

Greece Needs but does not have a Foreign Policy

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Today, Greece is in need of a foreign policy. In effect it does not have one. The main issues that dominate its foreign policy agenda remain static: Turkey; FYR Macedonia and Cyprus. There has been very little overt movement on these issues in the last decade despite some significant changes in circumstance: Turkey has opened its accession talks with the EU; FYR Macedonia is a candidate for EU Accession and Cyprus has become a full member of the EU. It was hoped these changes would have unlocked the doors for solutions to these central issues of Greek foreign policy, but they haven't. The EU which has, to some extent, shielded Greek interests from being undermined by these issues has also not proved a strong enough incentive for those three states to be more amenable to long-term accommodations with Greece or, in the case of Cyprus an end to the island's division which would have removed a thorn from the side of the Greek state.

While the reliance on EU influence, or the Europeanisation of these issues to put it a different way, has not resulted in the desired outcomes, Greece has not wanted to or has not been able to create new policies to push the agenda forward. Consequently, today Greece does not really have a foreign policy. It has certain static foreign policy positions with respect to the 'ethnika themata', red lines and veto threats, but not really a foreign policy. If you ask policy-makers and diplomats what Greek foreign policy is with respect to FYR Macedonia, for example, you receive an answer full of what we do not accept and what will not happen, but little encouragement that there is forward thinking for novel means to achieve the desired ends.

Of course, the great sovereign debt crisis now overshadows all aspects of government policy including in the international sphere. Greece is now unable to act: it has no respect or credibility in the eyes of its partners and allies in Europe and the North Atlantic area and even in the immediate neighbourhood of the Balkans its ability to influence is not taken seriously because of the financial crisis. If diplomatically Greek has little or no international capital to bank, in terms of instruments too it is unable to act. The medium of the EU is now a weaker than ever instrument in the pursuit of goals. And whatever soft power Greece had regionally has now dissipated: it no longer even has the relative regional economic muscle it once had in the Balkans which was seen as a great asset in the pursuit of regional diplomatic goals. Greece was once the great champion of EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. Now 'Agenda 2014' under Greek leadership is a non-starter: neither western Balkans states nor other EU members see Greece as a credible actor with the ability to deliver in this field. Of even greater concern is the fact that the debt/deficit crisis had not only weakened Greece's ability to act internationally but also made it potentially more vulnerable to rivals and other states with something to gain from its position of weakness. This has yet to manifest itself in political terms but it would not surprise me if it occurred sooner rather than later.

Beyond the debt crisis there are two other main reasons why I think that Greece has not been able to have a forward thinking foreign policy for the best part of a decade. The first is that there is no clear hierarchy or organisational pattern in terms of foreign policy decision-making. Power is concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister and his personal office; the Foreign Ministry and especially the diplomatic service have been increasingly marginalised in terms of the design and execution of foreign policy. Consequently, decisions are made in the short-term for the short-term, with little or no continuity or longevity (apart from the red lines and veto points which remain constant). While foreign policy, like every other aspect of government policy in a democratic, has to be debated publicly, come under scrutiny, and represent the national interest. But when foreign policy has become an instrument of populism and empty rhetoric pandering to nationalists, it serves no real purpose in achieving foreign policy goals in the longer-term.

The second reason for the lack of foreign policy has to do with personality rather than organisational models of

decision-making. The literature on foreign policy analysis places great value of the role of personality and leadership in the foreign policy domain. In the last seven years, leadership in the foreign policy field in Greece has been sorely missed. As the powers for foreign policy decision-making are centralised and revolve around the Prime Minister one would look at the previous and current premierships for indications of whether personalities and leadership are important. In the Karamanlis government, it seemed that the Prime Minister was not interested in foreign policy. Despite some personalised efforts with his Turkish counterpart, there is little evidence that Karamanlis wished to pursue and active (let alone activist) foreign policy. This was also reflected in his initial appointment as Foreign Minister, Petros Moliviatis, an experienced diplomat with long-standing relation with the Karamanlis family who was installed to ensure that foreign policy would not harm the domestic political climate and turn public opinion against the government. It has to be said that the one period of a more highly visible and more proactive foreign policy occurred under the Foreign Ministry of Dora Bakogianni who did not feel as constrained by the premiership of Kostas Karamanlis in trying to unlock some of the issues plaguing Greece.

The election of PASOK in 2009 did not result in a difference in the area of personality. Even though George Papandreou held the office of Foreign Minister alongside the Premiership, he did not have the time to deal with foreign policy because of the looming financial crisis. It was indicative that his deputy and ultimately successor, Dimitris Droutsas was neither a PASOK MP, or experienced in high-level diplomacy. It came as no surprise that he was replaced in the first Papandreou government reshuffle, having no party or public support, or from within the ministry he led. Essentially, if foreign policy matters, then personality and leadership, as well as strong processes of decision-making are prerequisites. Of course, all of this has now been overshadowed by the ever growing financial crisis.

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