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From Ideas to Policies: Greek Analysis on the Cold War and the Balkans, 1943-1989

LSE Ideas

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The presentation focused on the four main strategies, or schools of thought, that emerged in Greek foreign policy-making during the Cold War. The speaker tried to sketch the intellectual preconditions of Greece's Cold War policies: the ways in which policy-makers in Athens understood the world and tried to adjust to it.

The first strategy was an early concept of a post-war antagonism between the Soviet East and the West. It was put forward in July 1943 by Georgios Papandreou, the leader of the Democratic Socialist Party. Papandreou stressed that Germany's defeat would entail the expansion of Soviet control in Eastern Europe. He noted that the Soviet Union was radically different compared to older European Great Powers with hegemonic ambitions: firstly, the Soviet Union was a colossal power, which united two expansionist ideals, Pan Slavism and Communism; secondly, Communism gave Moscow a worldwide moral and political appeal. Papandreou believed that this formidable power should be resisted by a defence organization, which would unite 'Liberal Anglosaxonism', Nationalist China and a 'Socialist Paneuropa', 'so that Russia will remain a material threat and not a moral force, a menace, not a hope'. Papandreou became the Prime Minister of the Greek government-in-exile in April 1944; in December 1944 he led the pro-western forces in the battle of Athens against the Greek Communist Party, a conflict which determined the retention of Greece in the West.

The second strategy was an effort to respond to the dramatic emergency of the civil war. It was projected by Ambassador Panayiotis Pipinelis, the Permanent Under-secretary of the Foreign Ministry in 1947-9; it involved an emphasis on crude realism, and aimed to resist the climate of panic which prevailed in the country during the last phase of the Greek civil war. According to Pipinelis, technology and economic growth ensured that the large states would become more powerful and the smaller states would be left increasingly behind; ideology, which had provided for hope during the war, proved to be an instrument of power politics and of national policy, rather than anything else. In this context, Greece had become a frontline state, which had to accept its dependence on the larger Western powers.

The end of the civil war, thus, did not solve the problem of devising a convincing long-term strategy for the post-war era. This emerged in the mid-1950s and became dominant, with the parenthesis of the 1967-74 military dictatorship, until the late 1970s. The new strategy was implemented mainly by the leaders of the Greek Centre-right, such as Constantinos Karamanlis and Evangelos Averoff-Tossizza, but was also shared by the Centre governments in 1963-67. It focused on geographical realities, mostly on the prime problem of Greece's physical distance from the hard cores of the Western world. Exactly because of this problem of geographical separation, the search for security involved the employment of various means, military, political and diplomatic, in order to create a system of credible deterrence. However, the most important manifestation of the new policy was the emphasis to European institutions, as a means to ensure Greece's full integration in the West. Greece became the first country to attain associate membership of the EEC in 1961, and in 1979 the Treaty of its Accession to the European Communities was signed.

The fourth strategy was put forward in the 1970s and 1980s by Andreas Papandreou, the head of the new Socialist party. For Papandreou, the Cold War was not the most important element of post-war international affairs. He accepted the view that there was a different dominant cleavage, between the capitalist 'metropole', which exploited the 'periphery' to which Greece itself belonged. Thus, for Andreas the major aim was to restore national independence; without this, the American neo-colonialist capitalist metropolis would never allow the country to move to real democracy. Andreas Papandreou came to power in 1981, riding on a wave of anti-Americanism and nationalism. However, by the early 1980s he accepted Greece's western orientation, thus leading to the emergence of a new consensus in Greek foreign policy. The pivotal moment for this process was the summer of 1983, when the Papandreou government definitely accepted the country's membership to the European Communities and also signed a new agreement for the retention of US bases on Greek soil.

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