

## **Democracy in Greece, Forty Years On**

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### **Introduction**

On the 1st of April 2014, in view of meetings of Eurogroup and ECOFIN scheduled to take place in Athens on 1-2 April, the Greek police announced that all demonstrations were forbidden. The ruling applied particularly to political party- and labour union-led protests close to the buildings where the meetings of these eurozone and EU institutions were to take place. Parties of the left and anti-government labour unions defied the police and staged protests which led to a violent, if small, confrontation.

Just two days before, the major party of the opposition, Syriza, which is a radical left party that commanded 27 per cent of the vote in the most recent parliamentary elections of June 2012, had placed a motion of censure against the Speaker of the Greek Parliament. The latter was a prominent member of the governing party, the centre-right party of New Democracy (ND). The ND party, which obtained 30 per cent of the vote in the same election and was headed by Prime Minister (PM) Antonis Samaras, has formed a coalition with the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK, 12 per cent of the vote) and has been in power since 2012.

The Syriza party accused the Speaker of the Parliament, who eventually survived the motion of censure, of having contributed to the degradation of the Greek Parliament. In a series of fierce attacks, Syriza claimed that important policy measures were legislated by government fiat, namely through Presidential Decrees, and that the parliament has been reduced to passing major laws through emergency procedures. Syriza has consistently contested legislation emanating from Greece's adjustment programme, agreed upon with the country's creditors when it faced default in 2010. The radical left party has criticized the government for abolishing social rights, drastically altering labour relations to the benefit of employers and changing competition policy in a way that adversely affected very small and small business enterprises, the backbone of the ailing Greek economy. The coalition government of ND and PASOK has equally vehemently responded that it is only through the adjustment programme that Greece has been saved from default and has remained in the eurozone.

For the last five years (2010-2014) Syriza and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE, 4.5 of the vote in the elections of 2012) have backed their parliamentary challenges against the government with political rallies organised in front of the parliament in order to exert pressure on the Members of Parliament (MPs) supporting the

government coalition. Political rallies of this sort had also taken place was in the night of 30 March 2014, when the government was passing a new law uplifting restrictions to market access for new business entrepreneurs and slashing administrative regulations governing the exercise of some liberal professions.

In the meantime, the Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, which until 2012 had never obtained a share of the vote higher than half per cent (0.5%) of the total, in the elections of 2012 surprised everyone by obtaining 7 per cent of the total vote. Successive opinion polls in 2013 and 2014 showed that Golden Dawn may have risen to the rank of the third largest party in Greece, after ND and Syriza.

One naturally associates such extreme phenomena (acute party contestation, violent clashes, rise of the far right) with the economic crisis which has hit Greece since 2010. Yet, extreme polarisation in the parliament, accompanied by frequent, successive and vocal political rallies outside the parliament's building in 2010-2014, were not a novelty in the history of Greece's post-authoritarian democracy, inaugurated in 1974 with the fall of the Colonels' regime. In 1974-2014 it was not uncommon for political party polarisation to reach extremes and protests in the streets to turn violent. Nor was it uncommon for major pieces of legislation to take the form of Presidential Decrees and even ministerial ordinances, even before the onset of the economic crisis. These were frequent instances in Greek political life in 1974-2014 which is the topic of this paper.

Yet, such instances may convey the wrong impression about the 'health' of democracy in Greece. Indeed, forty years have passed since the transition to democracy in Greece (1974) and the vehemence of political competition as well as the current, dismal economic situation in which the country finds itself, may lead to a biased view of an otherwise stable parliamentary democracy.

Of course, one has to admit that the quality of democracy in Greece is not high. Political cynicism is rampant; women are under-represented in the higher echelons of power; the fight against social exclusion is a lesser priority; and environmental protection is sacrificed to short-term political calculations and whimsical decisions of policy-makers. Civil society has been dormant for a long time and has started reacting to political problems and social dislocations only since the onset of the economic crisis, i.e., since 2010. Corruption has been rampant, probably for more than three decades. It is only since 2013 that prosecuting authorities and independent state agencies have engaged in a sustained anticorruption policy. And, as the following table shows, trust in political institutions had already declined, just as the crisis was starting, in May 2010 (Table 1).

**Table 1. Political Trust in Democratic Institutions in Greece in Comparative Perspective**

(%, a lot or some trust)	Government 2003	Government 2010	Parliament 2003	Parliament 2010
Greece	55%	21%	63%	47%
Italy	26%	23%	32%	26%
Portugal	34%	19%	37%	27%
Spain	42%	21%	42%	22%

Source: Standard Eurobarometer Surveys no. 59 (field work in April 2003) and no. 73 (fieldwork in May 2010)

Yet, if one takes a view detached from the frequent political turmoil, to which allusions were made above, then Greece's post-authoritarian democracy, despite its pitfalls, emerges as a stable parliamentary regime in one of the most unstable corners of Europe. Greek democracy has set the political context for a rise in the living standards of Greece's inhabitants to a level still unmatched by other South East European nations.

In the remainder of this paper I am going to discuss the transition to democracy in Greece in the 1970s with an emphasis on the role of political parties and the European Union (EU). I will then try to explain why Greece faced near-collapse in 2010, by focusing on state-economy relations. Then I will present and interpret the travails of democracy in Greece under the economic crisis. I will finally focus on the mismanagement of the crisis in Greece and I will conclude arguing that Greek democracy faced at least two major challenges over the past forty years, but has overcome both of them and despite the effects of the economic crisis which it currently faces, it can reform itself and develop further.

### **The transition to democracy and the immediate post-authoritarian period**

Greece was one of the first examples of the last 'wave of democracy' in the twentieth century. The army, which had brought down democracy in April 1967, ruled for seven years (1967-1974). However, the army became delegitimised, particularly after the rise of the students of the Polytechnic School against the military 'junta' in November 1973 and after the Cyprus debacle of July 1974. What is more, the army was humiliated, as it quickly shown that war mobilisation and resistance to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus proved impossible.

In contrast to Portugal and Spain, in post-dictatorial Greece, during the transition from authoritarian rule the king and the armed forces did not play a significant role. They were completely excluded from national politics very soon after the rupture of July 1974. A government of national unity, led by the conservative PM Constantine Karamanlis (founder of the ND party), quickly rebuilt the country's democratic institutions, starting with the legalisation of the KKE (outlawed since the Greek Civil War, 1946-1949) and ending with the passage of a new constitution in June 1975. In the meantime, the referendum of December 1974 had put an end to the monarchy and a coup of military officers of February 1975 had been aborted.

Citizens associated the deposed military 'junta' with the national tragedy in Cyprus and the failure of the anti-communist ideology. This ideology was a cementing block of the right and centrist governments in the post-Civil War era (1949-1967). In contrast to the conspicuous presence of a far right party in Greek politics today, when a Neo-Nazi party is represented in parliament, after 1974 the time there was no extreme right-wing political party.

There were two short-lived exceptions—the Ethnike Demokratike Enosis (EDE) party, which dissolved after it obtained only one per cent of the vote in the 1974 elections, and the Ethnike Parataxis (EP) party which dissolved after obtaining seven per cent of the vote in 1977. The rest of political parties—ranging from the centre-right to the communist left—were firmly against the Colonels' regime.

More importantly Greek parties shared a measure of moderation as far as the democratic institutions were concerned. Despite strong disputes between the Right and the Left, immediately after 1974, on the type of economic development and distributional issues (incomes and social benefits) and the prospect of Greece's integration in the then EC (now the EU), no danger of political destabilisation appeared at least in the way experienced in Portugal in 1974-1975 and no problems

of balancing central and regional power emerged as was the case in Spain after 1975.

After all, Karamanlis had the wages and salaries increased, an incomes policy which was expanded by his successor in 1981, the socialist PM Andreas Papandreou. Moreover, all parties adopted a relatively moderate stance on the issue of transitional justice, the processes of which were completed in a swift manner in 1974-1975. The military officers who had staged the coup d'état in 1967 were tried, sanctioned with life sentences and imprisoned.

From the mid-1970s on, ND and PASOK were the main protagonists of Greek democracy. In fact, as the following table (Table 2) shows, the two parties dominated Greek politics for a period of thirty five years, between 1977 and 2012.

**Table 2. Electoral Results in Greece, 1974-2012**

Percentage share of major Greek political parties in national and European Parliament elections, 1974-2012 (E=European Parliament elections)

Election year	ND	PASOK	SYRIZA
1974	54.4	13.6	-
1977	41.9	25.3	-
1981	35.9	48.1	-
1981 (E)	31.5	40.3	-
1984 (E)	38.0	41.6	-
1985	40.8	45.8	-
1989 (June)	44.3	39.1	-
1989 (E)	40.5	36.0	-
1989 (November)	46.2	40.7	-
1990	46.9	38.6	-
1993	39.3	46.9	2.9
1994 (E)	32.7	37.6	6.3
1996	38.1	41.5	5.1
1999 (E)	36.0	32.9	5.2
2000	42.7	43.8	3.2
2004	45.4	40.5	3.3
2004 (E)	43.0	34.0	4.2
2007	41.8	38.1	5.0
2009 (E)	32.3	36.7	4.7
2009	33.5	43.9	4.6
2012 (May)	18.9	13.2	16.8
2012 (June)	29.7	12.3	26.9

Note: (E) stands for elections for the European Parliament. Various other parties, which are now defunct, participated in elections. Among them, the most important in terms of electoral influence and still surviving in today's Greece is the pro-Soviet KKE, the vote for which in 1974-2012 oscillated between 4.5 per cent and 10.9 per cent.

### **The importance of the EU for Greece's democratisation and economic development**

During the seven year long military rule (April 1967- July 1974) the EC practically showed their disapproval of the breakdown of democracy in Greece and the imposition of an authoritarian regime. A month after the Colonels captured power, the Commission of the EC unilaterally froze the 'Athens Agreement, namely the agreement to negotiate over Greece's accession to the EC within a period of 22 year. This was an agreement which had entered into force in 1962 and which the EEC revived in 1974, just after Greece's transition from authoritarian rule.

In 1967-1974 Greek dissidents found refuge in various European capitals, including Paris, London and Rome. European politicians, particularly Germans, Dutch and Swedes, supported the resistance against the colonels. Also, the Council of Europe 'suspended' Greece's membership in an open rebuttal of the Colonels' regime.

As already noted, the transition to democracy in July 1974 was the result of the humiliation of the Greek Colonels, which followed the Cyprus debacle, while the EC

did not have an active role in engineering the transition. Yet, the Greek government understood how important the institutional and economic environment of the EC was for Greece's democratic stability. A year later, in July 1975, Greece applied for full membership to the EC, an aim accomplished six years later, in 1981. The issue of Greece's accession to the EC was hotly debated in the post-transition period, as PASOK, headed by Andreas Papandreou, adopted an anti-EC rhetoric, full of populist and nationalist slogans. Also the KKE vehemently opposed Greece's joining of the EC.

PASOK, after winning the national elections in the same year as Greece's accession to the EC (1981), gradually shifted away from its anti-EC policies. Indeed, particularly after 1985, PASOK changed its stance and discourse toward the EC. An economic motive was behind this shift. After the mid-1980s regional inequalities in Greece decreased owing to the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (IMPs) which were followed in the 1990s and the 2000s by the Community Support Frameworks (CSFs) I, II and III. After the reform of Structural Funds in 1988, the whole territory of Greece was classified as an 'Objective 1' area, which meant that the country was eligible to receive aid necessary for underdeveloped areas.

PASOK's successor to power, ND, was firmly pro-European and ruled in 1990-1993. However, ND also succumbed to nationalist and populist pressures: while it took various measures which rationalised some policy sectors (e.g. pension and social insurance policy) along the lines of similar policy developments of other EU Member-States, the same party also behaved in a contradictory manner and in other sectors took measures going against the European mainstream (e.g. Greece's Balkan entanglement in 1991-1993, which resulted in Greece's becoming part of the problems in South-eastern Europe rather than a source of solutions in this region). PASOK, upon its return to power (1993), also adopted an ethnocentric stance on various domestic and foreign policy fronts (e.g., on the dispute about the name of FYROM). It was not until the succession of the socialist PM Andreas Papandreou by his ex-Minister of Finance Costas Simitis (1996) that the socialist party and its government firmly adopted a pro-European position.

On the economic front, Greece benefited from the flow of EC funds throughout the last thirty years. In particular, Greece experienced regional development. The Greek government focused on absorbing ESF and Cohesion funds that contributed to the development of most rural areas and to vast improvements in infrastructure, including transport and communications.

During the evolution of CSF I (1989-1993), Greece's 13 regions received a total 1.5 billion ECUs. The sum total of this CSF's funds helped accelerate Greek economic growth by 1 per cent per year. During the second CSF (CSF II, in 1994-1999), the total of funds channelled to the Greek regions reached 4.5 billion ECUs, while the acceleration of growth was 1.1 per cent per year. Between 40 and 50 per cent of all CSF funds were channelled to infrastructure, whereas 21-22 per cent went to human resources (Tsoukalis 1998: 303, Sotiropoulos 2004). CSF III granted 21 billion euros to Greece, which contributed to a total increase of 6.2 per cent in the Greek GDP between 2000 and 2006 (Andreou and Liargovas 2008: 257-258). In 2007-2013 Greece was entitled to 20.1 billion euros, to be drawn from Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

The economic crisis, which erupted in May 2010, meant that the country would need far larger amounts of aid. As I will argue in the next section, Greece overcame hurdles to join the EC in 1981 and the eurozone (in 2001) without either mainstreaming its public finances or addressing the structural imbalances of its

economy. The fact that Greece was an old Member-State allowed it to underperform.

### **The state and economic crisis in Greece**

Many commentators of Greek politics have attributed Greece's near-collapse in 2010 to superficial factors, such as the alleged propensity of Greeks to avoid work or extravagant social transfers made by Greek pension funds. However, it is implausible to argue that such a severe economic crisis is owed either to a lazy work ethic or to luxury welfare benefits. Both claims are wrong. First of all, the majority of Greek pensioners receive the minimum pension. Pension levels keep most retired Greeks close to or just above the poverty level. Second, Greeks work long hours, and many do so by holding two jobs, one in the official labour market and a second one in the underground economy. About a fifth of the labour force has secure jobs. These are workers and employees of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and a few hundred large private business firms. The remaining salaried employees work in precarious jobs in very small business firms employing fewer than 10 workers. And about one-third of labour force members are self-employed.

As it is well known, the Greek economy is based on agriculture, construction, tourism, banking and other services, which have contributed to Greece's rising living standards since the early 1980s. However, long-term structural problems, such as the small size of business firms, the lack of innovation and new technologies in the entrepreneurial sector, the absence of interface between education and employment trends and the bloated and outdated structure of the state sector have resulted in Greece being a laggard in terms of economic competitiveness.

Indeed, what is distinct in the case of Greece is the overextension of public spending between 1981 and 2011; the long-term inability or reluctance of government authorities to tax the population; and a long-term imbalance in current accounts, owed to dependence on imported oil, to very little export activity and long-term tendencies to consume imported consumer products.

In 2009, one year before the crisis broke out in Greece, the public debt stood at 129 per cent of the GDP, while the budget deficit at 16 per cent (European Commission 2013). The last time there was a budget surplus was in 2002. As for current accounts, 2013 was the first year in which there was a current account surplus since records began in 1948.

Government expenditures were not so much channelled to welfare benefits, but to a bloated public sector to which successive governments recruited large numbers of employees. Upon each government turnover, the party which won the elections, i.e., either ND or PASOK, colonised all state institutions, including the public administration and the state-owned media. At the same time, labour unions did not depend on members' fees, which were meagre, but on funds channelled to unions by Greece's Ministry of Labour.

On the other hand, it was rare that government revenue match government expenditure. Throughout the last forty years, authorities proved repeatedly incapable or unwilling to collect taxes.

There was also a frail private sector dependent on the state for tenders, subsidies and low-interest loans, which contributed to the depletion of state funds. More concretely, private businessmen used to start enterprises which counted on state

loans and subsidies for financing. Typically, large businessmen in the construction sector focused on servicing the needs for infrastructure (e.g., government buildings, national roads, ports) of the central and local government. Other businessmen supplied goods and services to state organisations, such as ministries, public hospitals and SOEs, at prices far above the market price. State organisations (e.g., the armed forces, public transport companies) could pay these prices because they operated on a soft budget, namely they counted on the state budget to cover their deficits. Successive governments funded deficits by increased borrowing that has gradually grown into an unsustainable public debt. Moreover, there was lack of funds, infrastructure and skills necessary for export-oriented economic activities to blossom.

In brief, Greece borrowed money from abroad, in order to finance the public sector and state-dependent business activity. It continued borrowing far beyond its means and for too long. All this would not have led to the current dramatic economic crisis in Greece, save that it had coincided with the worldwide crisis that erupted in late 2008. In other words, the culmination of Greek national economic problems in the late 2000s coincided with a very adverse global economic environment.

### **The mismanagement of the economic crisis in Greece**

In the early months of 2010, Greece faced the prospect of a chaotic default, owing to its inability to service its soaring public debt (129 per cent of the GDP in 2009). The bailout agreement between the Greek government and the 'troika' of IMF, EC and ECB in May 2010 was accompanied by a set of austerity measures in return for new loans, as specified in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed between Greece and the 'Troika'. Policy measures included extensive wage and salary cuts - first in the civil service and then, from February 2012 onwards, in the private sector and SOEs, too. Moreover, the rate of unemployment reached 26 per cent in 2012. Youth unemployment (18-24 age group) exceeded 55 per cent, while thousands of small businesses went bankrupt.

Data show that, in 2012, 35 per cent of the country's population ran the risk of poverty or social exclusion, while the share of those who were severely materially deprived was 19 per cent (European Commission 2013).

Since 2010 Greece has made an impressive effort at fiscal consolidation, transforming its structural budget deficit from 16 per cent of the GDP in 2009 to a tiny budget surplus in 2013. In the meantime, however, it had lost one fourth of its 2008 GDP, while the income of middle- and low-income groups experienced a free fall.

In 2013 the economic crisis continued unabated in Greece, producing alarming negative social effects and strong protests against the government's austerity policies. In the second trimester of 2013 unemployment stood at 27 per cent, while youth unemployment at 59 per cent (ELIAMEP's data base, available at [www.crisisobs.gr](http://www.crisisobs.gr)). In 2010-2013 successive governments rolled back the Greek welfare state and adopted harsh austerity policies in order to attain the fiscal consolidation required by the Troika.

In order to manage this crisis, the PASOK government, under PM George Papandreou (son of Andreas, the founder of PASOK), tried to implement harsh austerity policy measures contained in the MoU in 2011-2012, while being under constant attack domestically by political parties to its left (the Syriza and KKE parties) and to its right (the ND party). In contrast to Portugal and Spain, which also underwent a (less severe) crisis but managed to form a political consensus on



managing the crisis, the Greek political forces were divided on this issue.

Parties of the opposition, including the ND, professional associations of rather privileged groups such as lawyers, doctors, pharmacists and engineers, and labour unions fuelled mass reactions against the MoU. There were violent protests, resulting in the death of three protesters in May 2010 because of the uncontrolled action of anarchists who torched a bank branch. Further on, there were sporadic physical attacks against politicians, occupations of government building and efforts to storm the building of the Parliament.

Challenges to the government did not only refer to policy content, but also the rather abrupt and sudden policy processes through which multiple waves of government cuts in wages, pensions and social benefits were decided. Essentially these were measures forced upon the government by the country's creditors. However necessary for Greece's fiscal consolidation, clearly this type of forced policy-making reflected a shift of decision-making power from the site of democratic institutions (the parliament, the elected government) to the site of international financial organisations and the EU where Greek ministers met with representatives of the "Troika" and received orders on how to reshape Greek fiscal, macroeconomic and labour relations policies.

In a word, there was a deep, unpredictable and periodically widening gap between PASOK's electoral programme of expansionist economic policies and the programme to which Greece was subjected owing to its inability to service its public debt. MPs of PASOK were frequently pressed to vote against their party's original policies and socialist profile in order to avoid the government's and probably also the country's collapse. The divergence between policy promises and policy delivery, typical in modern democracies after elections are over, went far beyond anything seen at least in Greece since the 1974 transition to democracy and clearly called into question the legitimacy of the elected government of PASOK.

The gradual defection of PASOK's MPs came to a tipping point in November 2011, when George Papandreou made the false move to announce a referendum on another wave of austerity measures, the Medium-term Stabilisation Programme 2012-2015, on which he had already agreed with Greece's partners in the EU.

Papandreou did not calculate well. His political move, which raised the possibility of Greeks rejecting austerity policies emanating from Europe, had repercussions throughout Europe. It threatened the economic stability of the eurozone, because one Eurozone member country, Greece, might have left the euro (essentially this would have happened if the result of the referendum had been 'no'). Thus, eurozone leaders pressed Papandreou to recall the referendum, which he did within 72 hours after his initial calling. By then, he had lost the trust of most eurozone leaders on top of having lost a large share of his popularity domestically, in Greece. Papandreou was obliged to hand over the post of the PM to a technocrat, Loukas Papademos, who formed a short-lived coalition government, with the support of ND, PASOK and the right-wing nationalist/populist LAOS party (represented in the parliaments elected in 2007 and 2009, but not in 2012). Papademos proceeded to sign a second, austerity-driven MoU in February 2012 and called elections in the spring of 2012 out of which Greece's current coalition government of ND and PASOK was formed.

Clearly, there was no chance that a full four-year long term would have expired for another election to be held. The governments handling the economic crisis (PASOK in 2009-2011 and the tripartite coalition government led by Papademos in 2011-2012), did not have the political legitimacy either to pursue further reforms or to

renegotiate the most harmful measures of the bailout package. No wonder voters shifted their allegiance to the far right and to the radical left.

In the consecutive elections of May and June 2012 (resulting from the fact that no government was formed in May of that year) reflected a sea change in the Greek party system. In 2010-2012 the electoral influence of the two protagonists of Greek politics, ND and PASOK, collapsed. As already noted, a radical left party, Syriza, which in the 2009 elections had obtained only five per cent of the vote, saw its influence increase more than fivefold (from five per cent to 27 per cent). Meanwhile, as already mentioned above, the self-professed neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn, gained parliamentary representation (with 18 out of 300 parliamentary seats).

These were dramatic changes, signalling the polarisation of the Greek party system, but the most important outcome of the elections was that pro-EU parties were in the driver's seat and enjoyed fresh political legitimisation. The victory of ND, with 29 per cent of the vote in the June 2012 elections, was coupled with the fact that other pro-European parties, such as PASOK and the smaller pro-European 'Democratic Left' (DIMAR), sustained their electoral strength between May and June 2012.

ND's victory was not decisive, as the party did not obtain the absolute majority of parliamentary seats. Yet, given the depth of Greece's economic crisis and the rest of the world's ambivalence about the position of Greece in the EU, this electoral victory came at the right moment and gave the correct signals to the rest of the world.

First, the anti-bailout, radical left party, SYRIZA, lost. As a result, the pressure on the part of the eurozone leaders on Greece eased. The prospect of uncontrollable exit of Greece from the Eurozone diminished and so did the ramifications of such an event for other eurozone countries in crisis. Second, contrary to the widespread impression that Greece has become ungovernable, just 72 hours after the June 2012 election a three-party, pro-European coalition government was in place (the ND, PASOK and DIMAR government which was reduced to a two-party coalition in July 2013, when DIMAR disagreed with the PM's sudden decision to close down Greece's public broadcaster).

### **Conclusions: challenges to Greek democracy**

Greek democracy was tested at least two times, namely in 1981 and in 2010-2012 and it was not found wanting in terms of the legitimacy of electoral procedures and political stability. By contrast, in spite of the challenges Greek democracy faced, it was able to survive and proceed with government turnover and a more or less normal parliamentary life.

The first challenge took place in 1981 when for the first time in contemporary Greek political history a party of the left, PASOK, won the absolute majority of parliamentary seats and formed a single majority government. The military did not react, while the conservative and definitely anti-left President of the Republic, Constantine Karamanlis, who had masterminded the 1974 transition to democracy, and the new, socialist PM, Andreas Papandreu contributed to a smooth 'cohabitation' of the Presidency of the Republic with the elected government. This arrangement lasted until 1985 when Papandreu unseated Karamanlis and replaced him with a new President of the Republic, a favourite of PASOK.

The second challenge occurred in 2010-2012 when the socialist government of George Papandreu made an about-face six months after PASOK's coming to power

in October 2009. Instead of implementing the Keynesian policies he had promised in 2009, George Papandreou belatedly realised that the state was insolvent, resorted to the IMF, the EC and the ECB (the 'Troika') for a rescue package and signed the first MoU (May 2010). The rescue package accepted by the socialist government, which actually did not have but very little room for manoeuvre, was accompanied by sudden, harsh and unbalanced austerity measures which primarily hit the poor, the unemployed, the salaried strata and later on the middle classes too.

The consequence was the abrupt loss of legitimacy of the elected government of 2009, which commanded the parliamentary majority but was clearly distanced from the electorate. There were frequent violent confrontations between protesters and the police and the PASOK government was succeeded by a short-term coalition government in the winter of 2011-2012. Government instability lasted for a short time and since June 2012 there has been a ND-PASOK coalition government in power. This is an ironic turn of history, because before 2012 these two parties had waged fierce battles against each other, in order to win power and govern on their own.

Despite all, it is noteworthy that in 2010-2014 Greek democracy sustained the blows effected by the deepest economic crisis since 1929 and that the radicalisation of Greeks, obvious in their massive support of left and radical left wing parties in the elections of 2012, did not shake the functioning of parliamentary institutions. Meanwhile, in the winter of 2013-2014, prosecuting authorities put the leadership and several MPs of the Golden Dawn party to prison on charges of having formed a criminal group, held responsible for the assassination of a popular left-wing rapper in the autumn of 2013.

In view of the above, it would be wrong to forget the arduous road Greece had to travel since the end of the Second World War to its integration into the European Communities (EC, 1981), leaving behind it a Civil War (1946-1949), a military dictatorship (1967-1974) and a stagnant agricultural economy. Greece has become a stable democracy and a modern economy which of course has a long way to travel in order to overcome the economic crisis and to converge with other EU Member-States with regard to social protection, environmental protection, gender equality and other standards which, despite the on-going crisis, make political, social and economic life in the EU so distinct and worth leading.

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