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**The Western Stance of post-Cold War Greece: from Simitis’
“Modernization” to Mitsotakis’ “Return to Normalcy”**

Abstract: This study examines the evolution of Greece’s stance against the West and its position in it, from the Simitis’ government (started in 1996) to the Mitsotakis’ one (started in 2019). The research is focusing on the stance of Greek governments towards the European Union (EU) and NATO, the two largest and most significant organisations of the West (Greece has membership in both). It also examines Greece’s political landscape evolved with European and NATO policies during a period marked by significant challenges, including financial crises and shifting political climates.

The analysis is based on a comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources, including policy documents and scholarly works. By mapping key policy decisions and public stances of Greek governments during this timeframe, the study identifies patterns of alignment with EU and NATO priorities, despite internal political and economic pressures.

The biggest part of this study covers the Simitis’ government, the so-called “Modernization era” of Greece. This happens because this era came exactly after the end of the Cold War and marked the way that Greece in the following years, despite the much more adverse conditions that occurred.

Key-Words: Greece, Modernization, Crisis, European Union, NATO

Introduction

One of the first concepts of Greece in the new Cold War world was the redefinition of its relationship with Europe and the US, as well as its role in the relations between Europe (especially the European Union) and the US. The European Union had failed to emerge as a potential successor to the US in the scheme of the collective West, as all it ultimately managed to do was to integrate itself into US designs within the Cold War unified West. So, the absolute consolidation of American domination both in the collective West (during the Cold War period) and in the whole world (after the fall of socialism), came without the slightest possibility of not only a break-up of the collective West, but even a partial rupture.

In the new status quo created in the Balkans, Greece claimed a leading role in their westernisation. This was quite sensible, as Greece was the only country in the region that belonged to the Western camp and did not experience the intense social and economic change that the rest of the Balkan countries experienced with the fall of Communism. Therefore, Greece was by far the best economy in the Balkans at that time and was the one that could penetrate the other countries even with the help of the richer Western countries. Indeed, especially as far as the Western Balkans are concerned, it was Greece in the 1990s that played a leading role in their integration into the European market and later, for several of these countries, into the European Union (a leading role which in the following decade diminished considerably).

In the first years after the end of the Cold War, apart from the European Union, the United States also often referred to Greece's importance for the westernization of the Balkans, which Greece itself saw as a confirmation of its western identity and its unshakable position in the West (Sekeris 2004, pp. 424). Apart from the Balkans, of course, Greece was considered quite useful by the US for the penetration they wanted to make in the Middle East (Sekeris 2004, pp. 398-399), taking advantage of the disappearance of the great rival as an opportunity to 'break the resistance' of the more or less hostile regimes that had existed for years in the region. Even if Greece was not the main player in this field and there was no chance of it claiming such a role as there were enough other countries for the job (first and foremost of course Turkey), Greece certainly had a very important role to play given the openings that preceded it in the Papandreou period.

It is worth noting that the US at the same period, despite the rhetoric of 'the end of history' and 'world peace' that the collective West, and especially the US itself, was using extensively, there were two fronts that had already been opened. One was in the Middle East, with the US having invaded Iraq as early as 1991 against the Ba'athist government of Saddam Hussein, while the second was in Eastern Europe, the so-called "remnants of the past" (Voulgaris 2013, pp. 126). Greece may not have had an active role in this war, unlike, for example, Turkey, but it was a first example of the West's subsequent attitude in the region.

As far as Eastern Europe was concerned, things were somewhat more complicated. The Yugoslavian Civil War had already begun and the religious character of the parties involved set a particular tone both in the Catholic countries of the European Union and in Orthodox Greece and Muslim Turkey. Apart from that, the US itself had a strong military - and not only - presence in the Balkans and throughout Eastern Europe, in clear fear of various kinds of unrest breaking out across the region (Sekeris 2004, pp. 424). Of course, this fear on the part of the US had nothing to do with the outbreak of armed conflict, as far as the current war in Yugoslavia was concerned, the US was not particularly concerned with preventing it.

Rather, this fear probably had to do with post-Soviet Russia. Despite the pro-Western stance of the new Yeltsin government in those early years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, still caused the US great concern that in the future it might again take an anti-Western turn, even if it seemed at the time to be out of touch with reality (Gordon, 10/3/2002).

Greece, already in the Western camp since the Cold War period, logically would continue to look to the West for help, cooperation and models. After all, Greece has traditionally tried to belong to the Western family, adopting its models at every historical stage of its course since the foundation of the Greek state in 1830 (Voulgaris 2013, pp. 438). This could not change, of course, at a time when the great rival of the West, the most influential and dangerous one it has faced in its history, has lost and in such a deafening way. Thus, any political ambivalence about the country's place in the West in the next decade was without any counterpoint, as no political force in the country could (and probably did not want to) present any realistic alternative to the country's absolute attachment to the European Union and the United States (Voulgaris 2013, pp. 441).

In this context, the re-emergence of rhetoric against Turkey is very interesting. Being allies within NATO against the "great enemy" since 1952 and their almost simultaneous entry into the Alliance, their bilateral relations have never played a particularly important role in the national narrative of both governments, not even in times of major Greek-Turkish crises, such as the pogroms against Greeks in Istanbul in 1955 and Turkey's invasion of Northern Cyprus in 1974. After the fall of Existing Socialism, however, the two countries have had the Balkan field as an arena of battle for hegemony.

On this part, there was a very strong revival of the great and timeless national issues of Greece and Turkey, which had been partially subsided in the previous years on the altar of "fighting Communism" (Papasotiriou 1994, pp. 36). In fact, on the Greek side, following the trend of reintroducing Islam as the main enemy for the West, the rhetoric towards Turkey very often took on the character of a conflict between the "liberal European democracy" that Greece stood for and the "Eastern despotism" that Turkey stood for (Delanty 1995, pp. 16-17). Thus, in an effort both to gain an edge over Turkey in the Balkans and to take the lead in defending "Western Civilization", Greece was quick to dig out the anti-Islamic axes.

At the social level, the reception of the developments by Greek society was not as one would expect. The main issue that emerged was the fact that the Greek society did not receive the fall of Existing Socialism with much enthusiasm (Voulgaris 2013, pp. 128). This could be explained in several ways. Apart from the existence of a strong communist party in Greece that was consistently defensive of the Soviet Union and had direct contacts with it, one must also take into account the strong negative feelings of the Greek people towards the US, which for different (and often diametrically opposed) reasons ran, to a greater or lesser extent, across the ideological spectrum. As a result, even a part of society that may have been completely hostile to Communism and, as one would expect, would have been very happy and satisfied with this development, did not in any way view the emerging US omnipotence at the international level in a positive light.

In order to bring about a certain reversal of this climate, there were two narratives emanating from the political staffs of the pro-Western parties. The first, of course, was the constant highlighting of the potential economic gains for the country, which would of course reach the lower social strata. The second was that in those years the rhetoric of the "orthodox arc" was developed in Greece, i.e. the alliance at all levels between Greece and the other

orthodox countries of the former Eastern bloc countries. Leaving aside the followers of the KKE and all the other nostalgic followers of Existing Socialism, who in any case never constituted such a large mass (their number is certainly not negligible), both of these narratives were addressed to the part of society that, despite their right-wing convictions, viewed the US omnipotence with scepticism. The economic benefits part there was evidence that such a rhetoric was plausible. However, the rhetoric about the orthodox arc seemed to be based on myths of earlier centuries that were eventually confined to the Greek Far-Right, since such a strategy, as it turned out in later years, was not on the agenda of any of the orthodox countries in the region (Sekeris 2004, pp. 509-510).

Internal and external circumstances

With the absence of any other alternative on the international horizon, even for the pursuit of a "multi-level foreign policy" in the footsteps of the two previous decades after the post-war period, the changes in the Greek government did not mark any change in the course of the country. This was particularly evident in the re-election of PASOK and Andreas Papandreou in the 1993 elections and in the replacement of Papandreou in the leadership of PASOK and in the prime ministry in January 1996 by Costas Simitis for reasons of Papandreou's health.

The Balkan crisis that erupted with the Yugoslavian civil war was admittedly a catalyst for Greece's international stance, whether it concerned its international relations with other countries or its domestic narrative (Voulgaris 2013, pp. 131). As far as the country's domestic agenda is concerned, the independence of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) was of pivotal importance, which triggered the huge issue of its name in relation to Greece (until the end of this issue in January 2019 with the signing of the Prespa Agreement). During the same period, the further unification of the European Union took place with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, where Greece, as a member of the EU, was among the countries that signed it. These two developments were also the ones that very much determined both Greece's domestic and foreign policy throughout the 1990s (Cossolotto 1995, pp. 131).

The issue of FYROM's name had many implications for Greece's internal issues and especially for the country. However, other developments came because of the fall of Existing Socialism and had a profound impact on Greek society. These were the massive influx of immigrants to Greece from almost all the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (mainly from the Balkans and much more so from Albania), as well as the expansion of Greece's economic capital into the Balkan former communist countries with the help of the West, of course.

These two issues, namely the economic expansion in the Balkans and the influx of migrants from the Balkans into Greece, created a huge contradiction for Greece. On the one hand, a statement by Costas Simitis just a few months before he became Prime Minister (Simitis 1995, pp. 147-156), was an evidence that the activation of Greek capital in the Balkans had no other purpose than the smooth transformation of the Balkan countries from socialist (or at least post-socialist) to countries that would join both the European family and the normality of the free market.

On the other hand, however, as will become clearer in the following chapters on the Greek Far-Right of the time, Balkan immigrants became recipients of racism not only from nationalists, but also at an institutional level. After all, they function simultaneously as a factor

of economic cohesion, but also as a factor of social division (Sakellariopoulos & Sotiris 2004, pp. 139). As Dimitris Kousouris (2014, pp. 75) had also distinguished, immigrants at that time for the Far-Right (but not only for it) took the position of the "internal enemy". This was a role that now, with Existing Socialism no longer existing, communists could no longer play in the nationalist (or even national) imaginary.

Another important factor was the relations between Greece and post-Soviet Russia. Of course, many members of various bourgeois pro-Western political staffs were the ones who considered that with the disappearance of Communism from the map, there should undoubtedly be contacts with the new liberal pro-Western leadership of Yeltsin. However, the nostalgia for the Soviet era, the recognition by Russia of FYROM under the name "Macedonia" and the strong suspicion of the West about a possible new turn by Russia, the positive reactions to the cultivation of Greek-Russian relations were limited both in terms of their extent and their depth (Sekeris 2004, pp. 419-420).

In relation to Europe, it seemed that Greece had played a leading role in the implementation of the unification heralded by the Maastricht Treaty. Gradually, political decisions in Greece began to identify more and more with those of the European Union (Sakellariopoulos & Sotiris 2004, pp. 139), showing a willingness to claim an ever greater role in the new post-communist Europe, as well as to consolidate European identity within Greek society. The success rate of the first goal is under doubt until today and causes discontent and controversy, but that of the second goal was undoubtedly very high. At least until the bankruptcy of 2009, the feeling of "little Greece being hunted by rich Europeans" had been dissolved to a very significant extent in society, a feeling that existed in different ways on both the right and the left (Voulgaris (2013, pp. 146).

At the same time, Greece had to adapt to the new conditions that had arisen in the Middle East and Central Asia. As early as 1990, one of the first moves of the government of Konstantinos Mitsotakis was to recognize Israel. This marked a significant shift in relation to Papandreou's multi-layered foreign policy, which combined commitment to the European Union and NATO and bilateral relations with anti-Western countries in the Middle East such as Syria and Iran (Sekeris 2004, pp. 456). This specific action was certainly a clear message from Greece to the West that it would not deviate from the overall policy of the West from now on, but it was perhaps also a realization that unless there is a complete break with the West, such deviations are meaningless.

Here we may have to dwell on the revival of Greek-Turkish and the old anti-Turkish rhetoric. This must be done because, along with this rhetoric, there were several positive references. The later Prime Minister Costas Simitis had already referred to two interesting axioms regarding Greek-Turkish in 1995.

The first was the need to support Turkey for expansion into the Turkish-speaking former Soviet republics of Central Asia as a counterweight to Iran (Simitis 1995, pp. 159). This certainly, in addition to serving the obvious goal of stopping the influence of the "annoying" Iran, could also be considered as an exhortation to the West to orient Turkey towards this region and leave the Balkans under the influence of Greece. At the same time, however, the second axiom as a complement to the first was the rapprochement between Greece and Turkey within the framework of the mutual relations of two Western countries (Simitis 1995, pp. 160-162). That is, the direction that seemed to be given by Simitis was none other than

the total Westernization of Turkey through its use as a battering ram in Central Asia, which would also largely appease any issues that existed with Greece.

The "Modernization" era

In general, social cohesion in Greece during "Modernization" was based on four axes (Vernardakis 2023, pp. 11-13). The absolute primacy of the market in the economic aspect of social relations, the absolute political and identity coincidence with the strategy of European unification, the authoritarian shielding of democracy with all that this entails in terms of repression, as well as the attribution of a national character to any social issues that appeared from time to time. This led many to talk about a transition to a new era, leaving behind the era of the Post-Socialist Era. It is a somewhat controversial position to adopt this view, but undoubtedly, the fall of Existing Socialism was a world-historical development, one of those that affects even the last corner of the planet. Therefore, Greece could not be an exception.

The 1990s in Greece were undoubtedly marked by the death of Andreas Papandreou in 1996 and his replacement by Costas Simitis (until then holder of the key portfolio of the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Technology as well as the equally key Ministry of Commerce) a few months earlier, both as prime minister and as chairperson of PASOK. This change was considered by many to have changed the physiognomy of PASOK and the course of the country as a whole, placing it in the period of "Modernization", that is, as Simitis himself had characteristically emphasized in his position from 1994, on the path of convergence with Europe (Simitis 1995, pp. 109-115).

On a rhetorical level, this claim certainly had a strong basis, as PASOK abandoned the leftist and anti-Western rhetoric it had throughout 1980. On a practical level, however, PASOK had shown a willingness to make concessions in this area since its first two terms. Greece remained in both EU and NATO (with any minor deviations concerning bilateral relations with various countries of the Global South) in complete contrast to its declarations until 1981. During the second four-year term after winning the 1985 elections, with Costas Simitis even serving as Minister of Finance, there was a complete reversal of the Keynesian policy that occurred until then, with the imposition of a policy of austerity. The same austerity policy that later intensified to a significant extent, with the right-wing government of New Democracy and Konstantinos Mitsotakis (Vernardakis 2023, pp. 2-3).

In the first years of its government, the Simitis period had to deal with the refutation of the optimism that had been created in various ways by the penetration of Greek capital in the Balkans. The economic gains were certainly absolutely real and this was reflected in Greek society, creating what was later called the "period of fat cows", while the integration of the Balkans into the free market of Europe was proceeding normally and according to plan.

In terms of international status, however, things were by no means so profitable for Greece. The issue of the name of FYROM, as well as the conflict with Turkey in the Imia crisis on January 30, 1996, in addition to the enormous turmoil they brought to the country's interior, were a huge blow to the image of the "strong Western country" that the government wanted to give to Greece. Moreover, as regards the economic profits for Greece from business activity in the Balkans, despite the fact that these were real, they were clearly smaller than what businesspersons who were active in those years in this particular market proclaimed (Tsardanidis 2021, pp. 277). Therefore, the absolute need for the government to find some

other way to support its basic identity narrative of "Strong Greece in Europe and the World", quoting the phrase of the Prime Minister Kostas Simitis, appeared relatively immediately.

Even before Costas Simitis took office as prime minister, specifically during the last presidency of Andreas Papandreou in 1994, the foundations for discussion had been laid for the possible accession of Greece to the Eurozone, that is, the adoption of the Euro as the common European currency. This specific issue, beyond its economic parameters (which of course cannot be the subject of a political scientist's thesis), had a very strong identity significance for the pro-Western part of Greek society and the Simitis government itself, as the culmination of the "European Unification" guaranteed by the Maastricht Treaty. This was happening at a point when the "Strong Greece within the European Union" that the government had been proclaiming from one point onward could not be conceived without the country's accession to the Eurozone (Vernardakis 2023, pp. 96). In fact, Simitis himself in his speech during the 1996 TIF (Thessaloniki International Fair) spoke of disastrous consequences on an economic, social and national level if this "unique opportunity" is lost.

The truth is that in the general context of the now globalized market, without any alternative on the horizon (as there was during the Cold War), it seemed at least unlikely for a country that is not identifiably anti-Western to follow any other model. Especially with regard to Greece, as a country that was not only not anti-Western in any way, but also wanted to belong to the West, the subordination of its economy to the internationalized market and the internationalization of capital was essentially the only way forward for this strategy (Vernardakis 2023, pp. 136-137). Thus, in combination with both the economic and fiscal obligations that stemmed from the Maastricht Treaty and the beginning of the country's entry process into the Eurozone, the Greek economy for the following years followed the economic directives of the -already subordinated to internationalized capital- European Union, something clearly begun since Papandreou's second four-year term (Rozakis 1988, pp. 457).

As happened in almost all of Europe, so in Greece, the first impact of the end of the Cold War was the removal of ideology as a criterion not only for life attitudes but also for voting. That is, the identification of party and voter was reduced to a huge extent and political distancing increased (Voulgaris 2013, pp. 234-235). This was not expressed mainly in the high rates of electoral abstention compared to before (which were clearly higher, but the difference was by no means that great), but more in the development of relaxed voting criteria. The main political actors themselves helped in this. The famous "Third Way" (Blair & Schroder 1998, pp. 10) of the British Labour leader Tony Blair, that is, the structural shift of the historical social democratic party of Britain to neoliberal positions, marked a general shift of this kind in all of European social democracy (PASOK included). The degradation of ideology as a dividing line had actively spread not only to society but also to politics itself.

To put it on an even more concrete footing, what seemed to be happening was that the defeat of Communism created as a result the emergence of strong anti-ideological elements in both society and political life (Vernardakis 2023, pp. 26). The entire political narrative, therefore, had lost the ideological elements it had in previous decades and usually remained at a lower level. This phenomenon was called by Yannis Voulgaris (2003, pp. 58) as "the emergence of light politics" in Greece.

As for the political confrontation between the parties, for the first time in the history of the country, there ceased to be an ideological dipole on which the political forces and social classes were divided. Some may argue that this cannot be characterized as a "lightning bolt

from the blue” and that the path for this had been paved beforehand. Indeed, the “Right - Anti-Right” dipole imposed by PASOK in the 1980s was certainly a prelude to the elimination of the confrontation of two diametrically opposed socio-economic systems as a basic dividing line (as was the case during the post-civil war state and dictatorship with the “Nationalists - Communists” dipole). However, it retained several ideological elements at its base.

In the Greece of “Modernization”, the new dipole was not based on such divisions, which even in cases where they were based on a less deep ideological basis (such as Papandreian “Right - Anti-Right”) were now considered obsolete and clearly needed to be transcended by something that would be appropriate for the new era. Thus, a new dipole emerged in Greek society at that time, the dipole “Modernizers - Populists” (Sakellariopoulos & Sotiris 2004, pp. 61). That is, on the one hand, there were those who wanted the acceleration of the conditions of Modernization and the achievement of the goals that had been set by it regarding Greece’s position in post-Cold War Europe and the West. On the other hand, there were those who disagreed with this perspective or had at least some side and isolated objections.

At first glance, this division does not seem to have had an ideological basis. Greece’s position in the post-Cold War world is certainly a deeply ideological issue. The issue here, however, was the fact that this division did not take on a political character between the parties. At the same time, both the “populists” and the “modernizers” included people from various political formations. Even in the two major parties (New Democracy and PASOK) there were both “modernizers” and “populists”. This meant that, on the model of the Democrats and Republicans in the USA, the two major parties in power had converged politically and ideologically, while at the same time the phenomenon of the penetration of one party in power into the other began to appear (Vernardakis 2023, pp. 333).

Perhaps the most interesting part of the study of Greece during the period of Modernization and especially of the “battle of Modernization against Populism” was the adaptation of the Left to this new era. The defeat of Communism in Eastern Europe worldwide sent the ideas and rhetoric of Communism to the margins of political life and of course its political actors - to a greater or lesser extent - into obscurity. Thus, on the one hand, Greece followed the path trodden by the rest of Western Europe in developing rhetoric about anti-capitalism as “outdated perceptions of the past” (Diamantouros 2000, pp. 40). At the same time, throughout Western Europe but also in Greece, as the culmination of the defeat of Communism and communist-based policies in general, a conversion of several scholars and academics belonged to the Left to the new Social Democracy of the so-called “Third Way” did happen (Sakellariopoulos & Sotiris 2004, pp. 76-84).

The situation in Greece, however, had a peculiarity. This peculiarity was none other than the existence of a communist party that, in all the years from its legalization in 1974 to 1991, maintained a respectful social and electoral appeal, while at the same time having consistently good relations and direct connections with the leadership of the communist party in the Soviet Union. Apart from Greece, in the rest of Europe at that time this particular peculiarity was encountered only in Portugal. In fact, the peculiarity became more pronounced after the fall of Existing Socialism, when, in contrast to the other parties that either dissolved or changed their statutory character, the communist parties of Portugal and - much more so - Greece remained in the political spotlight (albeit with clearly reduced electoral power), maintaining both their character and their symbols.

The truth is that the KKE, in its attempt to come to terms with the new unfavorable conditions for itself, with the governance model that it proposed no longer existing and having experienced two splits of a profound political and ideological nature within two years, made a very serious effort to maintain its rhetoric and its character. During this process, by charting a somewhat "lonely" path away from the frontal shapes that it had adopted in the immediately preceding decades, it often gave the impression that the maintenance of the anti-systemic communist rhetoric on its part was more a desperate attempt to survive in conditions of absolute defeat than a serious attempt to regroup. In other words, it gave the impression, as Christoforos Vernardakis (2023, pp. 7) had observed, that the anti-systemicity that it projected was nothing more than a process of introversion.

It did not certainly mean in any way that it did not cease to be the target of the country's pro-Western forces. Obviously, the intensity of criticism against the KKE was reduced, given both its electoral decline and the elimination of Communism as a structured "enemy" at the international level, but it did not cease to exist. Perhaps the most characteristic example was the accusations that the KKE faced at that time that it was following in the footsteps of the "national populism" (Voulgaris 2003, pp. 46-47) that, according to many, the KPRF had already pioneered in Russia. It should be noted in addition that this particular rhetoric, in addition to other incidents, was mainly based both on the KKE's opposition to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty as early as 1992 and later, specifically in 1999, with its opposition to the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

The stance of the pro-Western forces of Modernization towards the KKE had an unprecedented element in terms of the rhetorical battle against the Left and Communism. This was the fact that, for the first time in the history of the country since the founding of the KKE, the rhetoric against it was not addressed exclusively to itself and its strategic aspirations or its ideology, but was integrated into the battle against a broader enemy, "Populism". Within this dipole, "Modernizers vs. Populists", the rhetoric against the KKE was also integrated, placed alongside various conflicts of the Simitis government with certain reactions to certain of its policies that emerged from the conservatism camp. The most typical example was the conflict between the Prime Minister and Archbishop Christodoulos regarding the inscription of religion on identity cards that erupted in 2001 (Lyrintis 2007, pp. 57).

During this period, the whole world had a shift from the Western hegemony, specifically on September 11, 2001 with the Al-Qaeda attack on the Twin Towers. As for Greece, even if this climate of euphoria and prosperity had not been overturned, it also experienced its own "end of the end of history" as early as 1999, with the country experiencing enormous internal upheavals due to the many and particularly massive reactions to the NATO bombings in Yugoslavia. The general pro-western status of Greece did not change because of that, but it has surely influenced the already existing anti-American sentiments of the Greek people.

"Modest and humble" form of Modernization

The return of New Democracy in the government after the 2004 elections was not considered as a major change in the stance of Greece. The reason for that was the decision of Kostas Karamanlis, the then leader of New Democracy to mark a partial political turn of New Democracy against its right-wing oriented traditions. This was expressed mainly by the

removal of the -future leader of the far-right party LAOS- Giorgos Karatzaferis, a decision taken solely from Karamanlis (Bratakos 2002, pp. 874) which also faced a lot of reactions from other members of New Democracy leadership (Psarras 2010, pp. 99).

While Karamanlis was Prime Minister of Greece, there were two developments, which had an anti-western sense. The first was the Veto that the Greek government set on the integration of FYROM to NATO. However, NATO was supportive towards the Greek demands despite the decisions of the IJC (2011).

The second was the movements for the beginning of the South Stream (the very moment when Russia under the presidency of Vladimir Putin has started to show the first signs of breaking ties with the West and to rise as a major geopolitical power). There were many speculations about this initiative of the Greek Government, such as the infamous theory about the so-called "Pythia Plan" (Zirganos, 19/04/2019). Of course, any serious analyst never took all these speculations in account, as it was obvious that this initiative never meant to mark a turn of the Western stance of Greece.

The Crisis is here: Memoranda and political instability

Following the statement of the New Greek Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou on Kastellorizo, where he announced the bankruptcy of Greece, the Greek Parliament voted the first Memorandum on May 6, 2010. Among the opposition parliamentary parties, New Democracy, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), and SYRIZA opposed the government's decision to borrow from the International Monetary Fund and voted against the memorandum, while all of them, to varying degrees, took part in the massive demonstrations against the austerity measures that had already begun to intensify. The only parliamentary party that supported PASOK's decision and backed from the very beginning the memorandum and the loan agreement was LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally), led by Georgios Karatzaferis (Tsiras 2011, pp. 176-177). In fact, in November 2011, when George Papandreou resigned from the position of Prime Minister and a coalition government was formed under the leadership of his then financial advisor, Loukas Papademos, LAOS, along with New Democracy, participated in this government with four ministers.

These developments were accompanied by massive protests with unprecedented participation, ranging from the huge strikes of May 5 and October 20, 2010 (both marked by tragic events), to the Indignant Citizens Movement in 2011, many of which were met with unprecedented repression. In most of these demonstrations, something unprecedented occurred in the country's history. For the first time since the civil war—and certainly for the first time since the restoration of democracy in 1974—slogans against the European Union and the country's alignment with the West prevailed on such a mass scale, even if not politically structured or cohesive.

Of course, the decision of a political party to participate in these demonstrations did not necessarily imply a fully developed anti-Western strategy, since among the demonstrators there were many intermediate demands before reaching that point. However, a party's decision to support the memorandum measures—let alone participate in a government implementing the laws stemming from them—clearly indicates its unwavering faith in the country's Western strategic orientation. Moreover, it is not the case only for PASOK, LAOS and New Democracy (which gradually changed its stance against the Memoranda and

consequently faced major departs from its ranks), but for every party that claimed the power during this period.

The results of the doubled elections of 2012, the first elections after the bankruptcy of Greece, were shocking for the Greek political system and has been characterized as an “Electoral Earthquake” (Voulgaris & Nikolakopoulos 2014). The reason for this characterization was the fact that those results marked a great electoral loss for New Democracy, a great downfall of PASOK, the marginalization of LAOS and the great rise of left-wing party SYRIZA.

New Democracy, PASOK and Democratic Left (a split from SYRIZA) formed a coalition government in order to accomplish the goals set from the austerity policies of the Memoranda. However, the rise of left-wing party SYRIZA and the appearance of the neo-nazi party Golden Dawn marked the results of these elections as a victory of the “anti-memorandum arrow” (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou 2015, pp. 52). Given these developments, supporters of the austerity policies of the Memoranda formed the movement “We Stay in Europe (Menoume Evropi)”, in order to fight the “ethno-populism of the anti-memorandum arrow” (Menoume Evropi 2012).

The time for the victory of SYRIZA came in the elections of 25 January of 2015. Although SYRIZA was the party that has risen taking the role of the political expression of the anti-memorandum arrow, we have to take in account that it was not the extreme anti-european and anti-western expression of it. Indeed, there were some random claims from a part of its leadership that highlighted Russia (which already has broken ties with the West after the Euromaidan and the invasion in Crimea) as an alternative ally of Greece (Rori 2016). In Addition, those claims led to accusations against SYRIZA from the pro-Memorandum opposition for preparing an anti-western turn of Greece with all the consequences such a move could bring. However, the collective discourse of SYRIZA never promoted a turn of the pro-western geopolitical stance of Greece or, more specifically, a Grexit plan. Especially Tsipras himself in his first speech as Prime Minister, claimed that he will fight against memorandum without any speculation for a possible exit from European Union. (Tsipras 2015).

There is no alternative (TINA): maybe political stabilization is back

After the Referendum bailout of 5 July 2015 and the voting of the third Memorandum from the SYRIZA government, the anti-austerity movement and the anti-western stance it brought has declined. The slight stabilization of economy after the first months of the third Memorandum has already brought a return of the pro-european stance that has always occurred Greece since the 1990's (Konstantinidis 2021, pp. 680). However, the parties that participated in the “Menoume Evropi” movement kept a strong anti-SYRIZA discourse in the domain of Western orientation of Greece and expressed fears even about a possible establishment of a regime similar to the ones of Bolivarian Venezuela or Ceausescu's Romania, even though they seemed (and were) quaint and completely out of context.

Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the president of New Democracy since 2016, used the slogan “back to normalcy” (Mitsotakis 2016)., reffering directly to the state of the Greek economy before the bankruptcy. On the road to the victorious elections of 2019, this slogan has been accompanied with a strong pro-european and pro-capitalist discourse with many conservative aspects.

At this point, it is very important to refer that the SYRIZA government, apart from implementing the laws stemming from the third Memorandum, was in general in favor of certain parts of a western-oriented foreign policy. In this, we must take into account both the strengthening of the ties with the United States of America (Ioannou, 18/10/2017) and the strategic agreements with Israel (Hadjistefanou, 18/04/2024). In addition, there were the paradox of the Prespes Agreement in 2019 for the resolution of the Macedonian Issue. In that case, while SYRIZA was in favor of such an agreement that assisted the expansion of NATO and the EU in the Balkans, the pro-European opposition was against it and even allied with sectarian religious groups as well as neo-fascist organizations. Of course, the narrative against the Prespes Agreement never aimed against NATO or the EU, but was based instead on nationalistic myths, such as the supposed concession of the “Macedonian nationality” and the “Macedonian language” (Theofilis 2019). A Macedonian national identity that, of course, the citizens of the Greek region named Macedonia never had.

This kind of strong pro-european discourse cannot be explained easily, as the SYRIZA government did not put it in any doubt. In the same time, the percentage of agreement between government and opposition, i.e. between SYRIZA and the pro-european parties, was extremely high, higher than any other era in the contemporary Greece (VouliWatch 2019). It seemed, however, that the aim of this discourse was in general an attempt to demonize any anti-western discourse.

In conclusion, it was obvious that the “return to normalcy” was not just a promise for the return of the economic growth of the 1990’s, but also for the end of any kind of anti-western discourse to claim its place in the public political discussion, just like the first years after the end of the Cold War. The stance of Mitsotakis’ Government in the two current battlefields, the one in Ukraine (Kathimerini, 8/2/2024) and Palestine (Euronews, 7/12/2021), a stance extremely pro-western, is maybe typical not only on the field of the geopolitical choices of Greece, but also on the field of its political and cultural Western Identity.

Conclusions

From the very first days of the establishment of the Greek state, its first aim was to adjust with the West. Every political attempt against this direction, from a part of the so-called “Anti-venizelist camp” to the communist uprising after the Liberation from the Nazis that led to the Civil War, was brutally oppressed.

The appearance and the end of the Cold War led to a unique circumstance. First, the Cold War united the West to a collective geopolitical body, something that did not occurred until then, despite the existence of a western collective cultural identity. Greece participated as a vital part of the Cold War West, being one of the most prominent examples of anticommunism, which has been elevated to a “national duty” (Mouzelis 1978, pp. 53).

Second, the end of the Cold War created for the first time a world map where there was no strong counterexample to the Western model (Keddie 1992, pp. 157-158). Greece, taking the advantages of the rapid change in the rest of the Balkans, tried to improve its position in the new post-cold war world, as a vital part of the West. The early benefits managed to create a social class that had identified with the already existing western identity. The one that has been set in question during the Greek Financial Crisis and, as the mainstream political parties of this era showed, could not be set in question in such a similar condition.

Therefore, as a final comment, we could say that the findings indicate a sustained pro-Western orientation in Greek politics, underscored by efforts to reinforce Greece's role within those two organizations. Even during periods of economic hardship and austerity measures imposed by the EU, Greek political actors prioritized maintaining close ties with the European bloc. This trend reflects both pragmatic considerations, such as economic dependency and geopolitical strategy, and ideological commitment to the Western project.

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