Greece: From Zenith to Nadir: The Post-1974 Political Experience of Greece

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Introduction

The history of Greece, as a democratic polity, is a mixed bag of successes and failures, highs and lows, expectations and disappointments. Indeed, the political background of Greece is a very engaging case of lessons learned for many countries in the southern and eastern periphery of Europe, going through democratisation, reform and Europeanisation. The most recent transition of Greece to democracy starts in 1974 with the fall of the military junta, the last authoritarian regime to rule the country between 1967–1974. From then on, Greece went through a successful transformation by establishing a new constitution, abolishing the monarchy, opening up its party system and putting the military firmly under civilian rule. For the next three decades, the country became a consolidated democracy with a stable party system, uninterrupted growth, anchored in the liberal context of the European Union. Greece, together with the other two southern European states, Spain and Portugal, became a model of transition for the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, aspirant member states of the EU. But from 2009 and beyond, most of these achievements were challenged as a result of the economic crisis which hit Greece more than any other country in the European Union. The 2010s reversed the earlier economic advances, upset political stability and social peace, taking the country back to the times of anti-German rhetoric with its roots in the 1940s, ideological polarisation between right and left reminiscent of the 1950s, social mobilisation resonant of the 1960s, Euroscepticism similar to the 1970s, political populism suggestive of the 1980s, and, by losing one fourth of the country's GDP, returning the economy to the levels of the 1990s. From a forward looking successful model, Greece became a backward looking European liability. But what happened that in a time span of 30 years, the country's international image went from zenith to nadir?

This chapter traces the trajectory of a country which rose from the ashes of a military regime to become a stable polity and a prosperous economy before falling into economic decline and political radicalisation. The first part of this paper discusses briefly the foundations of the post-1974 Third Hellenic Republic as it entered the new age of democratic transition, witnessing the peaceful succession in power from a right-wing conservative to a centre-left government. The second part looks at the main features of the current constitutionalism of Greece, the foundation of the present democracy and its practice in the party politicised

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context. The third section looks at the post-1989 period in Greece, as a paradoxical period of increasing influence abroad and failed modernisation at home. The fourth part discusses the impact of the ten year economic crisis (2009–2018) on the political landscape of Greece and the radicalisation and fragmentation of the party system. The conclusions look at Greece today – 10 years from the start of the crisis and more reaching half a century from the initial transition euphoria – as it timidly exits from one of the deepest crises in the country's history and what this means for the future.

The New Age of Transition to Democracy: The Formative Years (1974–1989)

The fall of the military regime in 1974 marked a new beginning for Greek politics and society, following a long turbulent post-WWII period of ideological divisions between right-wing and left-wing forces, exclusionary political practices, U.S. interventionism and a strong military in politics. The collapse of the dictatorship, following a military defeat from Turkey in Cyprus and the division of the island in July 1974, signalled the first decisive step of transition from authoritarian rule to democratic governance. The change of guard was a peaceful process from above, an elite based compromise, managed by Konstantinos Karamanlis, the leader of the reformed conservative, right-wing party, renamed from the pre-1967 National Radical Union to the post-1974 New Democracy, bringing back the political class which had been marginalised during the years of dictatorship. Karamanlis after winning the 17 November 1974 democratic elections, made some quick and decisive steps towards a steady transition to democracy by legalising the, since 1948 outlawed, communist party, by conducting a plebiscite on the question of the monarchy, whose overwhelming outcome (69.2%) led to the abolition of the latter and the declaration of the Third Hellenic Republic.[1] In parallel, a series of trials against the military conspirators, known as "the trial of the instigators of the 21st April 1967 coup", and the heavy sentences imposed upon them signalled that the young democracy was ready to stand on its constitutional feet, over and above any extra- or para-constitutional interventions, including the military which from then on was subsumed firmly under civilian rule. With all these steps in the right direction, Karamanlis made the most important strategic decision of his time, to commit to the accession of Greece into the European Communities, at a time when a large part of the Greek population viewed the West with suspicion. Karamanlis's strategy was threefold, in that it aimed to bind Greece to democratic Western Europe, to limit U.S. paternalism in domestic politics and to strengthen the security of Greece vis-à-vis Turkey. During his time in office, Greece negotiated its accession into the club and became a member state in 1981. Yet, despite the domestic and external achievements, there was a sense that the political process was still based on elites whose continuity with the pre-1967 political class was indisputable, and that those who had been excluded for so long had not spoken yet. These attitudes were successfully captured by the charismatic and astute leader Andreas Papandreou, the radical politician of the Centre Union Party of the 1960s and were translated

[1] Koliopoulos–Veremis 2010, 153–154.

into a victorious political discourse that would bring his Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) to the forefront of Greek politics.

In 1981, PASOK, a centre-left party which had been formed from fragmented resistance movements during the period of the dictatorship came to power and dominated the 1980s and beyond. This was, the second decisive moment in post-authoritarian Greek politics, a moment of an electoral revolution, under the banner of "change". PASOK won a convincing victory of 48.1% of the national vote, which brought about a radically new political class with different ideas, a more inclusionary and equitable message and a promise for a radical break with the pre-1974 past.[2]

PASOK and its leader Andreas Papandreou remained in power until 1989 and changed the face of Greek politics irrevocably. Opinions are deeply divided on the legacies of the socialist 1980s for Greece, with those who argue in favour and those who argue strongly against. The former claim that PASOK brought about a fairer and more egalitarian society, which was needed after years of social injustice and political exclusion. Indeed among the most prominent changes, PASOK recognised the left-wing Resistance movements of World War II which had been ostracised after the Greek civil war, it adopted sweeping reforms of social policy by introducing a welfare state, and most prominently the "National Health System", expanding health care coverage to a wider population and making modern medical procedures available in rural areas for the first time, it brought about the modernisation and liberalisation of the civil and penal codes by introducing reforms in family law and the rights of women, it eliminated the authoritarian structures of the Greek educational system. The economic policy of PASOK was at the heart of its political philosophy marked by increases in public spending, expansionary policies and a policy of redistribution.[3]

For its critics, PASOK contributed greatly to the consolidation of some of the more perennial problems of the Greek polity, including the swelling of the public sector, the linkages between the state apparatus and the party machinery, the spread of clientelistic practices, the introduction of a flat, anti-elitist system of educational mediocrity. The expenditure programme of the Papandreou Government during 1981–1989 has been also described by the critics as excessive, not accompanied by corresponding revenues, leading to increases in budget deficits and public debt, both of which became constant features of the economic policies of Greece adopted by all subsequent governments, and leading eventually to the economic debacle of the 2010s. As for Andreas Papandreou himself, opinions are also divided between his followers who see him as a benevolent and daring leader who understood the needs of his society and made the necessary changes, and his critics who see him as a populist tactician who glorified a valueless society, access to easy money, the lust for political power and the consolidation of strong and rigid interest groups. Papandreou's charisma, style of leadership and appeal to the people was emulated by many subsequent politicians in Greece, from the far-right to the radical left.

The 1980s were the formative years of the membership of Greece in the European Communities, where PASOK followed a tactical, non-ideological approach. A skilful orator, Papandreou won a ticket on his Euroscepticism and anti-NATO rhetoric but as Prime

[2] Koliopoulos–Veremis 2010, 161–162.

[3] Gallant 2001, 200–201.

Minister retained the country in both organisations, negotiating successfully benefits and subsidies from the EEC for Greece. Together with the other Mediterranean countries, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, he managed to introduce the structural funds from the EC budget for the support and development of the economically disadvantaged regions of the EU. While this was a major achievement, underwriting the modernisation of the country's infrastructure and agricultural sector, a lot of criticism has been levelled against the ineffective and politically expedient use of these funds by the political elites, which was often the case. Be that as it may, the European Communities became a very popular anchor for the country and despite its original Eurosceptic discourse, PASOK converted to a firm advocate of the deepening of European integration, supporting all the big EU projects such as the single market, the eastern enlargement, the common foreign and security policy and the single currency.

The two initial terms in office of PASOK ended with domestic financial and political scandals which rocked the system and led to a short period of electoral instability. Between June 1989 and April 1990, Greece conducted three electoral battles, it experimented with two short lived coalition governments before the New Democracy came back to power in 1991. That year, despite the polarisation and vitriolic political confrontations, signalled the third historical electoral moment in the democratisation of the country, what some scholars have termed the real moment of democratic consolidation in Greece. The inclusion of the communist party in the two short-lived coalition governments was a breakthrough of political reconciliation and coming to terms with an emotional and politically sensitive past of post-war politics which had its references in the Greek civil war of the 1940s. The fact that this took place in parallel with the momentous collapse of communism in international politics, was also an indication that Greece entered the new international order as a more mature society, ready to re-engage with its Balkan neighbours, having buried its own bitter and divisive past.

Setting the Rules of the Political Game: Constitution and Political Praxis

The post-dictatorial constitution of Greece, which entered into force in 1975, established the Third Hellenic Republic, defined the contours of parliamentary democracy, confirmed the separation of powers and secured civil and political liberties; it has been revised since then three times, one comprehensive in 1986, and two less extensive ones in 2001 and 2008. The original text established a "presidential parliamentary democracy" attributing executive power to an elected – by the Parliament – President and the Government, and legislative power to a single national Parliament elected directly by the people. The 1986 constitutional revision curtailed many of the powers that had been attributed originally to the President, making the latter a largely ceremonial figure and the Prime Minister the strongest political figure in Greek politics. This constitutional revision reflected the reality of a difficult co-habitation between Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, and President Konstantinos Karamanlis and was largely led by political calculations of the former towards the latter. As Greece has no second chamber, no federal system and no constitutional court, the power of the Prime Minister and his government in institutional

terms became omnipotent. At the same time, while legislation belongs to the Parliament, according to the constitution, in practice, legislative initiatives were overwhelmingly the domain of the cabinet whose power was further enhanced by the right to amend bills that were pending in the Parliament. Amendments to pending legislation have been the major power of a government to keep party discipline and attend to particularistic interests. The 2001 revision referred mostly to a broader spectrum of regulations to reflect environmental, technological and societal changes. As for the 2008 revision, this was more about ambitious intentions and less about outcomes, whereby only 3 out of 38 proposals for amendments passed through parliament in the end.

During all that time, the political landscape of Greece was dominated by a two-party system which kept on gathering around 80% of the electoral vote. An alternation between New Democracy and PASOK in government from 1974 until 2012 defined the identity of Greek bipartisanism. The latter was enhanced by an electoral system of "reinforced proportionality", a form of semi-proportional representation with a majority bonus. The party that won a plurality of votes was awarded extra seats which effectively worked to the benefit of the stronger party and at the expense of smaller parties. At the same time, smaller parties in Greece needed to reach an electoral threshold of 3% in order to be represented in parliament. Such provisions helped the party that won a plurality to achieve an absolute majority (151 out of 300 seats), intended to enhance governmental stability. This system contributed to the consolidation of a party system dominated by two parties and strong single party governments and worked against the option of coalitions, which with the (previously mentioned) exception in 1989–1990, had limited appeal in Greek politics.

The two main parties represented an ideological division between centre-right and centre-left, a pattern consistent with many other western European party systems, eventually both Greek parties joining the wider European families of Christian Democracy and Social Democracy, respectively. The smaller parties in Greece were more ephemeral, with the exception of the communist party (KKE), the third most resilient political force in the Greek Parliament, even after the collapse of international communism. The domination of Greek bipartisanism created a sense that Greek politics were stable and predictable with these two parties fighting each other during elections, aiming at the more volatile voters of the centre space. The one-party government pattern was able to project a sense of government stability and to form majorities in the parliament which were necessary for law making, yet at the same time facilitated the exploitation of the state by the governing party, as an instrument of favouritism and clientelistic practices towards citizens. The roots of the subsequent Greek crisis had in their core the mismanaged, expensive and dysfunctional state which was consistently captured by the two alternating parties, when in power.

The Strength Abroad of Greece and Failed Modernisation at Home: The Post-1989 Years

When Andreas Papandreou was voted in 1981, he was sincere in one thing. He called for "change" in Greek politics but very rarely used the word "reform" in his electoral speeches. And "change" he did. While many of the changes were in a socially desirable direction, PASOK failed to modernise the state structures and societal agencies of the Greek polity.

PASOK pursued social redistribution, it created a new middle class and a new plutocracy, but kept the state as the main coordinator of the new economy and society. At the beginning of the 1990s, the need for "reform" was imminent, also as a result of the country's Europeanisation and integration within the EU structures and projects of which both parties had by then become firm advocates. But while both of these agreed that they wanted to remain at the European core, in reality they both avoided all the necessary reforms which would have guaranteed them a safe place in it.

During the years of the New Democracy in power, between 1989 and 1993, Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis attempted to bring about a reformist agenda along the lines of EU exigencies, by focusing on cutting government spending, advancing the privatisation of state enterprises and the reform of the public sector. However, the New Democracy Government met with a strong opposition to what were regarded as crude "neoliberal reforms" and enjoyed a very thin majority in parliament. The reform agenda became the official "project" of the Greek Government, during the years of Kostas Simitis, successor of Andreas Papandreou, as the new leader of PASOK and Prime Minister between 1996 and 2003. The years of Simitis in power were closely linked with the new narrative of "modernisation", defined as reforms oriented towards the Greek economy and society as well as towards the post-Papandreou socialist party itself. Simitis's modernisation project was bold and comprehensive in its aspirations. It professed the adoption of the Maastricht criteria in order for the country to join the common currency, as well as a number of structural reforms in the fields of privatisation, labour market and pension system. Such a reform agenda was not only compatible with the needs of European integration and globalisation, it was also consistent with the new social democratic "third way" norms in Europe. Being a loyal member of Europe's social democracy meant for Simitis the transformation of PASOK into a "modern" political party, distancing itself from the hierarchical and clientelistic party practices of the past.

In the end, most of these priorities for reform remained unfulfilled in sectors such as the pension system, the labour market and the public administration, obstructed by powerful vested interests, street protests and a series of political and financial scandals. Under Kostas Simitis's premiership, Greece prepared for the 2004 Olympics in Athens, as well as the country's accession to the single currency in 2001, both of which became the two grand national goals of his time in office; both schemes, in their ambition, left bitter legacies in Greece, the former for the country's finances and debt levels and the latter for a fudged Euro entry based on false statistics and feeble preparedness. The political powerlessness and social unwillingness for reform continued during the succeeding government of New Democracy (2003–2009) under the premiership of Kostas Karamanlis, his party elected to reform the state and fight corruption, only to end up burdening the state with more deficit and with debt at an even faster rate and adding further scandals in the public life Greece. Simitis's failed vision had been replaced by Karamanlis's lack of vision.

Paradoxically, while the country was struggling with its modernisation project, its economy was growing among the fastest rates in the EU and its external appeal was increasing. For Greece, the demise of the communist rule meant the emergence of new opportunities for re-engagement with the post-communist Balkan states. The end of the Cold War found Greece as the most stable democracy, the most prosperous economy and the only country in the region to enjoy membership of all major Western international

organisations. Moreover, for the first time, Greece, traditionally a country of emigration to Western Europe, North America and Australia, experienced a massive influx of immigrants from East European countries, particularly from neighbouring Albania, Bulgaria and Romania. During the 1990s, the percentage of immigrants rose to around one-tenth of the population, challenging the hitherto homogenous image of the Greek society.

At the same time, Greek business became more extrovert and Greek capital was among the first to invest in the Balkan states. Although a small and marginal player in the context of the EU economy, the substantial economic influence of Greece in the Balkans, with a much higher GDP per head and a more experienced private economy, resulted in it becoming a chief source of foreign direct investment (FDI) and a major trading partner for the region. Greek companies in sectors such as banking, food processing, manufacturing, retail and telecommunications established large-scale operations in Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and some of the former Yugoslav countries. In addition, Greece became a firm advocate of the region's European integration, contributing to the most impressive EU accession promise to date by the European Council of the EU to the Balkans states, during the summit of Thessaloniki in June 2003.

The regional commitment of Greece was further sealed by progress in its relations with Turkey and lifting its veto to Turkey's start of accession talks with the EU in 1999. After the 1974 Turkish military invasion in the north of Cyprus, Greek–Turkish relations were dominated by disputes over the Aegean (air space, continental shelf, territorial waters and demilitarisation of the Greek islands). Greece had severe reservations about Turkey becoming a member of the EU as long as the question of the division of Cyprus and a number of bilateral Aegean disputes were not addressed. In 1996, Greece and Turkey came to the brink of war, owing to conflicting claims of sovereignty over the islet of Imia (Kardak in Turkish) in the Aegean. Against this hostile background, the 1999 introduction of a policy of Greek–Turkish rapprochement, pursued vigorously by the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Papandreou, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, İsmail Cem, was significant in that it led the way for a wide range of bilateral agreements between the two countries in the fields of trade, banking, energy, transport and tourism, during the subsequent years.[4]

Economic Decline and Political Radicalisation: The Post-2009 Period

It was in October 2009 when the Finance Minister of the recently elected PASOK in power, George Papakonstantinou announced that the Greek deficit was at 12.5% of the Greek GDP, and not at 8% as had been registered.[5] What the Minister had hoped for, was to lay the blame for economic excesses on the previous government and by acknowledging that the deficit was higher than believed, to justify some tougher measures and to eventually claim success for bringing down a very high deficit. But while the expectation was for this to be an internal matter of political manipulation, it became a global international sensation, at a time of the global financial crisis, and spiralled out of control. The international markets started doubting the solvency of Greece and with it the future of the Euro. During the next

[4] Koliopoulos–Veremis 2010, 190–191.

[5] Ardagna–Caselli 2014, 293.

decade, Greece became what many called an international economic protectorate, ruled by the Troika (IMF, the European Commission and the European Central Bank), its economic policy designed by the Eurogroup under the command of Germany.[6] The country was placed under strict conditionality and austerity, it was excluded from international markets and was forced to survive on IMF and EU loans. Greece experienced recession and stagnation for nine consecutive years, it lost 25% of its GDP, its private sector was shattered, unemployment rate peaked at 27% in 2014 (and 55% youth unemployment) leading to a big wave of emigration and brain drain of almost half a million people. At the same time, under the threat of exit from the Euro (Grexit) like a sword of Damocles and the imposition of three consecutive Memoranda by the creditors, the Greek governments had to adopt a tsunami of reforms in the labour market, pension system, privatisation, taxation, health service and public administration. This onslaught of changes led to a series of protests and social mobilisation against the external and internal political and economic elites. Intense polarisation between pro-memorandum/anti-memorandum voices and austerity/anti-austerity views dominated the everyday life of a country at the verge of bankruptcy.

For many the root of the crisis lied in Greek politics and the defective nature of political praxis. What started in 2009 as a severe economic crisis developed very quickly into a political crisis of extraordinary proportions. The financial collapse of the Greek state and the sharp drop in personal incomes led voters to mistrust politicians and spread their vote across a wide range of political parties from extreme right to extreme left. The June 2012 elections were yet another big moment of parliamentary change in the post-1974 electoral history of Greece, the outcome of which was a revolutionary break with the party landscape and a vote of rejection of the majority of the political class. The 2012 elections brought in parliament 146 (out of 300) first time MPs. Its most remarkable outcome, however, was the collapse of the ND–PASOK bipartisanism whose last gasp had taken place in the 2009 elections. The 2012 parliamentary landscape changed colours and from the blue-green domination, it became a multi-chromatic national parliament where the blues and the greens managed to win just 112 seats together (a shared 33%), on top of which came the extra 50 seats that went to the first party ND which had narrowly beat the new rising star of Greek politics, the radical left party of SYRIZA by less than 3%.

The message from the June 2012 elections was that parties would have to form coalitions if they wanted to govern. Thus a coalition was produced which included the New Democracy, PASOK and the Europhile Democratic Left, the latter withdrawing its support from the coalition a year later, leaving the two parties to struggle for their survival in power. SYRIZA was the new force in Greek politics, a left-wing populist party, resembling a Latin American style redistributionist and socialist political formation. Its leader Alexis Tsipras and the party's discourse, (reminiscent in style of the early Andreas Papandreou years), labelled the political class as dishonest, the media and business as crooks, Germany and the creditors as the neo-liberal enemies of Greece and courted the weaker social strata and the losers of the crisis by adopting a fierce anti-austerity discourse. SYRIZA which had started as a cluster of disparate political forces of the left – ranging from some pro-European, left-wing voices to the more extremist, far left and anti-European groups – became the main beneficiary of disaffection with the memoranda

[6] Papadimitriou–Zartaloudis 2015, 39–40.

and the magnet for disgruntled politicians, trade unionists and intellectuals from PASOK, the latter reducing itself to unprecedented single digit electoral figures; from a powerful 44% in 2009, to a modest 13% in 2012, and a humiliating 4.7% in the 2015 elections, the term "pasokification" came to represent party fragmentation and social democratic collapse, as the most extreme example of a struggling European social democracy.

This electoral commotion exhibited its dark side in the election for the first time of a neo-Nazi party, the Golden Dawn which gained a resounding 6.9% of the national vote and an impressive number of 18 seats in the parliament. The rise of the Golden Dawn from 0.9% in the 2009 national elections to 6.9% in the 2012 national elections was the most worrying development in the parliamentary and wider political life of the country.[7] The Golden Dawn made its presence felt in Greek politics by resorting to violence, anti-immigrant criminal activities, neo-Nazi salutes and provocative behaviour in parliament. The sudden rise of the far-right is a paradox in a country that had suffered from brutal Nazi occupation, and where military authoritarianism had been discredited after the fall of the military junta. During the previous two decades, Greece had developed its own parliamentary brand of xenophobic right through the presence of a party called LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally), a breakaway group of MPs from the New Democracy, advocating conservative nationalism and a reaction to immigration. While most of the voters of LAOS went to Golden Dawn, the latter aimed at a wider public audience of disaffection with politics, austerity and immigration, and did even better in the subsequent elections becoming third force in the 2014 European elections with a 9.38% of the votes.[8]

The major breakthrough came with the parliamentary elections in January 2015 which brought SYRIZA, a left-wing party for the first time in power, and with it, expectations for a tougher stance vis-à-vis the creditors, and the end of austerity. However, it soon became clear that SYRIZA as an opposition party had promised the undeliverable and following a dramatic eight months (January–August 2015) of failed negotiations with creditors, imminent bankruptcy of the Greek economy, near Grexit from the Euro, anti-austerity referendum victory and capital controls, SYRIZA as a government succumbed to the impossibility of the task. In a context of general despair, the government, passed quickly a third tougher memorandum through parliament, proclaimed new elections in September 2015 with a completely different pro-memorandum agenda and won them again. From then on, together with its seemingly odd coalition partner (the national-conservative Independent Greeks), it pursued a U-turn (despite the outcome of the anti-austerity referendum which they, themselves, had conducted by adopting a strong anti-austerity stance) and a much stricter austerity policy. With SYRIZA in power, most parties from right to left had adopted, as governments the same memorandum agenda, whether they liked it or not. The post-2015 years were less eventful than the years before, with more political stability and social numbness, leading gradually to a certain improvement of the macro-economic indicators – primary surplus, slow de-escalation of unemployment and some privatisations – but with persistent problems in the real economy, private sector, long-term unemployment, over-taxation, low productivity and squeeze of the middle class.

[7] Karyotis–Rüdig 2015, 137.
[8] Karyotis–Rüdig 2015, 137.

During the years of economic hardship, the resilience of Greece was tested on other sectors related to a deteriorating geopolitical environment and rising instability in the neighbourhood of Greece. The wars in Syria created a massive refugee problem for Europe which culminated in 2015, with Greece yet again at the epicentre of international attention. As the main entry point to Europe and the Schengen area of free movement from the South-East, Greece was severely affected by a huge influx of refugees, from Syria, in particular, and of economic migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan and Afghanistan seeking refuge in Western Europe, through the Aegean Sea. In addition, the rise of authoritarianism in Turkey, the 2016 attempted coup and problems in the whole of the Middle East put new strains on the geostrategic position of Greece and created additional stresses for Greek politics in the field of foreign policy. The second decade of the 21st century had been a major challenge for Greece, a country under tremendous economic pressure, going through a reconfiguration of its political landscape, in a geopolitical environment of fear and a weaker EU. By the end of the second decade of the 21st century, the mainstream centre-right/centre-left political pattern had completed its course, with new political formations testing the political ground and domestic politics looking much more volatile and unpredictable than before.

Conclusion

Looking at the tremendous crisis of the Greek economy, the dramatic decline of the country's GDP and personal incomes, the fragmentation and radicalisation of politics, it is remarkable how the Greek democracy endured, in face of so many internal and external challenges. At home, a society in turmoil turned its back on the political class but did not seek alternative authoritarian solutions, the institutions continued to function by and large often under emergency and abnormal circumstances and the country remained within the liberal core of the European Union and the Eurozone. While the quality of democracy was affected by the rise of populist politics from the radical right and the radical left, in the end all the parties which were involved in coalition governments during the years 2009 to 2019 were forced to continue on the same path. The second decade of the 21st century saw a wide range of parties in government, all of which through their frequently irresponsible behaviour, as government or opposition, and the role they played in prolonging and delaying the exit from one of the worse crises in the economic history of Greece, they nevertheless had to respect the rules of parliamentary democracy in passing a series of laws which were highly unpopular and terribly stressful for the Greek people. Abroad, the rise of illiberalism in EU member states like Hungary and Poland, neighbouring countries like Turkey, and further afield in Russia, did not affect the liberal democracy of Greece towards a more illiberal direction. Greece resisted the voices of external populism although it often succumbed to the local traditions of its own home-grown historical populism. The well-known pattern of party polarisation between government and opposition continued to exist, the state even with its limited resources continued to be the instrument of the governing party, the parties continued to want to manipulate the media to suit their purposes and the reform process, this time imposed by the creditors in exchange for loans, continued to generate resistance and opportunistic considerations of political cost.

To conclude, the post-1974 Greek paradigm, while broadly speaking a positive macropolitical democratic experience is also a case of many antitheses: it is an example of high expectations and lower performances; a political class that professes modernisation but refuses to implement it; a vulnerable peripheral European economy with significant potential; a fragile western partner with substantial geostrategic significance. A core underlying theme in the democratic consolidation of Greece is that modernisation and reform has suffered from a series of missed opportunities or at best the adoption of half-baked, temporary measures. Much like the struggles of Sisyphus, the tasks must be repeated again and again until they become Herculean, more difficult with time. In the end, it became apparent that the country's political establishment lacked any long-term perspective in times of growth, which is the correct time to proceed with reforms, and was forced to adopt them during the period of dramatic decline. To be fair, Europe shares some of the responsibility, in that it failed to address appropriately a very difficult situation and to use effectively its transformational power beyond the mere use of a very strict conditionality and a blame game against Greece. There are many domestic and external reasons why Greece failed to use the crisis as an opportunity, despite some changes that took place for the better. So, while Greece is slowly recuperating from a prolonged calamity, it will take many years before the economy stands back on its own feet, the Greek society finds its dynamism and the Greek political class reaches a higher level of maturity and responsibility.

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