

Greek Foreign Policy: Theoretical Orientations and Praxis

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I. Introduction

In an article published in this journal - vol. 4, no.1, 1996 - I tried to present the evolution of the field of international relations in Greece and its subsequent influence on the country's foreign policy. I tried to demonstrate the existence of a dialectical relationship between theory and praxis, between politicians and academics on the formulation of Greek foreign policy.

Even though theoretical work in this field remains in an embryonic state,¹ it is possible to tease out some trends in the discipline of international relations in Greece and to link its theoretical orientation to practical applications. This endeavor becomes especially relevant since we have witnessed in recent years a confrontation between opposing theoretical approaches, combined with an effort to influence the course of Greek foreign policy. Equally relevant is the forging of alliances between scholars and politicians on the important issues of foreign policy.

In writing the article published a year ago, I sought not only to summarize the theoretical debate among Greek scholars but also to open up a new one. It seemed that discussions were taking place in newspapers and magazines rather than in academic journals and I expressed the hope that debate at an academic level would enhance the development of the discipline of international relations in Greece.

From this point of view the article has been well received. The field of international relations in Greece is a relatively new one - introduced essentially after 1974 - and IR scholars, after years of building their discipline and their recent rather "wild" debates are now prepared for an exchange based on academic criteria.

Of course Greek IR scholars did not always agree on the way in which I summarized their views. They did, however, recognize that I had worked in good faith, which explains why they accepted to collaborate on this special issue of *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies* and to present an accurate picture of their discipline.

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Professor Van Coufoudakis, a distinguished Greek-American scholar, graciously accepted to be co-editor of this special issue. In a concluding chapter, he will first present the specific trends represented by the articles published here. He will then express his own views on the Greek foreign policy.

My task is to present a theoretical framework of the field of international relations in Greece by referring to the evolution of the discipline and then discussing what is currently going on.

II. The Present Debate

The present debate on international relations in Greece is blurred. I believe the main problems lie in the underdevelopment of theory and the tendency to consider political ideologies as theoretical trends of the discipline. I am aware that there is no pure theory; in one way or in another, ideology is present at the core of any theory. Ideology is above all a force in the political arena. As such, it demands acceptance and full faith. Theory, however, is a scientific tool and as such must be verified against reality - in our case it must confront praxis.

Yet it is illusory to consider the present debate as only a political and ideological one. The Greek scholars of international studies - at least a number of them - tried all these years to transplant elements of theories developed outside Greece to their discipline. Their own contribution to the development of theory remains very limited and weak. Unfortunately, the present theoretical debate is not broadened and enriched with elements from Greek reality.

Although this situation constitutes somewhat of a paradox for the country that gave us Thucydides, the father and first theorist of international relations, there is an explanation. We alluded in the article published in this journal a year ago, to the fact that for political reasons² social sciences in Greece were never in the forefront of mainstream Greek society before 1974. This delay explains why the field of international relations is more than half a century behind the USA and a generation behind the Western European countries.

Inevitably this new field of study developed within conditions of theoretical confusion characterized by a mixture of theoretical elements and ideology. Scholars of the new discipline came from various backgrounds, having studied or taught abroad in different countries. They necessarily brought the experience of those countries with them. Furthermore, they had different academic backgrounds; i.e., some of them had completed their first university degree in law, history or economics. Since there was no Greek tradition of international relations as a discipline, they tried to cobble one together, each scholar contributing according to his background and foreign tradition.

As a result, there were two basic orientations seeking to influence the establishment of a Greek tradition of international relations. The first orientation, the Anglo-American, originated essentially in the USA. The second, the European, was imported essentially from France and Germany. To these two main influences, we must add a third, the influence of the Greek diaspora. Indeed, scholars of Greek origin abroad had fruitful exchanges with their colleagues in the "homeland" and exercised an important influence on the foundation of the discipline in Greece.

The theoretical trends in each of the above orientations are numerous and generally not clear. Nonetheless, they may be divided into two streams: the first stream is linked with international theoretical approaches; the second, with the "ideologico-political" realities of the country.³ These streams are very important in the present debate. One can proceed from the hypothesis of the primacy of political ideology or, on the contrary, from the primacy of theory, but making such a choice presents no special interest here. The researcher will be more effective in analyzing each particular situation in order to understand the influence of either the ideology or the theory as an explanatory tool or even as a guiding instrument for politicians.

Given the current state of development of IR theory in Greece, however, there can be little doubt that the politico-ideological tool precedes the theoretical one in a considerable number of studies on Greek foreign policy. Neither can there be any doubt that corporate interests play an important role in the present debate, although camouflaged by either ideological or theoretical considerations. But in the end, this is a way to progress, go step by step and eliminate as much as possible what is not "scientific" in this debate. Saying this, I must add that even an ideological confrontation at a certain level is useful in advancing the study of Greek foreign policy. Indeed, a number of social scientists contest the possibility of a "scientific" study of social phenomena. They consider that any study in this area is of an ideological nature. One could also argue "that any scientific analysis, if it is well done, is by definition, at the same time an ideological one".⁴

The scientific approach in the area of social sciences - which is also applicable to the field of international studies - is based essentially on: a) an effort to separate value, moral or partisan judgement from a clinical look of reality; b) the use of methods and techniques of investigation which are common to all social sciences and are acceptable by researchers of the same field; c) an effort of systematization by proposing some general models of analysis in search of possible laws - or at least consistencies - governing social phenomena.

Naturally I am aware of the difficulty of applying this approach in a country like Greece. In fact even in countries where the social sciences are more developed, this difficulty exists. As Raymond Aron wrote: "Sociologists are always partial; they study a part of reality pretending to study the whole. They have the tendency to only notice the positive aspects of societies they like and the negative aspects of the societies they don't like. The sociologist behaves as a politician even without being conscious of it, not just because he expresses from time to time a judgement of value, but in going directly to what is the deadly sin of politicians - and unfortunately of savants, - which is to see what they want to see."⁵

I think that in the international studies debate in Greece we must consider three specific themes in order to clarify the situation:

- The influence of Greek "Ideologico-Political" patterns;
- The impact of different schools of thought regarding international relations;
- The present political situation in the country and especially the weight of Greek-Turkish relations.

A. The Influence of the Greek "Ideologico-Political" Patterns

There have been in Greece, even before independence (1830), two basic "ideologico-political" currents which have had an important influence in the vision the Greeks have of the place of their country in the world. The first current after the Enlightenment maintains that Greece belongs to Western Europe. Adamantios Korais (1748-1833), a notable figure of the Greek Enlightenment who spent much of his life in Western Europe (Amsterdam, Montpellier and Paris), is an eminent representative of this current. He worked to convey to Greeks the Western ideas of statehood, nationality and rationality. Korais regarded modern Greeks as the legitimate descendants of the ancient Hellenes and as the heirs to the classical Greek culture, rejecting Byzantium as a medieval period. The second current considers Greece as Eastern. The roots of neohellenism are to be found in Byzantium and consequently Greece has to resist Western influence.

These East-West patterns are ideological and political references, "largely imaginary constructs".⁶ Scholars and intellectuals of this orientation are convinced that their nation could not imitate any other culture and that Hellenism had to be based on its own sources, rejecting Western ideas. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, when Eleftherios Venizelos, the eminent representative of Greek bourgeoisie, managed some kind of Europeanization of the state, others were seeking "a sense of mission in the East", in "framing" even "the ideology of a multinational

Eastern State” comprising Greeks and Turks.⁷ As one historian puts it, “strangely enough, it took a civil servant (Ion Dragoumis) and an officer of the Greek army (Athanasios Souliotis) to formulate the most systematic criticism against the state and propose a viable alternative to it”. At the time when Venizelos reformed the Greek State and set it on course toward Europeanization, Dragoumis and Souliotis proposed the alternative of the “multinational Eastern” Greco-Turkish state.⁸

This idea is not really new and may be traced to the Ottoman Empire when the Patriarchate of Constantinople and Greek élites were in a sense part of the Ottoman administration. Even in Byzantium, the Church and some élites resisted the efforts of the Pope and the Latin West to impose their spiritual and dogmatic domination on Greek Orthodox citizens. On the contrary under the Ottoman Empire, the Greek Orthodox Church of Constantinople became a real political power over all Orthodox peoples inside the Empire.

The East-West patterns present a new dimension in the eighteenth century when the Greek diaspora composed of bourgeois and intellectual elements, mainly in Western and Central Europe, received the influence of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and began to work on Greek nationbuilding, thus preparing the war of independence. The ideals of liberalism and Enlightenment were to form the weapon opposed to internal conservative elements like land-owning citizens and ecclesiastic administration. The Church defended traditional values and generally “the *status quo* as it existed in the framework of the Ottoman Empire”.⁹ As mentioned above, we can go even further to find the roots of these patterns at the time of the Schism (1054) between the Orthodox Church of Constantinople and the Catholic Church of Rome. The anti-European attitude of Orthodox Greeks was also influenced by “the sack of Constantinople and the adjacent lands by the “crusaders” in 1204”.¹⁰

However, it would be a mistake to consider that the patterns involved in this conflict are clear. As one scholar noted “reality is always more complex and less clear-cut than such constructs propose.”¹¹

This conflict was supposed to be over when Greece became a member of the European Union in 1981. Nevertheless, there is always a strong group of intellectuals and others, known as the neo-Orthodox, who continue to express this anti-Western position, favoring a non-Western Greece with a romantic vision: “organic communities”, “anti-rationalism”, a return to the roots, to the lost paradise of traditional values, etc. As Thanos Veremis noted, this romantic view of communal life under the Ottomans survives to this day and is presented as a model against the nation-state considered to

be a “western product that has nothing to do with the values and culture of Hellenism”. Veremis points out that “the myth surrounding communal life was challenged by historical works presenting the communities as a functional component of the Ottoman tax system rather than a product of national volition.”¹²

Even the Nobel laureate, Odysseus Elytis, insisted on the importance of tradition, worried about Greek identity and considered that the West was always hostile to the Greek nation. Elytis also referred to the Schism and the crusades in remarks such as the following: “The West always tried to make us dance to its tune. And these days it has succeeded in doing so. From now on we have to walk with one foot in the European Community and the other in NATO”.¹³

The “Europeanists” oppose modernizing patterns to this traditional vision, and try to insert them in a European schema, as elements reinforcing Greek ethnocultural identity.

From another point of view, nationalism is a very strong current influencing the formulation of Greek external policy. Nationalism may coincide with the neo-Orthodox vision in some points; however, overall it does not reject a European orientation.

It should be remembered that Greek nationalism was initially the product of Western influence. Nationalism shaped the Greek identity by favoring the building of the Greek nation-state *via-à-via* the cultural identity put forward by the Church and its allies who preferred the framework of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴

The question to ask at this point is how these “ideologico-political” orientations can be combined with the different schools of thought on international relations coming from abroad in order to trace the theoretical trends that scholars use. Nowadays one could question the real influence of these patterns.

Studying what is going on in the present debate enables us to link elements of these patterns with theoretical orientations from abroad. However, some difficulty arises when we try to pin these patterns to one or another theory, to one or another school of thought in international relations. The matter becomes all the more delicate in the case of Greece, where we know that these schools of thought are still being formed.

B. The Influence of the Different Schools of Thought Regarding International Relations

I consider that there are two major schools of thought regarding the study of international relations in Greece: Realist and Transnationalist.¹⁵ The Marxist-Dependency School, which played a significant role up to the end of 1980s, is marginal like other paradigms (feminism, environmentalism, etc.) are also marginal. Even important currents like structural realism are not well known yet. Even if we consider that the two major schools mentioned - realism and transnationalism - are not well assimilated within the Greek realities and that Greek scholars are not always able to articulate their theoretical discourse, we cannot deny some influence from these schools in the study of international relations and Greek foreign policy.

Nevertheless, neither of the two basic "ideologico-political" patterns presented above can be identified with the one or the other of these schools of international relations. Identifying the realists as "anti-Europeanists" and "nationalists", for example, would be to forget that Greek nationalism in the era of Enlightenment was the product of European and Western influence. Identifying the transnationalists as opponents of the nation-state and the fervent supporters of Europe would be to affiliate them with the ideology of a multinational state developed strangely enough by those who opposed the West and Europe and regarded Byzantium and even the Ottoman Empire as a model for Hellenism!

As a result, we must remain aware of the manipulation of these constructs and remember that "reality is always more complex and less clear-cut than such constructs propose".¹⁶

C. The Present Political Situation in Greece

Beyond theories and political ideologies, there lies the political reality, a country facing a major security problem and a continuous challenge from its eastern neighbor, Turkey. Any discussion on international relations and the formulation of Greek foreign policy must, therefore, take into account this reality.

The opposing schools of thought mentioned above are not always convincing. Unfortunately the use of epithets to attack the "enemy" has nothing to do with serious debate between scholars. The confrontation is not always one of theoretical or even ideologico-political arguments but rather one of petty political and personal disputes. The result is a kind of simplification of the reality leading ultimately to manichean bipolarism.

One would expect a scholarly exchange of views with explicit reference to theory and paradigms in support of the arguments that each side provides even in a debate concerning the security of the country. Unfortunately, the use of terms loaded the heavy political overtones and significance due to the history of the country does not foster an open and serious debate.

I consider that there are valid arguments advanced in this debate concerning the particular situation of the country in the area of security. Policymakers may benefit from such a debate if they succeed in distancing themselves from it. This is not always the case, of course, as politicians are identified with one or another school of thought.

In short, as long as the country continues to face a security problem, security will remain an important factor determining the nature of the debate described above.

III. The Influence of the Current Debate in the Formulation of Greek Foreign Policy

On one hand, it is clear that there is a dialectical relation between theoretical paradigms and Greek ideologico-political patterns. But a relation does not mean full identification of one or another of these constructs to a paradigm.

On the other hand, we assume that there is a dialectical relation between the current debate and the praxis of Greek foreign policy. The theoretical and ideological visions in this debate exercise their influence in the application of Greek foreign policy. In some cases, however, it is not sure whether the theoretical and ideological visions proceed to praxis or whether this praxis produces theoretical and ideological orientations.

As we enter a new transitional era in the international system, Greek scholars have to clarify their objectives, adapt theoretical patterns to Greek reality and link theory with praxis. Decision-making in this field is a little old-fashioned but, undoubtedly, it advances in a dialectical manner. Of course, decision-making is influenced by many factors, such as cultural values and customs, economic reality, political power and information.

If we analyze the impact of theory and ideology in the post-dictatorial period of Greek foreign policy (1974-1998), based on the preceding developments, we notice such influences in the decision-making process. It is also clear, however, that during this period theoretical patterns were confused without clear lines and without real development.

During the Caramanlis period (1974-1980), his right wing government experienced different influences and received different pressures in the formulation of Greek foreign policy. These influences and pressures came from diversified theoretical and ideological patterns; e.g., transnationalism, dependency theory, and nationalism.

In the Papandreou period (1981-1989), the theoretical framework of socialism was very present but the realist theoretical orientation had also gained ground.

Nevertheless caution is required because nothing is so clear. From appearances the Caramanlis period could be seen as under the influence of transnationalist patterns; the Papandreou period, under the influence of dependency patterns. However the reality is more complex and one must not mistake the appearances for reality. How can we explain the withdrawal of Greece from NATO by Caramanlis in terms of transnationalist patterns or the Davos summit between Papandreou and the Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal in terms of dependency patterns?

The return of the Right to power with Mitsotakis (1990-1993), but also the upheaval of the international system, changed the theoretical framework of Greek foreign policy. This time it was clear that the transnationalist-interdependence patterns had gained ground.

Nevertheless nationalism poses an obstacle to such an orientation, - especially given the exasperation over the Macedonian issue. Prime Minister Mitsotakis was unable to impose his vision on even his foreign affairs minister, Antonis Samaras, a devoted nationalist.

The new PASOK period with Papandreou as premier (1993-1996) was one of contradiction between discourse obeying realism and dependency patterns yet with a number of actions obeying interdependence logic.

It seems that at first with Constantine Simitis as Prime Minister (1996), the interdependence-transnational paradigm has gained ground. But the Imia Crisis forced Simitis and his government to be very cautious in foreign policy orientation. Even if Simitis is a dedicated transnationalist technocrat, his responsibility for the security of the country from the perceived Turkish threat forced him to go ahead with the purchase of new army equipment in order to restore the balance of power between the two countries. Again, reality is more complex than the clear-cut theoretical or ideological patterns.

Meantime, debate over the formulation of Greek foreign policy among scholars, journalists and politicians continues. At the end of the millenium, it is permitted to hope for an open and serious debate.

IV. Concluding Remarks

The traditional formula of both good and bad news could apply as a conclusion here.

The good news is that the discipline of international relations is currently enjoying increased popularity. Programs are already established in the universities, research projects are carried out in specialized institutes or centers, books and articles are published. There is therefore tremendous interest in the field as the current debate has shown.

The bad news is, of course, a certain confusion in the present debate, combined with degeneration into petty politics and personal disputes. Simplification of a complex reality in the name of theories and ideologies is yet another negative aspect of the situation.

This volume presents a pluralist snapshot of Greek international relations in the hope that the debate will continue at an academic level and will enhance the development of the discipline in Greece.

Let us conclude with Constantine Cavafis, the Alexandrian poet :
*It's sure, in the Colony many things unfortunately are not going well;
but is there any human creature without fault?
At the end, however, we move forward.*

NOTES

1. Stephanos Constantinides, "Greek Foreign Policy: Theoretical Orientations and Praxis", *Etudes helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 4, No.1, Spring 1996, pp. 43-61
2. As it is pointed out in the academic journal *Etudes helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, vol.3, No 1, Autumn 1994 (Editor's note, p. 7-8) "Research and dialogue in the social sciences as such have never been in the forefront of the mainstream Greek society. A variety of reasons have been offered for this seeming lack of interest in the social research field, the primary being some kind of "socio-political conspiracy" on the part of the conservative élites that have governed Greece almost exclusively since Independence. As a matter of fact, it is not accidental that neither sociology, psychology nor education faculties exist in Greek universities, where systematic research on political and historical issues has been minimal". This point of view was presented for the first time in 1983 in the first issue of the journal. In the edition of 1994, it is pointed: "we can repeat what we published in 1983 with slight modifications. As a matter of fact, in Greece progress has been made in numerous fields of studies and research in the social sciences, especially in the fields of sociology, psychology, education and political science. There is now an openness in the Greek universities. Research institutions have also appeared since 1983. Nevertheless, the situation is precarious and in comparison with other western countries, Greece remains behind in all these fields."

See also **Koinonikes kai Politikes Dynamis stin Ellada (Social and Political Forces in Greece)**, Hellenic Society of Political Science, Athens, Exantas Publishers, 1977 (in Greek)

3. Stephanos Constantinides, *op. cit.*

4. Henri Mendras, **Eléments de sociologie**, Paris, Armand Colin, Coll. U, 1975, p. 233

5. Raymond Aron, **Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle**, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Idées, 1970, p.30

6. Argyris Fatouros, "Greece's Integration in the European Community", in Harry Psomiades and Stavros Thomadakis, **Greece, The New Europe and the Changing International Order**, New-York, Pella Publishing Company, 1993, p.24

7. Thanos Veremis, "From the National State to the Stateless Nation 1821-1910", in Martin Blinkhorn and Thanos Veremis, **Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality**, Athens, ELIAMEP, 1990, p.17

8. Thanos Veremis, *op. cit.* p.17. See also Dimitri Kitsikis, **Istoria tis Othomanikis Aftokratourias (History of the Ottoman Empire)**, Athens, Estia, 1985, p.85 (in Greek)

9. Argyris Fatouros, *op. cit.*, p.25, Constantinos Dimaras, **A history of Modern Greek Literature**, Albany, editions of the same work, Athens, 1975, pp. 152-156

10. John Cambell and Philip Sherrard, **Modern Greece**, New-York, Washington, Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968, p.33

11. Argyris Fatouros, *op. cit.*, p. 25

12. Thanos Veremis, *op. cit.*, p. 25

13. Interview of Odysseus Elytis to the Greek Weekly **To Vima**, December 1978, cited in the monthly **Diavazo** (Athens), April 1996, p. 74

14. Argyris Fatouros, *op. cit.*, p. 25, Constantinos Dimaras, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-152

15. Stephanos Constantinides, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53

16. Argyris Fatouros, *op. cit.*, p. 25