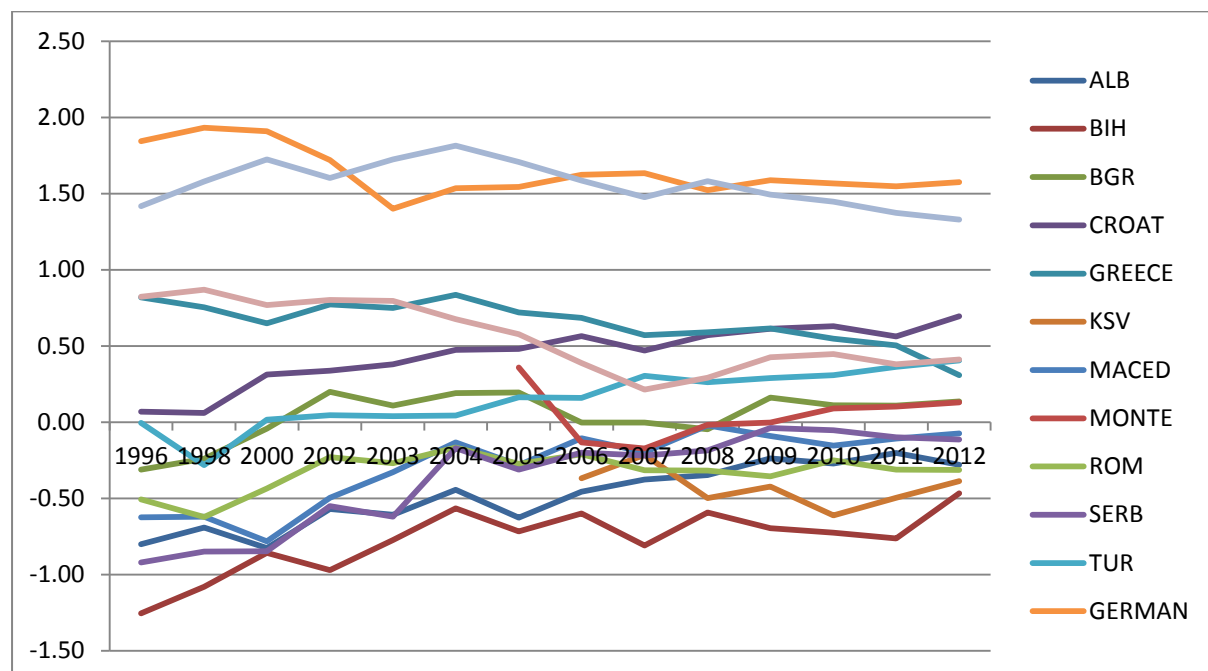
But the data prompts reflection on the depth of Greece's 'Europeanisation' since her entry into the EU. It is as if SE Europe forms a separate 'world of governance'. Its separateness pre-dates the economic crisis, it is not a simple matter of the level of economic development (Spain and Portugal have diverged), nor is it differentiated between EU and non-EU members. The indicators cover institutional performance, but also public attitudes.

They relate also to what Jürgen Habermas and others refer to as ‘cultures of democracy’ and the reception of, or resistance to, modernity.

Throughout its modern history, Greece has often been described as possessing a Janus-like quality: Karamanlis in 1974 sought to remind his opponents that Greece belongs to the ‘West’. These are sensitive issues of identity: generations of modernising progressives have claimed a European vocation and looked with embarrassment at any domestic failings that might contradict it. Indeed, the robustness of this public commitment to Greece’s place in Europe has throughout been one of the greatest sources of optimism for the country’s path.

But it is salutary to be reminded that the Greek system was not so ‘Europeanised’ before 2009 – however we might wish to identify the shortfall - and that it wasn’t the debt crisis that caused its institutional problems. Instead, the crisis has exposed the systemic weaknesses and distortions. It has also crystallised the choice of paths for Greece. Neither a romanticised picture of the pre-crisis past nor a sense that Greece restored to 2008 can go it alone is helpful in this context. An honest interpretation of the long-term weaknesses of the state – and their social causes – is a prerequisite for future progress. A failure to shift the system may leave Greece, in these terms, looking more ‘Balkanised’ .

‘Government Effectiveness’ as reported by the World Bank, 1996-2012.



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