

**The *Metapolitefsi* that Never Was:
a Re-evaluation of the 1973 ‘Markezinis Experiment’**

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The next year marks the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the dictatorship in Greece. In all that time, little attention has been paid to the attempts of its elites to transform it into some kind of democracy in 1973. The ‘Markezinis experiment’ is presented as a mere farce on behalf of the regime to continue under a parliamentary mask, and discredited ever since the actual *Metapolitefsi* of 1974, mainly due to the violent suppression of the Polytechnic uprising. In a comparative framework with other similar cases, however, a different picture of the attempt can take place. It will be the scope of this paper to deal with this issue, using data that already exist, as well as information coming up through recent research. Its main position will be that the ‘Markezinis experiment’ was not necessary to collapse; rather, there were actors making certain choices that doomed this attempt to failure and retreat to authoritarianism.

Some theoretical points on democratic transitions by *reforma*

The main factors that determine democratisation by regime transformation are the nature of the regime, interest differentiation, institutionalisation and the existence of an elite or institution to supervise the democratising process unchallenged by the rest of the elites and/or the civil society. The regime will, at some point, become dispensable for its elites (or part of them), depending on their perception that they can equally serve their interests under a democratic institutional environment, thus avoiding internal and international opposition, possible future splits or economic problems. From this point the success or failure is also a problem of tactics adopted by actors, and is mainly a game of co-operation and bargaining between regime elites and counter-elites. The civil society has an important role in the final stages of the game, especially the first elections; however, in the inter-elite negotiation its absence rather than dynamic presence is more likely to help the process of peaceful *reforma*, appeasing the potential hard-liners or convincing the regime elites that they can embark on the institutional changes unchallenged and sure that they can surrender power to civilians without jeopardising their interests. The whole process is contingent and open-ended, and it is not necessary that democracy will prevail. Thus the importance of agency to transform the structural necessity of democratisation into reality appears equally important. The case of regime transformation in Spain in 1976-77 had a different outcome from the Greek one, based on the above characteristics, and will be comparatively tested according to this model.

Nature of the dictatorial regime

The 21st of April coup was made not by the military-as-institution, but by various groups of mid-ranking officers, from captains to colonels. The latter acted for their own interests to save the position of the army in the power structure of the country, endangered as they saw it by the balance shift that had occurred in Greek politics from the early 1960’s onwards by the rise of political and social forces that questioned the post-civil war status quo.

The regime was not bureaucratic-authoritarian like the Latin American dictatorships,¹ nor fascist, due to the absence of organised corporatist institutions in the country, the lack of any links between regime and people, and of any movement or party to offer support and votes. Veremis, based on the typologies of Clapham and Philip, has spoken of a dictatorship similar to ‘a veto regime’ with some diversions, due to the quite low degree of military unity, as the colonels were cut off from the higher officers and the rest of the armed forces. And gradually, as Veremis notes, ‘the regime was later degraded to the level of a one group regime....[it] did not dispose of either military unity or political clientele, elements sine qua non for its transformation to a clientelistic authoritarian regime.’² This isolation and fragmentation would haunt all attempts of the dictatorial elites to gain legitimacy and broader support, and eventually would greatly contribute to the failure of the attempt of Papadopoulos, the only really politically thinking among the insurgents,³ to hold the regime together and come to terms with the politicians in an attempt of a compromise, as well as to its actual downfall in 1974. The various factions of officers were constantly on an underground struggle for more powerful governmental posts and promotions in the army. One of the insurgents said, years afterwards, that ‘the causes of Papadopoulos’ s downfall and the failure of the Revolution were created from the morning of the 22nd of April on....[the insurgents] instead of looking forward, just had in mind how to undermine each other’⁴. Spain on the other hand was a case of authoritarianism where the church, the landed aristocracy, the army and the bourgeoisie converged in supporting the July 1936 Francoist coup; later, the regime saw new interest groups added, such as the *Opus Dei* and the middle classes, which assured broader links with the Spanish society and a peculiar pluralism on behalf of the regime elites.

The Greek dictatorship was characterised by continuous clashes among the regime factions, producing one crisis after another⁵. The most serious one came in September 1971, after a plot to replace Papadopoulos with another officer, probably Makarezos⁶. The attempt was frustrated by the rising strong man of the regime, colonel Ioannidis, who established himself as trustworthy in the eyes of Papadopoulos. Ioannidis was the only officer among the insurgents never to occupy a governmental post; he was totally committed to the control of the army.⁷ ‘As Papadopoulos was ascending the climax of offices, he was becoming more and more dependent on Ioannidis, who assured for him the commitment of the army, and especially the seven important units stationing in Athens and its periphery’⁸. At the same time, he was meticulously gathering support from many lower officers complaining about the behaviour of the regime leaders and the way they were (ab)using their office, ruling through nepotism, corruption and contempt for meritocracy, and worried about the future of the ‘Revolution’. Papadopoulos would pay dearly for his trust to Ioannidis two years later...

Because of its dictatorial nature, the lack of any links with the civil society, and the obsolete ideology of its elites, the regime was everything but welcomed by the people. The colonels used state propaganda and attempted to mobilise the Greeks to make up for their

¹ This is the opinion of Korizis 56-98. For a typical example of the literature classifying the regime as one of Latin-American style, see Rodakis 10-14.

² For those comments see Veremis 268-69.

³ Haralambis 252.

⁴ Quoted in Kakaounakis A’ 185.

⁵ Grigoriadis 141-174 speaks of one serious crisis per year from 1969 to 1973.

⁶ Makarezos, however, denies any involvement in this attempt.

⁷ Details of this inner-regime coup are given in Grigoriadis, 181-82; Kakaounakis 315-25; and Psicharis 13-15. See also Woodhouse 188-89.

⁸ Veremis 267.

isolation and lack of social support.⁹ In spite of that, the regime failed to gain anything more than acquiescence. There was no acceptance, but there was passivity; there was rejection, but there was no considerable resistance. This is also explained by the initial economic success that contained the people's discontent. Its economic policies boosted growth in industry, construction, and small and medium enterprises. The average rhythm of growth during the first five years of the dictatorship was more than 10% per year. The average unemployment was about 5%. The average inflation at the same period was less than 2.3%¹⁰. On the other hand, taxation was over-burdening mostly non-privileged groups and relieving certain well to do others¹¹. Also, the country's productive basis was still of low potential, and the high demand led to a rise of imports after 1970. At the same time, the public deficit started rising, and so did inflation¹². As long as its model was successful, the regime was able to channel and check symptoms of discontent. It failed, however, to capitalise on those successes by refusing to extricate itself. And from the time that growth gave its place to stagnation, this simmering discontent started becoming evident. In any case, the economic boom was ending with 1972,¹³ but the economy was not in crisis. Furthermore, in 1973, 'politics was absolutely predominant, setting the economic policies in the background'¹⁴. The democratic transition is a *political* process and as such should it be studied and explained.

Regime and political elites: a rapprochement made impossible

The colonels failed to establish any links with the pre-1967 political class, with very few exceptions, one of which was Markezinis himself. Efforts for compromise were failing either because of the hard-liners refusing to concede power, or because the very few politicians that would accept to negotiate would be stigmatised in the eyes of the elites and the people. The most prominent leaders like Karamanlis and Andreas Papandreou were either hoping to return to the favourable for them pre-1967 status or pressing for utopian revolutionary opposition. G. Mavros, heir of G. Papandreou to the leadership of the Centre, and P. Kanellopoulos, the Prime Minister overthrown by the coup, adopted a position of vehement rejection of the regime, and opposed any compromise with Papadopoulos. The king, self-exiled after his failed counter-coup of December 1967, did nothing active against the regime, nor made any open condemning statements, probably hoping for a future development that would open the way for his return to Greece. The only figure openly searching for a compromise was E. Averoff, ex Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Karamanlis governments, searching for 'bridges' between the regime and pre-1967 leaders. Reportedly there was American interference in these negotiations, as the then US Ambassador to Athens Tasca was in touch with Karamanlis and the king. However, as British and US diplomats in Greece were noticing, these attempts were constantly facing the opposition of the regime

⁹ See Korizis 56-58 for this point.

¹⁰ Numbers taken from tables of the National Statistical Service of Greece. See also Theodorakopoulos 209-211; Zournatzis and Mihalopoulos 268-320 for a positive account of the regime's economic performance.

¹¹ See Pesmatzoglou 154 for this argument.

¹² All this information is based on data supplied by Meletopoulos 402-406 and provided by OECD Reports. Mouzelis 290, agrees on the rapid growth. For the deficit, see Pesmatzoglou 153, 178.

¹³ Meletopoulos 426, Mouzelis 291. This is why Makarezos, the coup leader responsible for the economy, claims to have warned the other leaders that they should leave office by the end of 1971 *at the latest*.

¹⁴ Meletopoulos, 409. He also argues (411) that "the impact of political turmoil to political life had a destabilising effect in economic life."

hard-liners and the politicians¹⁵. The first attempt of Papadopoulos to start a process of *reforma* occurred in the spring of 1968. He was claiming that if the 'Revolution' stayed more than a certain time in power, it would lose its dynamics and transform into a 'regime,' which was not in his intentions. He tried to implicate Markezinis in the attempt; however, he met the stiff resistance of the hard-liners. Another attempt was again frustrated in the end of 1969 and the beginning of 1970; Papadopoulos was then disappointed and complaining 'I am being subverted by my fellow Evelpides cadets!' As a result of this second failure, he considered resigning in the summer of 1970, complaining that he lacked any support from other leading figures, his own closest followers included. But the rest of the faction leaders renewed their trust to him.¹⁶

As far as relations between the political elites are concerned, they remained cold throughout the dictatorship years. Suspicion and distrust in the opposition did not cease to hinder the attempts for common action against the regime. The pre-dictatorial divisions were not easy to overcome in a climate of mutual doubt and divergence on how to deal with the regime, and what to do about a future democracy, its goals and inclusiveness; this is not irrelevant to the cleavages caused by the civil war and its difficult aftermath. Everyone was acting on behalf of his own political interest, in order to secure his privileged position in a future democracy that was not near¹⁷. The only solution for a viable return of democracy was a negotiated transition involving mutual concessions between regime elites and counter-elites that would isolate the hard-liners and gain the approval of the civil society and international community, like it happened in Spain, where the opposition elites eventually overcame their divisions and converged, just after Franco's death; however, they were much more coherent in the final stage of the Franco, and, furthermore, ready to accept that negotiations are the only way to bring down a regime supported by tanks and military police.

The conjuncture of 1973

By the end of 1972 Papadopoulos and members of the 'inner cabinet' decided to meet regularly, discuss the situation, and plan their future moves in face of transferring power to a non-military government. Papadopoulos was urging his followers to speed up the process of restoring some form of parliamentary democracy, saying 'we must definitely leave office this year and surrender power to civilians!'¹⁸ He was aware of the difficulties that a new government would have to face with regard to the economy, which started showing signs of stagnation, so it was logical for him to want to withdraw in good times. He must also have wanted to finish off with the reaction of the hard-liners, who had at least twice in the past blocked his attempts for *reforma*, as well as to catch up with any possible developments within the opposition, lest it finally presented a united front against him.

However, it became obvious that he had problems at home. Student unrest started in February, when the students of Athens clustered in the Law School and refused to leave, and long negotiations had to be carried out with the police to secure a peaceful evacuation on

¹⁵ Some of the Foreign Office archives that have seen the light so far confirm this. See FO reports published in the Greek dailies *Eleftherotypia*, *Kathimerini* and *Ta Nea* of the 2nd and 3rd of January 2002.

¹⁶ The interview with Zournatzis, 20/09/2001 is revealing for those events. He interestingly notes the Greek Military Academy cadets (the Evelpides) that graduated the same year with Papadopoulos: Makarezos, Aslanidis, and Ladas, the presumed representatives of the hard-liners opposing any opening of the regime.

¹⁷ For a good account of splits among the pre-1967 political elites see Theodorakopoulos 219-21. For accusations on Papandreou's behaviour, undermining other anti-regime organisations, see Murtagh 207, 225.

¹⁸ Interview with Zournatzis, 20/09/2001.

the night of the 22nd while demonstrators and police were clashing elsewhere in Athens.¹⁹ These events showed that patience was running out for the regime in the most sensitive social groups like the students. Six years of dictatorship had been enough for a people tired by military rule and willing to see its freedoms restored. But also Papadopoulos was losing the toleration of other elites in the country. This was proven in May, when the naval officers tried to overthrow the regime. The attempt was condemned, however, because of the tight control that regime security were maintaining over the armed forces. On May 23rd it was announced that a conspiracy among a number of naval officers was revealed and frustrated. It was claimed that this was a proof that the majority of the armed forces were now against the dictatorship, and the former politicians were starting to co-operate; it was becoming obvious that the political situation was turning to an impasse²⁰.

The failure of the naval coup attempt marks the turning point in the way for the *reforma* of 1973. Although frustrated, it alarmed Papadopoulos to speed up the pace of the transition. He realised he had nothing to expect from either the king or the politicians he was previously in contact with. Just a few days after the frustration of the coup, on June 1, 1973, he addressed to the people, announcing his decision to transform the regime to a Republic. At the same time, he called a plebiscite for the approval of the constitutional change, and said that the country would pass to an interim government charged with organising elections no later than the end of 1974. He also amended the 1968 constitution and tried to amass as many powers in his hands as a constitution could possibly allow. By the same token, a series of measures were introduced, which aimed at convincing the civil society and the international community of the good intentions of the regime: a general amnesty to all ‘political criminals’ was granted, and thus the last three hundred political prisoners were released; martial law was lifted throughout the country; and strict censorship was seriously eased. The plebiscite, which took place on July 29th, granted the regime change with 78,4% favourable votes against 21,6% negative²¹. The politicians were mostly negative to these developments, some calling for abstention, denouncing the whole process as a farce. The same more or less process of opening was adopted by Suarez in Spain, and the legitimacy of the December 1976 plebiscite went unchallenged.

Development and failure of the ‘Markezinis experiment’

On August 19th Papadopoulos was sworn in as President of the Republic. Negotiations between him and Markezinis on the formation of the civilian government started almost immediately after the declaration of democracy, focusing on the issues of the formation of the interim government, the constitutional amendment and the preparations that would lead to elections. During the summer of 1973 there took place three such meetings; they were not easy to accomplish, as Markezinis recalls. He was pressing Papadopoulos to accept less powers as President, and the opening to all political forces to participate in the elections, the KKE included. The negotiations were inconclusive, but an agreement was reached that gradually, after the elections, the constitution would be amended, and the political game would open to all parties. However, precious time was lost: Papadopoulos and Markezinis were in no position to surprise the hard-liners, as rumours were spread that

¹⁹ See Papazoglou 72 for detailed accounts of these events.

²⁰ For the impact of the failed coup see Papadimitriou 504.

²¹ Results in Grigoriadis B’ 273.

Markezinis was to take office²². On October 1st, he was officially given the mandate to form the first non-military government after the 21st of April 1967, and on the 8th he was sworn in.

‘The international reactions to the constitutional change were unexpectedly positive. Nowhere was the issue of a *de jure* recognition of the new democracy raised.’²³ As far as the Europeans were concerned, there is evidence Markezinis was successful enough, if not anything else, to achieve their non-adversary position. There were some positive albeit cautious comments on his government in some European states; and certain EEC officials were even expressing content with him assuming office. Markezinis had very good links with some European leaders in the past and was trusted as a negotiator and statesman. The Dutch ambassador Barkman wrote on the 18th of October that the ambassadors of the EEC countries, who were meeting regularly to discuss the situation in Greece, agreed that ‘the leaders of the ERE and the Centre Union would not act in the best interests of Greek democracy if they were to abstain from the general elections.’²⁴

However, the international situation degenerated with the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur war and the subsequent crisis. The Americans asked the Greek government to allow the use of their bases in Greek territory and air space to supply Israel; Markezinis, backed by Papadopoulos, denied on the grounds of maintaining good relations with the Arab countries. This denial is said to have turned the US against Papadopoulos and Markezinis. The latter would insist until the end of his life that subversion on behalf of the Americans, especially of the then Secretary of the State Kissinger was the main reason for his downfall a few weeks later²⁵. Markezinis was known for his independence to the US interests.²⁶ There can not be a definitive account on whether the US administration did turn against Papadopoulos-Markezinis; it seems nevertheless that, if not anything else, the Americans would not actively oppose a change of government in Greece.²⁷ However, those who moved military units on November 25th 1973 were not the Americans, but rather Greek officers.²⁸

The serious danger for the *reforma* was the majority of the lower officers worrying about corruption among the military as government, and expressing concern on what they thought of as ‘the abandonment of the 21st of April’²⁹, which was giving its place to the same political class it had overthrown six years before. In that situation Ioannidis was emerging as a solution for the officers, in sharp contrast to Papadopoulos, whose accumulation ‘of so many offices and titles (President of Republic, Prime Minister, minister of Defence) was harming the seriousness of the regime and giving it an unacceptable image, which was not left

²² Some blame Markezinis for this. See, for instance, Passas 542-43. Also interview with Zournatzis, 20/09/01.

²³ Woodhouse 1983, 177.

²⁴ Ibid. 121.

²⁵ Markezinis would say characteristically twenty years after his overthrow, that “it was not the Polytechnic uprising that brought me down; rather, it was Kissinger himself!” (*Kathimerini*, 20/2/1993). Haralambis 286 also claims that from this point ‘one of the most important reasons of US foreign policy support to the military dictatorship had ceased to exist.’

²⁶ It is interesting that Markezinis interviewed early in 1973 on the question of the homeporting of the 6th US Fleet in Greece said that it is wise to say ‘no’ to the Americans from time to time! See Markezinis 1979, 192.

²⁷ ‘There is certainly some truth in the opinion that the Americans knew at least by 1972 that Ioannidis could at any moment overthrow Papadopoulos...and also that they encouraged him in the action of the 25th of November.’ Psicharis 30.

²⁸ ‘They would have deposed us even if it had not been for Kissinger... I refuse to believe that Greek officers took orders from the US Foreign Minister to proceed to such a move’ (Zournatzis).

²⁹ The attitudes of junior officers against Papadopoulos and his associates are well presented in Theodorakopoulos 225.

un-exploited by its opponents.³⁰ Ioannidis was able to capitalise on groups opposing Papadopoulos, as well as neutral but unsatisfied with the situation.³¹ Conspiracies were already brewing by the time Markezinis was sworn in. And, unfortunately for him and Papadopoulos, they were tolerated by the military-as- institution, which would not accept their submission to civilian rule. The majority of the higher echelons of the military backed and covered the conspirators, despite that Papadopoulos had placed men of his trust in the higher ranks of the army. In sharp opposition to that, in Spain the hard-liners were kept away from the centres of decision.

Even more unfortunate for the *reforma* would be the utter denial of the majority of the pre-1967 political elites to accept the opening altogether, in sharp contrast to what happened in Spain, where the opposition negotiated with the post-Franquist elites, eventually coming to a compromise on inclusive and free elections. This is what Markezinis was promising, but whether motivated by personal ambitions and calculations, or by real concern about the possibility of a fake democracy under military tutelage, most of the politicians refused even to discuss with him. Especially the leaders of the two bigger parties, Mavros and Kanellopoulos, were vehement in their rejection of what they called a farce³². Characteristically, Mavros stated ‘the planned elections have a single purpose: to legitimise the dictatorship covering it by a castrated Parliament which will not have the power to debate, let alone decide, any of the nation's vital matters.’³³ The same position was adopted by A. Papandreou, who said that ‘everyone who participates in the elections and, in general, in the political processes of the regime, will be a Quisling;’³⁴ so did the KKE, but not figures like Iliou, ex-president of EDA and L. Kyrkos of the KKE-es³⁵. Karamanlis, on his behalf, did not actually take a clear position: he kept silent through this time, obviously stalling, waiting to see how things would turn. According to his close associate and later minister Yannis Varvitsiotis, he would like the ‘Markezinis experiment’ to succeed,³⁶ but was too cautious to break his silence from the beginning. Also, if Karamanlis returned, he feared that the interest of the people would not last long, and would ease down after a short time without him achieving much. Karamanlis would by no means accept to become Prime Minister under Papadopoulos, as this would legitimate the dictatorship *a posteriori*.³⁷ Thus only a few politicians like ex-minister Rallis of the right, and ex-prime ministers Stefanopoulos and Novas of the centre, accepted that under the present circumstances there was no other way out of that situation³⁸. The latter, however, were not enough to ensure a tired and suspicious civil society that it was not to be a *facade* democracy on the making.

³⁰ Bonanos 110, 112. Also, Veremis 266-67.

³¹ Papadopoulos reportedly tried three times to remove Ioannidis from the ESA or totally from the army but met his stiff resistance and succumbed. See Bonanos 114-15; Theodorakopoulos 227-28; Arapakis 112-15.

³² Ironically, Markezinis 1979, 268 notes that for Kanellopoulos ‘legality meant the returning of the situation to the 20th of April 1967, that is, a Kanellopoulos cabinet that would proceed in organising elections.’ As for Mavros, in July 1973 is said to have urged Markezinis in a public meeting to accept the offer of Papadopoulos and immediately form a government. However, in October he would fiercely oppose the latter. See Zournatzis and Mihalopoulos 45.

³³ Quoted in Grigoriadis C, 38.

³⁴ See Papandreou 57.

³⁵ Interviews with Kyrkos and Farakos for more about the attitudes of the left.

³⁶ Interviews with Varvitsiotis. Rallis basically agrees but says Karamanlis was sceptical on the chance of success of his return to Greece.

³⁷ This comes from the recollections of Rallis.

³⁸ Theodorakopoulos. 230 gives an account of political figures that accepted to discuss the *reforma*.

The ‘Markezinis experiment’ started among a climate of suspicion and distrust for Papadopoulos’ intentions, reflecting the six-year isolation of the regime from the people; the soft-liners failed to gain any credibility with their attitudes in the civil society; the latter would give much more credit to the negative stance of the politicians. The transition was entering its most difficult phase: the interim stage during which the slightest mishandling might cause the reaction of both hard-liners and sensitive social groups like the students. The presence of Papadopoulos as head of the democracy-to-be, and the wide powers he had, along with the army tutelage over Greek politics, was nullifying any positive aspects of the attempt. Still it seems that the Greeks failed to realise that the regime hard-liners were as unwilling as ever to surrender power, and bracing themselves for a reaction. Markezinis started giving interviews to the foreign press, trumpeting his intention to bring full and inclusive democracy. ‘He claimed that he was fully maintaining his independence of opinion towards G. Papadopoulos and that in the new Parliament he would seek a radical amendment of the constitution, so that the powers of the President be reduced.’³⁹ In one of these interviews he said to the *Times*, ‘if I do not agree with the President, I shall resign...there is no other solution.’ But not only was he failing to convince the people of its good intentions; in this desperate attempt, Markezinis had gone beyond the limits of toleration of even the less radical in the army.⁴⁰ On the 17th of November he was to address a televised press conference to the people in which he would announce his decision to carry out free elections with participation ‘of such hostile personalities as Andreas Papandreou’ and other famous regime opponents. But this conference would never be, as from early November he was faced with large demonstrations, escalating after the 13th of November, with the occupation of the Polytechnic school by students demanding more reforms and calling for Papadopoulos and Markezinis to go⁴¹. After the situation degenerated to a point when police were unable to deal with the demonstrators, the army was called to intervene and martial law was declared, tanks and troops stormed the Polytechnic building, early in the morning of the 17th, forcing its evacuation. In the clashes twenty-three people were reported dead and hundreds wounded or arrested.

A factor that made the early stages of the Polytechnic uprising easier was indeed the relaxation of policing, especially in Athens, due to the lifting of most of the oppressive measures. As Kyrkos remarks, ‘without the liberalisation of 1973 there could never have been the Polytechnic uprising.’⁴² It was this degeneration that did not happen in Spain because of the restraint that counter-elites, especially communists, and civil society showed. The non-organised students bypassed the parties’ youth organisations and proceeded in occupying the campus almost despite their will. The latter, mainly the left wing, were quite suspicious in supporting an uprising made by students.⁴³ As many recall, ‘the main reason for the student uprising were anti-dictatorial and anti-imperialist feelings and not student or economic problems, as many suggest.’⁴⁴ Interestingly the main slogan of the uprising was ‘down with the junta:’ this demonstrated that, in the level of political communication, the government had completely failed to convince it was not the continuation of the dictatorship, and was

³⁹ Grigoriadis C’ 36.

⁴⁰ See characteristically Bonanos 128 for the reaction of the military to the Markezinis statements.

⁴¹ It is interesting to point that Kanellopoulos and Mavros, the fiercest opponents of Markezinis, were supporting and encouraging the students’ uprising. See Theodorakopoulos, *op. cit.* 23.

⁴² Interview with Kyrkos, 24/9/2002. Zournatzis and Mihalopoulos 531 reach the same conclusion from a diametrically opposite point of view.

⁴³ Interview with Farakos, 18/9/2002.

⁴⁴ Mantoglou 218-19, hence the quotation.

preparing the ground for free and fair elections. As far as the regime is concerned, its elites acted very ambiguously. In the beginning they severely underestimated the dynamic of the students; then, they hesitated to take radical steps that might have at least hindered the escalation. When they eventually realised the seriousness of the situation, it had gone out of control.⁴⁵ Technically speaking, though, Markezinis did not have any authority upon the armed forces to order them to suppress the uprising; this was Papadopoulos' competence as President of the Republic. Markezinis offered *a posteriori* legitimacy to the army's intervention. As he wrote, his concern was to reach the elections as smoothly as possible and what disrupted this path was against the interests of the country. However, he was also anxious to appease the military, alarmed by what they saw as 'a communist comeback.' At any case, this attitude cost Markezinis dearly, even if he believed he could restore trust by presenting his plans for elections a few days later. The anti-elites tried to make the most of the situation to discredit Markezinis and succeeded, presenting his government as a continuation of the dictatorship under a pseudo-democratic mask. Markezinis regards the reaction to his government as an interest convergence from two opposite directions. On the one hand, the hard-liners willing to put an end to his government and the *reforma*; on the other hand, the ex-politicians, with Kanellopoulos and Mavros in the forefront, trying to discredit his measures and block the way to elections at any cost. Markezinis does not explicitly say that it was intended; but he leaves a hint that it eventually came as a perverse effect of the attitudes of both groups mentioned. His opinion was that 'the escalation of violence in the Polytechnic had the goal of cancelling the press conference.'⁴⁶ Thus the students 'had been played straight into the hands of Ioannidis, who looked upon the coming elections with a jaundiced eye. So had the irresponsible statements of Kanellopoulos and Mavros, two vain self-seeking men.'⁴⁷

Although Markezinis insisted that the timetable set for elections next February would be closely followed, he and Papadopoulos had hopelessly lost control of the situation. On the morning of the 25th of November, tanks were once again in the streets of Athens: Ioannidis and his hard-liners had performed their long-feared coup, bringing the 'Markezinis experiment' to an abrupt end. A note of a 'Revolutionary Committee' handed to Papadopoulos stipulated 'on demand of the Armed Forces, yourself, the vice-president and the Markezinis government have resigned. You will be informed on the developments from the television. The prestige of you and your family will be preserved.'⁴⁸ Ioannidis had powerful armour units and infantry battalions on his side, as well as commando and paratroopers, and of course, the omnipresent and fearful ESA.⁴⁹ His network was so large that, should he be able to mobilise it all at the same time, the chances of a failure were minimal. The date for the coup was set roughly around the 25th to 30th of November well before the Polytechnic events, and did not change because of them. Although both Papadopoulos and Markezinis were aware of the preparations of the conspirators, they let them get away with it. 'Rumours on an imminent coup were on the streets';⁵⁰ it was openly discussed even in the ministry of defence for some time. The British ambassador invited Markezinis and his wife to dinner and openly said to him 'are you sure you will still be able on Monday [the 26th, date in which Markezinis had said he would announce the date of a

⁴⁵ This blunder of Markezinis (again in contrast to what happened in Spain) is clearly depicted in the interview with Zournatzis.

⁴⁶ Markezinis 1979, 416. He refers to the conference he was about to give with details for the elections.

⁴⁷ Theodorakopoulos 234.

⁴⁸ The whole text in Kakaounakis *ibid.* 48.

⁴⁹ All the information comes from Arapakis110; Grigoriadis *ibid.* 119-130; Kakaounakis B' 102-109.

⁵⁰ Interview with Makarezos.

press conference to give details for his plans on elections] to proclaim the elections? I am afraid that you will not be in office by Sunday!’ Eventually the uncertainty of the situation and the flow of information or lack of it have to be taken into account. Papadopoulos was confused by the conflicting rumours and, even if he feared the hard-liners’ reaction, he could not be certain when it might occur, and what position Ioannidis might take in that. It seems he was not expecting a coup as early as in November, and in this he perhaps thought that he was aided by the declaration of martial law, which put all units in alert, regardless of whether their commanders were implicated in the coup. Thus he was overtaken by the lightening action of Ioannidis. As for Markezinis, he simply had no competence over the armed forces, which were a domain of responsibility of the ‘President of the Republic’ –Papadopoulos. In Spain it was exactly the opposite: the hard-liners were constantly surprised by the well-planned actions of Suarez and the soft-liners.

A new puppet government and ‘President of Republic’ were sworn in; the real power, however, was to be in the hands of Ioannidis, who became known as ‘the invisible dictator,’ and the military-as-institution. It is striking that the reaction of large parts of the ex-politicians and the civil society to the new dictatorship was positive. The Greeks had not realised exactly what the intentions of the new elite were. Soon, however, relief would give its place to concern, frustration and fear.⁵¹ The fact that a ‘worse dictatorship’⁵² had been imposed did not take long to show. Ioannidis said to Pattakos ‘we are not playing. We shall have a dictatorship, send all our opponents to exile on the islands and stay in power for thirty years!’⁵³ Greece would live under the new dictatorship for eight months until the ill-fated coup in Cyprus against Makarios in July 1974, which sounded its death knell.

Looking back: what caused the collapse of the ‘Markezinis experiment’?

Since the actual *Metapolitefsi*, the dominant argument concerning the ‘Markezinis experiment’ has been that it did not really mean to bring democracy to Greece; rather, all was but a mere trick on behalf of Papadopoulos to find a way to secure his position in a pseudo-democracy, having secured for himself the role of the ‘President of the Republic’ and a big margin of army intervention in political life.

It has to be accepted that Papadopoulos had in mind the perpetuation of his own privileges, in the sense of both controlling the democracy-to-be, and achieving impunity for his participation in the 1967 coup. But he was constantly losing support from inside the army and toleration from the people; and as the May naval coup had shown, he was even losing credibility in the eyes of the pre-1967 elites searching for a compromise. If he wanted a puppet democracy, not only would he have met their opposition and the resistance of the civil society, but he would also have to face the rejection of Markezinis, who would not accept to be his pawn. Let alone the reaction of the hard-liners opposing his absolute power disguised under a democratic facade. And this was the moment of his weakness: if the political elites could exploit his difficulty and accept, under conditions of freedom and fairness in the elections planned, to support his initiative for a negotiated transition, as happened in Spain, democracy might have a chance. Papadopoulos appeared to have realised that ‘the military oligarchy is not a complete regime. It has neither a comprehensive programme nor a

⁵¹ This change of heart is portrayed in Arapakis 117; Bonanos 149-50.

⁵² In Averoff’s words, quoted in Markezinis 1979, 393.

⁵³ Interview with Pattakos. Markezinis mistakenly says that Ioannidis spoke of elections, but not earlier than 1977 or 1978. Ioannidis said something similar to Bonanos (ibid. 145).

perspective into the future...it has no provision for succession,⁵⁴ and willing to make concessions. It is doubtful whether he had a clear idea of how much he should concede. But he could be pushed to open the regime as much as to save his own position in the new democracy-to-be. The question then was how much he would be prepared to sacrifice, and how much the democratic forces could win. Interestingly the Dutch ambassador records on December the 5th, after a meeting with Markezinis that he ‘was indeed impressed by what he [Markezinis] had been able to get Papadopoulos’ agreement for-even after the disturbances.’⁵⁵ This does not necessarily mean that the reaction of the hard-liners would have been overrun, or that a full democracy would have been restored, as Greece lacked a personality as Juan Carlos in Spain to take the transition risk from the relatively safe point of enjoying general acceptance among the regime elites. Papadopoulos had lost control of the army and never had any credit among the politicians. However, it was the only possibility for an attempt to democratise without risking the hard-liners’ reaction.

In contrast to the dominant argument of post-1974, a collapse of the *reforma* could not come from the pre-dictatorial elites, nor from the civil society: the former could just delegitimise it in the eyes of the people and the international community by refusing to cooperate, and the latter could react by taking to the streets. But they had no resources to topple a dictatorship supported by tanks and military police. In Greece in the autumn of 1973 the losers were the soft-liners; but this did not mean restoration of democracy, but a reverse to authoritarianism. As the situation got out of control for Papadopoulos-Markezinis, the final word was in the forces that controlled the army. And these were not friendly to Papadopoulos. This is exactly what has been overlooked by almost everybody in Greece since:⁵⁶ as Markezinis himself had quite prophetically said in an interview to the French daily *Le Monde* in September, ‘if I fail, power will pass into the hands of a Greek Qaddafi!’⁵⁷

There is also a problem of trust: Papadopoulos was untrustworthy in the eyes of both civil society and political elites. The assurances of Markezinis alone were not enough. The fact, however, that they were denouncing the *reforma* without accepting first to discuss, raised accusations that they had in mind their own personal interests, namely, that they feared an early retirement had Markezinis proceeded to elections to which many of their parties’ rank and file might participate but from which they would abstain. It was thus claimed that ‘none of the political leaders had realised that Papadopoulos was sincerely aiming to civilianisation and would gradually, through free elections, achieve full normalisation of political life, as it would be difficult and unwise on his behalf...to proceed to full restoration of democratic politics, given that the more numerous and more dynamic officers were hostile to civilianisation.’⁵⁸ Even if this is apologetic for Papadopoulos, it can not provide an excuse for the opportunity missed by the counter-elites; and gives reason to Schmitter’s aphorism on Greece ‘defying classification’ in democratisation studies. Again, such a situation was avoided in Spain with similar guarantees on behalf of the soft-liners, and an unpleasant but

⁵⁴ See Legg 241 for the quotation.

⁵⁵ Barkman 145.

⁵⁶ Except of Haralambis 345 ff, who still regards it unavoidable for this attempt to collapse, because of the nature of the regime.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Meletopoulos 34.

⁵⁸ Passas 546-47. See also Theodorakopoulos 230 for a positive approach to Papadopoulos’ goals.

necessary compromise on behalf of the democratic forces, which saved the transition from collapse in its early stages.⁵⁹

Apart from the question of the inertia of Papadopoulos to decisively handle their reaction, the fact remains that the soft-liners were constantly being surprised from the events, rather than themselves leading the developments. Markezinis lost the opportunity to organise elections in the autumn of 1973, surprising the hard-liners and convincing the politicians of his good intentions-just what Suarez did in Spain four years later. He also was too conspicuous of his intentions where he should have been reserved in alarming the hard-liners. Nobody can tell what might have happened had the officers been surprised by the announcement of elections as in Spain.⁶⁰ The factor of human agency thus appears important for a quick decision-making and implementing of plans: Markezinis was 'talking too much and doing too little.'⁶¹ However, notwithstanding all his mistakes and shortcomings, there is no doubt that he was well-meaning and sincere in his intention to get Greece out of the impasse it was in 1973.⁶² He is reported to have said three days before his downfall 'I did not and do not have any illusions: in the elections I will get 15%. I hoped, however, that finally the old parties would participate and we could come to terms on forming a government.'⁶³ As for Papadopoulos, interestingly the Dutch ambassador concludes that 'history may yet judge that it was [Papadopoulos'] misfortune-if not necessarily his country's- that the treachery of his own most trusted follower deprived him of the opportunity to undo the harm he had done to Greece.'⁶⁴ Had the 'Markezinis experiment' failed like Arias in Spain, because of the reluctance of the elites to democratise, it would have been totally different. But it was not the case: it collapsed because of the reaction of the military hard-liners, ironically the only group that took Papadopoulos and Markezinis seriously. Things would also be different if this had happened after elections had been announced with the guarantees that Markezinis was to set. The rapidity of the insurgents and their almost perfect information made the issue a historical assumption: 'a historic opportunity was lost...if a climate of understanding had prevailed then, democracy would have returned to Greece without a heavy price being paid...instead, democracy returned eight months later at the cost of thousands of dead and hundreds of thousands of homeless in Cyprus-developments which traumatised the Greek body politic for generations to come,' let alone the self-fulfilling argument of an omni-present and determining American interference in Greek politics.⁶⁵

Therefore, it can be claimed that there was nothing inevitable, necessary or predetermined either in the course of the 'Markezinis experiment', or in the actual breakdown of the dictatorship in 1974. The collapse of the *reforma* was a contingent outcome, which occurred because certain actors- the pre-1967 political class, Markezinis, Papadopoulos, the hard-liners- acted the way they did. They could have acted in another way. Regime transformation in such a situation demanded more willingness for a consensus and more

⁵⁹ Theodorakopoulos *ibid.* exaggerates, writing that Papadopoulos 'found himself caught between the Scylla of the politicians headed by Kanellopoulos and Mavros, and the Charybdis of the hawks within the armed forces, who watched his balancing act with increasing disillusionment.'

⁶⁰ 'Had the elections been proclaimed in the first five days of November, and had new developments got under way, then what took place [the Polytechnic events and the coup] would not have happened.' Bonanos 135.

⁶¹ Interview with Georgalas. The contrast to Suarez, not intellectual but a man of rapid action is sharp.

⁶² 'History will probably be kind to Markezinis, because no one tried harder to serve his country at a historic moment.' Theodorakopoulos 235.

⁶³ Quoted in Konofagos 113; also Markezinis 1979, 411.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 138. This opinion is the most balanced judgement brought on Papadopoulos' intentions.

⁶⁵ This is the dramatic but basically correct opinion of Theodorakopoulos 231.

agility in action than Papadopoulos, Markezinis and the politicians showed. Ironically, the only unwanted outcome was the one that finally prevailed: a reverse to authoritarianism. The regime of the 21st of April posed enough barriers to a democratic restoration on its own; the inexplicable failure of the elites to understand the impasse and offer a way out of it condemned the 1973 *reforma* to a mere six week parenthesis that is today despised, if at all mentioned. Remembering an abstract of *El Pais* written during the uncertain Spanish transition, ‘one of the most common fallacies when writing history is concluding that things in the past could not have happened otherwise.’

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