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## *Europe and the Impasse of Centre-Left Politics in Turkey: Lessons from the Greek Experience*

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## Abstract

This paper aims to explore the state of centre-left politics in Greece and Turkey by focusing on the transformation of the two leading centre-left parties in the two countries, the Greek Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima-PASOK) and the Turkish Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP). Such a comparison is warranted for a number of reasons, despite size discrepancy and religious differences between the two countries. Both Greece and Turkey emerged from the Ottoman Empire and share to a considerable degree a legacy of uneasy modernisation. PASOK has succeeded in ruling Greece for more than twenty years. While the party emerged in the 1970s with nationalist, anti-imperialist third-worldist elements, it was able to gradually move to the centre of the political spectrum and become a trigger of political reform. This process peaked during the Simitis administration, in which Greece regained its lost international prestige as “the European country of the Balkans” and was able to fulfil the economic criteria for its membership in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). While still paying lip service to old slogans and rhetoric, Simitis administration attempted to break old nationalist taboos on issues relating to Greek foreign and security policy. The rapprochement with Turkey had a central position in that respect. This was followed by a redefinition of Greek national interest on a more internationalist basis. While PASOK showed signs of deviation from these policy directions when Simitis stepped down, the Simitis era became an ample example of how a centre-left party could form a greater winning social alliance, appeal to the winners of globalisation and achieve high economic growth, while not compromising its social justice agenda. The comparison of PASOK and CHP can provide useful conclusions for the reform steps which could bring Turkish centre left to the front stage of Turkish politics. To be successful social democratic parties need to become responsive to political and economic developments and readjust their strategies. On the economic side, finding solutions on how to achieve higher rates of economic growth and fairer distribute the national income is the true crux of centre-left politics today. Widening the political agenda, increasing electoral appeal beyond disenfranchised political groups towards the political centre and expanding their political programme beyond redistribution issues to address economic development and growth are some useful implications of the policy. Strong commitment to democratic values and embracing immigrants and minorities, which form a substantial part of the disenfranchised in contemporary Western societies, is also imperative. Adopting a more tolerant approach towards diverse cultures not only befits social democratic ideals but also proves to be a smart political strategy. This can assure the leading role of social democratic parties in the changing conditions of European politics.

## Introduction

This study aims to explore the state of centre-left politics in Greece and Turkey by focusing on the transformation of the two leading centre-left parties in the two countries, the Greek Panhellenic Socialist Movement (*Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima*-PASOK) and the Turkish Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*-CHP). Such a comparison is warranted for a number of reasons, despite size discrepancy and religious differences between the two countries. Both Greece and Turkey emerged from the Ottoman Empire and share to a considerable degree a legacy of top-down and crisis-ridden modernisation. In both countries, a reformist and an underdog culture clashed, and modernisation is the product of the compromise between the two. In the case of Greece, PASOK has succeeded in ruling Greece for more than twenty years. While the party emerged in the 1970s with nationalist, anti-imperialist third-worldist elements, it was able to gradually move to the centre of the political spectrum and become a trigger of political reform. This process peaked during the Simitis administration, in which Greece regained its lost international prestige as “the European country of the Balkans” and was able to fulfil the economic criteria for its membership in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). While still paying lip service to old slogans and rhetoric, Simitis administration attempted to break old nationalist taboos on issues relating to Greek foreign and security policy. The rapprochement with Turkey had a central position in that respect. This was followed by a redefinition of Greek national interest on a more internationalist basis. While PASOK showed signs of deviation from these policy directions when Simitis stepped down, the Simitis era became an ample example of how a centre-left party could form a greater winning social alliance, appeal to the winners of globalisation and achieve high economic growth, while not compromising its social justice agenda. In the case of CHP, the party increasingly distanced itself from its social democratic legacy. Failing to win political power, it was trapped into a defensive nationalist, anti-globalisation and anti-reformist political agenda spearheaded by the question of secularism. The consolidation of Turkish democracy and the promotion of human and minority rights lost their significance, and the CHP emerged as Turkey's leading nationalist and anti-reform party, questioning the country's European vocation and being willing to tolerate military interventions into Turkish politics. The diminution of the CHP into a party of the “secularist middle class” has deprived it of any chances to lead a winning social coalition and lead Turkey's political reform. This article will seek conclusions on the future of centre-left politics in South-eastern Europe based on the Greek and Turkish experience.

### **Europeanization and the Transformation of Centre-Left Politics in Greece**

The experience of German-Italian-Bulgarian occupation and an ensuing bitter civil war shaped Cold War Greek domestic politics. Between 1946 and 1949 Greece suffered a bloody and destructive civil war between the state army and the communist insurgents who aspired to turn Greece into a socialist republic. The victory of the state forces in 1949 irrevocably positioned Greece in the Western camp and set the framework in which the Greek political system would operate in the following decades. The establishment of a pro-Western illiberal democratic regime by the civil war winners through the 1952 Constitution allowed for the persecution of communist intelligentsia, the polarisation of Greek society and the marginalisation of the Greek left. The threat of communist subversion served as pretext for severe compromises in fundamental and political rights and the operation of para-state organisations operating beyond the rule of law. This trend was facilitated by the general Cold War climate in countries of Southern Europe. When social democratic or centrist parties rose to government, the military and bureaucratic establishment spearheaded by the Palace refused to surrender the full control of the country. The crisis of July 1965 between Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou, leader of the Centre Union, and King Constantine II sparked a political crisis which led to the coup of 21 April 1967. This coup meant even harsher persecution of leftist political thought and interrupted the process of Greece's accession to the EEC. The resumption of the EEC accession process became the work of the Greek centre-right. After the fall of the junta in 1974, Greece's EEC accession became the primary task of the Karamanlis government. In this, however, Karamanlis enjoyed no support from the centre-left. Greek socialist and leftist parties –with the exception of the small KKE Esoterikou– failed to grasp the peculiar character of the European Economic Community. Following a line reminiscent of postcolonial third-worldist states, they fully objected to Greece's accession seeing such a development as a subordination of Greek sovereignty and national interests to Western European business interests. In particular, PASOK and KKE vehemently opposed Greece's accession to the EEC. Andreas Papandreou, as an opposition leader, vehemently objected to the process and vowed to withdraw Greece from EEC once elected. It was only after the rise of PASOK into power with the elections of 18 October 1981 that Papandreou abandoned his anti-EEC rhetoric and accepted the integration of Greece into the EEC. This did not mean that Greece immediately became a functional EEC member. Pursuance of narrowly-defined national interests and strengthened the case of a Greek exceptionalism.

Throughout the 1980s Greece was considered by many to be the “bête noire” of the Community.<sup>1</sup>

With the exception of the 1989-1993 interlude, PASOK governments under Andreas Papandreou and Konstantinos Simitis led Greece’s steps inside the European Union from 1981 to 2004. While many would argue that, due to Papandreou’s populist policies, Greece lost a crucial chance in the 1980s to modernise its state and economy with EEC aid following the example of other poorer member states such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland, Greece’s democratic consolidation was secured through EEC membership. In his second administration from 1993 until 1995, a Papandreou did show a more pro-European stance, although he was not able to follow the cataclysmic developments in Europe. Its relapse to an old-fashioned nationalist stance appeased the public opinion but had considerable consequences regarding Greece’s international image and regional role. It was his successor Konstantinos Simitis who assumed powers in January 1996 that overcame the nationalist legacy of Andreas Papandreou and addressed Greek national interests through the acceleration of Greece’s European integration. Simitis achieved against the backdrop of the most serious crisis in Greek-Turkish relations since 1974. A sovereignty dispute over the islets of Imia/Kardak brought the two countries to the brink of armed conflict in January 1996. This comprised the first challenge to the Simitis administration only a few days after coming to power.

The Imia/Kardak crisis underlined the need for an urgent reconfiguration of Greek strategic objectives. Setting the target of membership in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and Greece’s membership in the “hard core” of the European Union, Simitis turned Greek centre-left into the avant-garde of Greek EU federalism and put the ND, the party which had spearheaded the process in the 1970s, into an awkward position. By providing Greece with a new strategic vision called “*strong Greece*” (*ischyri Ellada*) which projected the country as “a European country of the Balkans and not as a Balkan country of Europe,” a leader of the economic and political reform process in Southeastern Europe and a strong supporter of the European integration of all neighbouring states. Simitis argued that a “strong Greece” could only be possible with a strong Greek economy. This required a radical departure from PASOK’s distributionist legacy, fiscal discipline, control of inflation, structural reform including privatisation, as well as introduction of the Euro. In a speech at the Greek Parliament, Simitis outlined the main pillars of his policy as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> George Pagoulatos, "Believing in National Exceptionalism: Ideas and Economic Divergence in Southern Europe", *West European Politics*, Vol. 27, no. 1 (2004), pp. 55-57

... Our equal participation in the process of European integration. This provides the means so our country can meet the challenge of globalisation, be competitive, support self-sustained development and improve living conditions....The modernisation of the country, changes in the way our society operates to create more opportunities and capabilities for citizens..... to achieve more social justice and cohesion....Our leading role in the Balkans. This is the way to offset our geographic isolation from the centres of the European Union....And, finally, the defence of our national causes and rights.....

The voice of the Greek government is prestigious and persuasive. We have proved that through hard, systematic and effective work, Greece can claim the position it deserves in Greece.....We are no more the country of deficits, retrogression, of Hellenocentric isolationist self-reflection. We have proved that we are not a country which constantly asks for understanding for its special conditions and argues on the basis of its underdevelopment.....<sup>2</sup>

This strategic vision comprised a radical departure from the third-worldist PASOK legacy of the 1970s and 1980s and brought the party much closer to the policy framework which characterised European social democratic parties in the aftermath of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Greek economic elites were assigned the task of leading regional economic integration by gaining key influence in the economies of Greece's economic hinterland. This new strategic role necessitated the acceleration and completion of Europeanisation reforms within Greece which had been delayed for years due to domestic political reasons. More significantly the government achieved the entrance of Greece into the Euro-zone in 1999 and contributed to a historic improvement of Greek-Turkish relations. Significant improvements in the legal protection of minority and immigrant rights were also to be noted. The infamous Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code which allowed for the stripping of minority members from their Greek citizenship was abolished.<sup>4</sup> In the field of economic policy, a clear shift from previous PASOK policies was noted. Fiscal discipline was furthered and privatisation gained pace.<sup>5</sup> A rally in the Athens stock exchange was indicative of strong economic and social optimism.

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<sup>2</sup> Konstantinos Simitis, "Speech to the Plenary Session of the Hellenic Parliament on the 1998 Budget", 21/12/1997

<sup>3</sup> Michalis Spourdalakis and Chrisanthos Tassis, "Party Change in Greece and the Vanguard Role of PASOK", *South European Society & Politics*, Vol. 11, no. 3-4 (2006), pp. 503-04

<sup>4</sup> Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "On the Europeanization of Minority Rights Protection: Comparing the Cases of Greece and Turkey", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 13, no. 1 (2008), pp. 28-29

<sup>5</sup> George Pagoulatos, "The Politics of Privatisation: Redrawing the Public-Private Boundary", *West European Politics*, Vol. 28, no. 2 (2005), pp. 371-76

This marked a clear departure from older PASOK policies which prioritised statist economic policies over privatisation and assimilation over minority and immigrant rights.

This is not to say that there were no shortcomings in the political performance of the Simitis administration. Its utter failure to implement the long-needed and planned reform of the social security system,<sup>6</sup> accomplish the economic recovery and privatisation of virtually bankrupt state-controlled companies such as the Olympic Airways moderated the success of the Simitis' government. The PASOK government proved unable to make hard but necessary decisions to deal with the needed structural reforms of Greek economy. The social security reform was extensively discussed in the late 1990s, but the proposed reform measures were shelved as soon as they would meet fierce reaction from labour unions and public opinion including a large part of the electoral base of PASOK. Last but not least, corruption charges which became increasingly strong in the late years of the Simitis administration reduced the popularity of PASOK and paved the ground for a wide ND victory in the 2004 elections. These outline the limits of PASOK's transformation<sup>7</sup> but should not occlude the major steps made which had a crucial effect on the Europeanisation of Greek economic and foreign policy.

The centre-left maintained a dominant position in Greek politics from 1981 until 2004. However, this became possible due to its responsiveness to the new international and domestic political circumstances. Despite its anti-Western, anti-imperialist rhetoric of the 1970s, PASOK was able to realise that the Greek national interest was full and effective participation in the European Economic Community. In the 1990s, when Greece got entangled in a serious domestic political crisis and looked like a part of the Balkan problem rather than a part of its solution, it was PASOK again under the Simitis administration which failed to fall prey to nationalist and populist sirens and put forward Greece's full participation in the European Economic and Monetary Union. This adaptability was a crucial element for the dominant position of the Greek centre left and could be attributed to the foresight of its

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Featherstone, Georgios Kazamias and Dimitris Papadimitriou, "The Limits of External Empowerment: Greece, EMU and Pension Reform", *Political Studies*, Vol. 49, no. 3 (2001), pp. 471-74

<sup>7</sup> On the same question regarding the whole country, see Kevin Featherstone and Dimitris Papadimitriou, *The Limits of Europeanization: Reform Capacity and Policy Conflict in Greece* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

leaders. PASOK was able to increase its appeal to more educated and richer segments of the Greek society.<sup>8</sup>

Leadership of the Greek centre-left was one of the main reasons for its successful transformations. Both Andreas Papandreou and Konstantinos Simitis were able to foresee the country's –and the party's– long term interest and distance themselves from declared political promises which would forestall Greece's European integration. Despite the disappointment of a part of the PASOK's electoral base and membership, both leaders were able to further their pro-integration agenda. This allowed the party to successfully adapt to the changes brought about by the end of the Cold War, globalisation and European integration. Dealing with the question of nationalism was also of paramount importance. In the early PASOK years, Andreas Papandreou had maintained a nationalist stance in all Greek foreign policy issues repeating that "Greece belongs to the Greeks" and that national sovereignty and independence are foundation pillars of PASOK's policy. The Simitis administration distanced itself radically from that legacy. While still paying lip service to old slogans and rhetoric, Simitis administration attempted to break old nationalist taboos on issues relating to Greek foreign and security policy. The rapprochement with Turkey had a central position in that respect. In the 1999 European Council summit in Helsinki, Greece lifted its objections to Turkey's gaining EU candidate status, in return for setting a framework which could facilitate the resolution of both the Cyprus question and the bilateral Greek-Turkish disputes by 2004. This fundamental shift of Greek foreign policy regarding EU-Turkey relations was followed by a redefinition of Greek national interest. Greek national interest vis-a-vis neighbours was no more understood in zero-sum game terms. Greece aspired to assist the development, stability and European integration of its neighbours aiming to benefit from the fruits of that development as a key regional economic player, as well as from the "peace dividend," the national resources which could be diverted from defence expenditures as a result of the resolution of long-standing conflicts.

### **The Peculiarities of Centre-Left Politics in Turkey: The Historical Context**

The 1970s constitutes a useful starting point for a comparative analysis of the contrasting fortunes of centre-left politics in Greece and Turkey. The CHP reached the peak of its electoral success under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit in the elections of 1974. The CHP

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<sup>8</sup> Ilias Nicolacopoulos, "Elections and Voters, 1974-2004: Old Cleavages and New Issues", *West European Politics*, Vol. 28, no. 2 (2005), p. 277



emerged as the dominant partner in the coalition governments of the late 1970s. Yet, this unusual success proved to be short-lived. The late 1970s was a highly unstable era in Turkish politics. A major economic and political crisis in the late 1970s peaked with the military coup of September 1980 which led to the exclusion of the CHP from Turkish politics. The 1970s also constitutes an interesting era in terms of highlighting the contrasting Europeanization experiences of the two countries, as well as similarities in the policies of PASOK and CHP. PASOK during this period was firmly against Greek membership of the European Community, which was identified with Western imperialist and capitalist interests. Yet unlike in the Greek case, CHP opposition exacted a toll on EEC-Turkey relations. In October 1978, the Ecevit government froze EEC-Turkey relations exactly at the time Greece was speeding up its efforts for full EEC membership. The 1980 coup dealt the strongest blow against EEC-Turkey relations and led to the suspension of the Europeanization process in Turkey.

The 1980s and the 1990s represented an era of increasing decline and marginalization of social democracy in Turkey. During this period, even though centre-left parties participated in different coalition governments at certain times, they progressively lost their electoral support, class alliances and linkages with society. This process reached a climax with the 1999 parliamentary elections, in which the CHP failed to reach the 10 percent electoral threshold and found itself outside the Parliament.

At the heart of the steady decline and marginalization of the CHP during the 1990s was the impact of 1980 coup on Turkish social democracy.<sup>9</sup> The closure of the established political parties of the pre-1980 era including the CHP by the interim military government and its anti-democratic and national security-based strategy to de-politicize society together have generated a negative impact on centre-left politics. Increasing splits within the centre-left have also contributed to the CHP's decline. Particularly striking in this context was the challenge posed by the emergence of the Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Partisi-DSP*) under the leadership of the CHP's previous leader, Bülent Ecevit, as a more nationalistically inclined alternative. This has constituted a major split on the centre-left axis of Turkish politics, resulting in the fragmentation of the social democratic vote. The reduction of social democratic politics into intra-party politics of the CHP and the failure of the party to respond effectively to the strong societal demands for social justice and participation have caused both the growing detachment of Turkish social democracy from society and the increasing

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<sup>9</sup> Ergun Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation* (Boulder CO & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000)

disenchantment of society towards the identity and ideology of the CHP. In this period, politics of the centre-left has been increasingly reduced to a contest over leadership and power politics within the party.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in addition to the major splits in the centre-left during the 1980s and the 1990s, what we observe is a serious decline in the credibility and persuasiveness of the centre-left to present itself as a viable solution to the serious structural problems of the Turkish society.

The post-1980 period has, in fact, given rise to a serious crisis of state-centrism; “the legitimacy once enjoyed has been withdrawn in the eyes of the Turkish society at large, its democracy deficit has steadily increased, the national developmentalism has been seriously challenged and replaced by neo-liberal economic rationality.”<sup>11</sup> Its secular national identity has been criticized and attacked by the resurgence of Islam. Its homogenous vision of society has been challenged in ethnic terms by the rise of the Kurdish question. Its top-down mode of governing has been exposed to calls for democratization from civil society organizations and civil initiatives, and its uni-dimensional, security-based foreign policy has become inadequate in coping effectively with the increasingly complex and multi-dimensional international challenges.<sup>12</sup>

Since the 1980s and especially during the 1990s, both the changing international context, described as the processes of globalization, and radical transformations that have been occurring in Turkish society together have generated important challenges to the state-centric Turkish modernization, dismantling its very foundations and leading to its gradual demise. The changing nature of Turkish modernization and its ever increasing exposure to

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<sup>10</sup> Hasan Bülent Kahraman, *Sosyal Demokrasi Düşüncesi ve Türkiye Pratiği* (İstanbul: SODEV, 2003) and Suat Kınıklıoğlu, "The Democratic Left Party: Kapıkulu Politics *Par Excellence*", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2002), pp. 4-24 and Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, "The Republican People's Party", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2002), pp. 102-21

<sup>11</sup> Çağlar Keyder, "Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s" in Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1997), pp. 37-51

<sup>12</sup> On this, see Fuat Keyman, *Türkiye ve Radikal Demokrasi* (İstanbul: Alfa, 2001) and Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1998).

globalization constitute the historical basis for the decline of the CHP in terms of its social support, its ideological persuasiveness, and its organic ties with society.<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, the CHP's failure to cross the threshold in 1999 elections turned out to be a blessing-in-disguise as the party escaped scorn for the 2001 economic crisis, which severely hit Turkey's established political parties. In the November 2002 elections, the CHP could not match the electoral success of the Justice and Development Party, the AKP, a new centre-right party of Islamist origin, but nevertheless, became the only opposition party to enter the Parliament.<sup>14</sup> In the post-election period the fortunes of the two principal parties, the AKP and the CHP, diverged even further. In contrast to the pro-active stance adopted by the ruling party, the AKP, on Turkey's key political issue such as relations with the European Union, the attitude of CHP leadership appeared largely defensive and negative. Certainly, there was a false expectation on the part of key CHP figures that the AKP, given its Islamist heritage, would sooner or later find itself in confrontation with the state elites resulting in its ultimate closure as was the case with its predecessors the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*-RP) and the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*-FP). Once the AKP was out of the way with the help of the state, the CHP, as the main opposition party would establish itself as the natural party of government, a mentality rather reminiscent of the single-party based inter-War era and clearly reflecting the historical legacy of this particular period. Certainly, one could detect a failure here on the part of the CHP to recognize the adaptability and the learning process experienced by moderate Islamists in Turkey, as well the transformation of the Turkish society since the 1980s.

In contrast to the very cosmopolitanism of the AKP, the CHP appeared to pursue a hyper-nationalist course. For instance, the party strongly opposed any kind of internationally acceptable solution to the Cyprus dispute. A similar nationalist attitude was also evident in the CHP's lukewarm approach towards the democratization reforms. In its position on democratization, the party elites have tended to establish causality between democracy and secularism which resulted in recognizing the military as a necessary guardian of the state against possible violation of the principle of secularism. Whilst the commitment of the CHP

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<sup>13</sup> Fuat Keyman and Ziya Öniş, "Globalization and Social Democracy in the European Periphery: Paradoxes of the Turkish Experience", *Globalizations*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (2007), pp. 211-28

<sup>14</sup> Ali Çarkoğlu, "Turkey's November 2002 Elections: A New Beginning?", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, Vol. 6, no. 4 (2002), pp. 30-41 and Ziya Öniş and E. F. Keyman, "Turkey at the Polls: A New Path Emerges", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, no. 2 (2003), pp. 95-107

to secularism was well-founded, its strict or hard-line interpretation of secularism hardly left any avenue for democratic opening in the direction of extending the realm of politics for religious freedoms. In CHP's view, democracy was conditioned by secularism and not vice versa. The party missed an important opportunity to present a major challenge to the ruling party by prioritizing a narrow understanding of secularism over democracy.

Hence, the dominant vision of the CHP in public mind and in key international circles was that of a defensive, inward-looking party that lacked the kind of democratic and reformist credentials to tackle Turkey's serious economic and political challenges. Ironically, the conservative position adopted by the CHP on key domestic and foreign policy issues resulted in its legitimacy problem. This, in turn, has helped to increase the AKP's societal and international support leading to the aggravation of the asymmetry in the electoral fortunes of the two parties. Moreover, what was also striking was the lack of concern on the part of the CHP with the economic domain, centring its attention instead entirely on cultural, political and security-related issues with a heavy focus on secularism and the Cyprus issues. With respect to these two central issues, the position adopted by the party was quite unconstructive and clearly failed to take into account the changing public opinion. On the Cyprus issue, for example, the party's position was to protect national sovereignty at any cost. Nevertheless its notions of national interest, sovereignty and security appeared to be seriously outdated. Definitely, there was no attempt to take into account changing public opinion on this issue, notably the outcome of the elections in northern Cyprus itself that clearly signalled popular demands in the direction of an internationally acceptable solution. It was also interesting that as a social democratic alternative, the party failed to place key issues such as the performance of local government and the need to fight endemic corruption as its central priorities. Consequently, the governing party, the AKP, was able to capitalize on the vacuum and occupy the space left open by its principal opponent regarding such key political and economic issues. The outcome of these strategic errors was to marginalize the CHP even further in the electoral process both in the municipal elections of 2004 and the general election of 2007.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sinan Ciddi, "The Republican People's Party and the 2007 General Elections: The Politics of Perpetual Decline?", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, no. 3 (2008), pp. 437-55

## **Explaining the Current Impasse of Social Democratic Politics in Turkey: The Problem of Path Dependence and the Role of Agency**

The current impasse of social democracy in Turkey is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and the collective outcome of several influences. Certainly, the current stance of the CHP reflects the legacies of the single party era of the inter-war period. The CHP of the early Kemalist era was closely associated with a certain mode of top-down, state-centric mode of modernization based on a particular understanding of “secularism” and “national identity.”<sup>16</sup> This historical association with the Kemalist modernization project has had the unfortunate repercussion of making it rather insensitive to demands for “recognition” on the basis of religious or ethnic identity. Indeed, the party leadership increasingly conceived of its mission as stabilizing or protecting the basic founding principles of the Turkish Republic at all cost. Regime stabilization as opposed to electoral success under a normal parliamentary democratic regime emerged as the overriding concern for the party leadership, particularly as we approached the general elections of 2007. The emphasis placed on regime stability also had a parallel influence in terms of contributing to growing Euro-scepticism, in spite of the fact that the party has historically associated with the goal of westernization a natural corollary of which is EU membership. The CHP of the recent era has increasingly been characterized by its “defensive nationalism” which has made it heavily sceptical of EU conditionality on the grounds that some of the key EU-sponsored reforms would undermine the unity and secular character of the Turkish state and contribute towards a dual process of partition of the Turkish state and Islamization of Turkish society.<sup>17</sup>

An increasing requirement of electoral success in contemporary democracies is that political parties of centre-left or of centre-right origin need to extend their horizons beyond class-based politics and appeal to a wide range of interests in order to obtain a large share of the popular vote. Class-based politics or appealing to certain specific segments of society is simply not a good strategy if a political party is at all interested in building successful electoral coalitions.

Historically, the CHP has been rather ineffective in its attempts to build broad, cross-class coalitions. Only in the 1970s, under the Premiership of Bülent Ecevit, did the CHP actually manage to achieve major success in terms of building broad-based societal support.

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<sup>16</sup> Bozdoğan and Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*

<sup>17</sup> Ziya Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists: Political Parties and Paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey ", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 9, no. 3 (2007), pp. 247-61

In the Turkish context, conservative parties of the centre-right have been much more successful in this respect as the successive experiences of the Democratic Party led by Menderes in the 1950s, the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi-AP*) led by Süleyman Demirel in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi-ANAP*) led by Turgut Özal and, finally, the AKP under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan clearly testify. Centre-right parties effectively managed to appeal to both religious and nationalist sentiments of the society at large. They have also managed to make business, both large and small, an integral component of a broad based electoral coalition. The CHP, in contrast, has had limited success even in terms of its attempts to bring small- and medium-sized business interests into the party's electoral coalition. All these factors have sustained an image of an elitist party, a party of bureaucrats and intellectuals, rather detached from the society at large.

Yet another structural influence concerns the nature of the welfare state and the nature of organized labour in Turkey. Unlike its Western European counterparts, the welfare state has been underdeveloped in the Turkish context and unionized labour has constituted a small element of the overall workforce. A significant proportion of the population has been located in rural areas and employed in agricultural activities. All these factors have placed centre-left parties in a disadvantageous position in the Turkish context. In any case, labour unions, which reached the peak of their influence in the 1970s, have been increasingly weakened and marginalized during the post-1980 era of neo-liberal globalization. This, in turn, made the job of an allegedly centre-left party even more difficult. Admittedly, the labour unions have also been on the defensive in Western European democracies during the neo-liberal period. Yet, they continued to be far more influential than has been the case in the Turkish context.

Military coups in Turkey, notably the coup of 1980, have also had a devastating impact in terms of fragmenting and de-institutionalizing the Turkish party system. Arguably, the effects of the 1980 coup on centre-left politics have been more profound compared to its effects on the centre-right. All the major political parties of the pre-1980 era, namely, the AP, the CHP, and the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi-MSP*) have been closed down following the military intervention of September 1980. Furthermore, the leaders of these parties Süleyman Demirel, Bülent Ecevit and Necmettin Erbakan have been banned from participating in active politics for the course of the next decade. This has clearly had the effect of a major rupture or discontinuity in terms of its impact of the institutional evolution and the maturation of the Turkish party system. Yet, the centre-right certainly proved to be far more adaptable with Turgut Özal's ANAP, a natural successor to the AP of the earlier era,

emerging as the leading party in November elections of 1983, following the end of the military interlude and the re-transition to democracy. There is no doubt that centre-left politics was the prime target of military intervention and the ensuing authoritarian Constitution of 1982 provided restricted space for left-wing politics, not only by its vigorous repression in the party political realm but also through the repression of leftist intellectuals and restrictions placed over the activities of organized labour. Centre-left politics in Turkey has been clearly on the defensive during the course of the 1980s and the 1990s. Several parties have emerged which described themselves as centre-left or social democratic, including the leader-dominated party of Bülent Ecevit's DSP and the Social Democratic Populist Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halk Partisi-SHP*) led by Erdal İnönü. Both of these parties managed to become partners in coalition governments at different times, the former between 1999 and 2002 and the former during the early 1990s. But these different manifestations of centre-left politics were able to obtain only around twenty percent of the total vote and have clearly failed in terms of replicating the electoral success of the CHP in the 1970s. Indeed, the CHP itself could only emerge under its conventional name in mid-1990s and once again become an important force in Turkish politics as the principal opposition party as late as in 2002.

Structural explanations and the problem of path-dependence are important, but can only provide part of the explanation. A complete explanation also needs to take into account the role of agency and more specifically the role of leadership. The CHP leadership, in stark contrast to its Greek counterpart, PASOK, failed to break away from the domestic historical legacies and take advantage of the opportunities provided by the global and regional structural context. In the post-2002 context, attempts to move the party in a more cosmopolitan reformist direction by opposition groups led by Kemal Derviş and his associates was marginalized. The attempt of İsmail Cem, a former Foreign Minister and senior member of the DSP to form a reformist centre-left party, the New Turkey Party (YTP) failed to change Turkey's political map. The party had a dismal performance in the November 2002 elections, collecting only 1.2 percent of the vote. Soon after, the party was dissolved, and Cem joined the ranks of the CHP. The tight organizational structure of the party and absence of intra-party democracy facilitated this marginalization process and contributed to the extra-ordinary dominance of the party leader, Deniz Baykal, in the process. To the surprise of many both at home and abroad, the leadership of the AKP proved to be much more flexible and adaptable in its response to the opportunity space provided by the changing domestic, regional and global context.

Turning our attention to the global context, there is no doubt that the process of world-wide neo-liberal restructuring from the early 1980s onwards has left social democratic parties in a difficult position. The possibilities for sustaining the welfare state in its existing form ceased to be a viable alternative even in advanced industrialized countries of Europe. Nevertheless, neo-liberalization globalization also helped to create a sizable group of “winners” which could be effectively incorporated into the broad electoral coalition of a centre-left party. The experiences of “third way” style political parties in Europe such as New Labour under Tony Blair and SPD under Gerhard Schröder demonstrated that social democrats could achieve significant electoral success. The key for this was modification of their strategies which involved an attempt to come to terms with market-friendly strategies and the reform, the redefinition and decentralization of the welfare state and new thinking based on a broader understanding of inequality incorporating its “material “redistribution” and “recognition” dimensions. The prospect of EU membership and the associated set of democratization reforms provided a major opportunity space for a European third way- style social democratic party in Turkey from the late 1990s onwards. The crisis of Turkish modernity and the rising demands for recognition based on Islamic or Kurdish identity as well as the growing strength of the civil society helped to extend this opportunity space. Yet, ironically it was the AKP, a centre-right party of Islamist origin and not the CHP which has effectively capitalized on this new opportunity space.

### **CHP versus PASOK: The Principal Contrasts**

Shifting attitudes regarding modernisation comprise an interesting point of contrast between PASOK and the CHP. According to Diamandouros, Greek modernisation came about as a result of a clash between a reformist and an underdog culture.<sup>18</sup> Western-inspired and willing to break away with tradition, the reformist culture had been represented by secular urban elites throughout the nineteenth century and found in the early twentieth century its best representative in Eleftherios Venizelos. This culture was countered by a culture characterised by a strong belief in redistributionist policies, national exceptionalism, prioritisation of a narrowly-defined national interest and a conspiracy-driven understanding of international politics. This “underdog” culture strongly resonated with dominant public opinion views in

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<sup>18</sup> Nikiforos Diamandouros, *Cultural Dualism and Political Change in Post-Authoritarian Greece [Working Paper 1994/50]* (Madrid: Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, 1994)



the 1970s and shaped PASOK's worldview and political programme.<sup>19</sup> Yet in the course of twenty years, PASOK underwent such a transformation that by the late 1990s it became the staunchest representative of the reformist culture in the Greek context. In the case of Turkey, a similar division could be observed in the early years of Atatürk's reform. The CHP was the reform party *par excellence*, aiming to implement Atatürk's Westernisation programme and sever Turkey's links with its Ottoman and Islamic past. In Turkey the "underdog" culture was represented by forces which opposed Turkey's Westernisation underlining its non-Western identity. This culture was best represented in the "Just Order" political programme of the historic leader of Turkish political Islam Necmettin Erbakan. Yet following the deep socioeconomic changes which Turkey underwent in the 1980s, a reverse process was observed. While a majority current within Turkish political Islam was able to shift from the underdog to the reformist camp, the CHP moved to the reverse direction. It came to represent those elements of Turkey's secularist elite which failed to adapt to the new environment defined by globalisation and Turkey's steps towards European integration. The culmination of Turkey's Westernisation process, namely its EU membership, was seen with outright suspicion, as democratic consolidation also meant the end of tutelary privileges enjoyed by the country's secularist elite. Increasing emphasis on a narrow definition of national interest and defence of the status-quo even at the expense of human rights and social peace did not allude to a social democratic party but rather reminded of the interwar authoritarian statist legacy of the CHP. Thus the CHP ended up appropriating a statist, pro-status-quo version of the underdog culture.

At the risk of oversimplifying, perhaps the most striking difference between the political parties is that PASOK stands as a party of government whereas the CHP can be described as the party of the state. PASOK has been in office for a period of more than twenty years and is used to be a natural candidate for office. In contrast, history of the CHP is characterized by two dramatically different phases. During the single party era, the CHP was the political arm of the Kemalist ruling elite and, hence, the natural party of government. Once the transition to multi-party democracy was accomplished in 1950, the role of the party changed to the position of a quasi-permanent opposition party in a political environment

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<sup>19</sup> The former President of the Hellenic Republic Christos Sartzetakis put this underdog culture in a nutshell when he argued that "Greeks are a brotherless nation (*ethnos anadelfon*)," which heavily resonated with adages commonly referred to in Turkey, such as "There no other friend to the Turk than the Turk (*Türk'e Türk'ten başka dost yoktur*)" or "We look like ourselves (*Biz bize benzeriz*)."

dominated by parties on the centre-right of the political spectrum. It was only in the mid-1970s under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit could the CHP mobilize itself in such a way as to win a large share of the total vote and emerge as the leading party in the country. Even during this unusual era, however, the votes generated were not enough to generate a majority in the Parliament. The CHP found itself in a difficult position of forming a coalition with right-wing parties. Indeed, the period during which the CHP has managed to emerge as a serious contender for political power proved to be short-lived. The economic crisis of the late 1970s and the subsequent military coup of September 1980 embodied disastrous consequences not only for the party itself, but for the social democratic movement in Turkey in general. Arguably, this strange mix of being the natural party of government during a critical phase of Turkish modernization followed by a new role of a quasi-permanent opposition party for most of the post-war has left a deep imprint on the mind-set of the party leadership which perhaps explains the attitudes of Baykal and his associates during the most recent era.

The CHP has identified and presented itself as a left of centre party ever since the 1960s claiming to represent the weak and disadvantaged segments of society. The fact that it became a member of the Socialist International in 1977 also appeared to confirm its social democratic credentials. Yet, the party seemed to be much more concerned about its role as a regime stabiliser, in other words as the guardian of the founding principles of the Turkish Republic, as opposed to a promoter of the interests of the weaker segments of society. As long as the party was able to fulfil its regime-stabilizing function effectively, winning an electoral contest seemed of minor importance. Similarly, from this kind of perspective, a concern with social and economic issues appeared to be of secondary importance at a time when the fundamental building blocks of the regime such as secularism and national sovereignty were confronted with an alleged existentialist threat. This is certainly the kind of perspective that seems to characterize the approach of the CHP under the leadership of Deniz Baykal, especially during the post-2004 era leading up to the general elections of July 2007. As the guardian of the regime, the party leadership also signalled its willingness to tolerate top-down interventions by key components of the state, notably the military and the judiciary, as a means of counteracting what it considered as central threats to the existing constitutional order. Indeed, during this particular era, the overriding perspectives of the military and the CHP elites appeared to be largely indistinguishable. There was no opposition, for example, from the CHP leadership to the so-called “e-intervention” by the military in April 2007 to prevent the election of Abdullah Gül, a leading AKP politician with an Islamist background to

the office of the Presidency. Similarly, the closure case against the governing party, the AKP, in the early months of 2008 following the party's major electoral success in July 2007, was not questioned by the CHP leadership on the basis of its democratic credentials.

Another striking characteristic of the CHP which became more striking during the post-2004 era has been its vocal and single-minded Euro-scepticism. Previously, the position of the CHP was broadly supportive of Turkey's Europeanization drive although it had significant reservations concerning some of the conditions attached to EU membership. During the post-2004 era, however, the party assumed the role of an active opponent of the EU membership process on the grounds that the EU-related reforms enlarged the space for Islamists and Kurdish nationalists in Turkey, hence undermining the very basis of the secular order as well as creating conditions conducive to the partition of the Turkish state. In a rather ironic fashion, the CHP's stance on Europe progressively converged to the position of the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*–MHP), arguably the least friendly segment of the Turkish political system historically to the whole process of EU integration.

It is quite obvious, therefore, that the two members of the Socialist International, PASOK and CHP, occupy widely contrasting positions. PASOK has managed to shed off its heavily nationalistic and Euro-sceptic posture of the 1980s and has established itself as a typical European style social democratic party during the course of Greece's on-going European transformation during the course of the 1990s. PASOK under the leadership of Simitis increasingly resembled social democratic parties of the "third way" vintage that one associates with Blair's New Labour and Schröder's SPD among others. Its commitment to democracy and to EU membership was firmly established and clearly irreversible. Its definition of national interest had changed in a way which made the party much more favourable in its attitude towards globalization. At the same, the party's underlying social agenda, in the context of constraints imposed by an increasingly globalized Greek economy, became a key element which distinguished it from its principal rival, the centre-right, conservative ND. Another positive element of PASOK was that it started to take an active interest in issues such as the reconstruction of the Balkans and the global challenges confronting social democracy. In sharp contrast to its defensive nationalist posture in the early 1980s, PASOK projected the image of an increasingly internationalist social democratic party. The fact that the party's current leader, George Papandreou, has taken an active interest in the

organization, the Socialist Internationalist, by taking over its Presidency provided further confirmation of PASOK's increasingly cosmopolitan and internationalist outlook.

In sharp contrast to PASOK, present day CHP appeared to have little in common with its social democratic counterparts in Europe. Its democratic credentials and European orientation appeared to rest on weak foundations. Social and redistribution issues appeared to be very much a secondary item in the overall list of party's priorities. The way that national interest is defined in a highly restrictive manner renders the party increasingly at unease with globalization. Indeed, one could go even further and claim that the principal rival of the CHP, the AKP, in spite of its conservatism on certain critical issues, appeared to be much more progressive from a social democratic standpoint especially during the early years of its government. Again in strong contrast to both PASOK and the AKP, the CHP's approach to foreign policy was heavily nationalistic. The party displayed very little interest in broader European or global issues extending beyond Turkey's national borders. The fact that the Socialist International was increasingly disenchanted with the CHP's activities reaching to the point where the possibility of expelling the party from the organization altogether was contemplated at some point and that many European socialists felt more at home with the representatives of the AKP provide further testimony to the weak credentials of the CHP in the current conjuncture judged by the standards of European social democratic parties.

### **Lessons of the Greek Experience for the Turkish Context and the Limits of Comparative Analysis**

One of the major lessons of the PASOK experience has been that shifting from distributionist definitions of social justice may indeed not have punitive electoral effects. In fact, it may form the basis of a wider political alliance including the political centre, if it entails a more comprehensive definition of social justice. Social justice was not understood as simply distribution of benefits to the weaker parts of the society or to the party clientele, but was directly linked with policies aiming to promote economic growth and competitiveness, which would allow the implementation of social policy based on created surplus and not debt. This means that a social democratic party need no more be a party of the weak but a party of those who aim to achieve harmonious social and economic development and further social policies, which would not undermine policies aiming to achieve fiscal stability and economic growth. In the case of Greece, improvement of the country's economic performance was achieved

alongside the acceleration of a privatisation programme and increasing integration to global economy.

Moreover, centre-left parties do not need to totally disengage from nationalism, but can contribute to new definitions of national interest, more compatible with globalisation and European integration. Redefining national interest in light of the new political conditions set by the end of the Cold War, Greece's participation in the European Union and the need to promote Europeanisation in the Balkans allowed PASOK to divert Greek nationalism from longstanding regional disputes to the vision of a new "strong Greece," willing to share its political stability and economic prosperity with its neighbours and base its leading regional role on these. Greek national interest was understood in "win-win" terms with the country's neighbours. This facilitated efforts for the resolution of long-standing disputes.

The profound transformation of PASOK notably during the course of the 1990s contains some interesting implications for the current Turkish experience. The first lesson is that the on-going Europeanization process constitutes a powerful dynamic force which also helps to transform a heavily nationalistic, inward-oriented and defensive social democratic movement to a more globalization-friendly, Western European style social democratic movement over time. Hence, the current state of the CHP does not necessarily represent a long-term, sustainable equilibrium position. At the same time, however, change is a slow and highly painful process, and the PASOK experience is quite striking in this respect in the sense that resistance has continued, even though Greece joined the European Community at a relatively early stage in 1981. The second major lesson is that structural factors alone are unable to account for this change. Leadership matters. It was the critical leadership of Simitis which was instrumental in the transformation of Greek social democracy which, in turn, played an extremely critical and constructive role in the adaptation of the Greek economy and political system to European norms in the late 1990s. This suggests that Turkey may also experience a similar phase in the future where a leadership change in the CHP could play a significant transformative role. The third broad lesson is that social democracy contributed to the European transformation process of Greece and at the same it has also been transformed itself as part of the on-going Europeanization dynamic. This implies that social democracy becomes both a subject and object of democratization. Clearly, these broad lessons create a certain bias towards optimism concerning the future trajectories of social democracy and the Europeanization process in Turkey.

At the same time, however, one ought to be aware of the fact that there are certain limits to the possible lessons one could draw from the Greek experience for the Turkish context. Social democracy in Greece has been able to capitalize on the fact that Greece has historically a much more homogenous social structure than Turkey. Greece's defeat in the 1919-1922 Greek-Turkish war led to territorial losses and a population exchange which left it smaller but very homogeneous. Cleavages in Turkey along the lines of ethnic and religious identity in the Turkish context have remained far more pronounced. These cleavages, in turn render the task of any social democratic party in Turkey far more problematic than is the case in Greece. Despite the key role of the Orthodox Church in Greek political life, secularisation and the role of religion in the Greek public sphere have not comprised ground for contestation as in the case of Turkey. Similarly, the minority problem in the Turkish context, notably but not exclusively in relation to the identity claims of the sizeable Kurdish minority in Turkish society, has no direct counterpart in the Greek context. Immigration into Greece and the associated problem of integrating minorities into the main fabric of Greek society has emerged as an important social and political problem since the end of the Cold War. Yet, the problem is clearly not comparable in terms of its scale and intensity to the problem of integrating minorities and notably the Kurdish minority in the Turkish context.

Yet another issue that makes a comparison between PASOK and CHP somewhat problematic concerns the differences in the Europeanization experiences of the two countries. The fact that Greece attained Community at a relatively early stage in 1981 provided a conducive environment for the transformation of centre-left politics in Greece. In Turkey, the Europeanization process and the question of EU membership has remained a hotly contested issue. Furthermore, Turkey's European identity continues to be a matter of intense debate in public deliberations as is clearly evident from the recent constitutional debate and the ensuing stalemate. The decision to include or exclude Turkey is part and parcel of a parallel debate on the future course of the European integration project itself. Clearly such debates have negative repercussions in Turkey itself contributing to the process whereby elements of the anti-EU and anti-reform elements gain an upper hand, and pro-EU and pro-reform elements finding themselves very much on the defensive. Indeed, following a golden age period of 2002-2005, the Europeanization process in Turkey appears to be at a stalemate and this provides a rather unattractive milieu for the kind of transformation of CHP along the lines of a European style social democratic party replicating the past experience of PASOK in the process. Parallel to

the relative weakness of the Europeanization process, the fact that democracy is still far from being fully consolidated and the continuing importance of the military in Turkish politics represent major hurdles on the path of social democratic transformation in the Turkish context.

Added to the comparative weakness of the momentum and depth of the Europeanization process in the Turkish context, the current European and global context also provide a less favourable environment for the transformation of social democratic politics in Turkey. Third-way style European social democratic parties in Europe have been very much on the defensive in recent years and have been losing the electoral stronghold which they had managed to establish across Western Europe in the late 1990s. The parties in question have been experiencing a structural problem in the sense that constructing electoral coalitions which include both winners and losers of the globalization have become progressively more difficult. In an environment of rising unemployment and fears of immigration, social democratic parties faced growing competition from far-left as well as right-wing populist parties, as the recent German experience clearly testifies with the SPD being forced into a coalition with Christian Democrats. Similar structural problems have manifested themselves in the Greek context and have led to the breakdown of the electoral dominance of PASOK since 2004. In the early years of George Papandreou's administration, PASOK proved unable to defend Simitis' legacy and suffered severe electoral losses both to its left and right. This was underlined in the September 2007 parliamentary elections, when the ND scored an easy victory by collecting 41.83 percent, while PASOK collected only 38.1 percent, almost 2.5 percent less than in the 2004 elections. The current global economic crisis will make the job of any social democratic party especially in terms of pursuing a redistribution based social policy agenda exceedingly difficult. Even if such parties manage to win elections as a reaction to the failures of the existing parties in government, the scope for success will be considerably restricted compared to the much more favourable global liquidity environment which ruled during the early part of the decade. All these considerations suggest that the PASOK-style transformation of the CHP could be a much more painful and lengthy process, given the constraints imposed by the current European and international context.

### **Concluding Observations: Looking Towards the Future**

The comparison of PASOK and CHP can provide useful conclusions for the reform steps which could bring Turkish centre left to the front stage of Turkish politics. To be successful

social democratic parties need to become responsive to political and economic developments and readjust their strategies. On the economic side, finding solutions on how to achieve higher rates of economic growth and fairer distribute the national income is the true crux of centre-left politics today. Widening the political agenda, increasing electoral appeal beyond disenfranchised political groups towards the political centre and expanding their political programme beyond redistribution issues to address economic development and growth are some useful implications of the policy. Strong commitment to democratic values and embracing immigrants and minorities, which form a substantial part of the disenfranchised in contemporary Western societies, is also imperative. Adopting a more tolerant approach towards diverse cultures not only befits social democratic ideals but also proves to be a smart political strategy. This can assure the leading role of social democratic parties in the changing conditions of European politics.

In particular, the experience of PASOK is a telling example of how social democratic parties in the era of globalization can display resilience to change and display unusual adaptive capacity to changing environments at the same time. PASOK displayed elements of strong defensive nationalism which also had a counter-productive effect on Greece's integration to the European Community in the 1980s at a time when Greece had already become a full-member of the community. Under the new leadership of Simitis, however, the party was able to transform its outlook. PASOK's transformation under Simitis involved a new understanding of the national which was much more in tune with globalization. The new and transformed PASOK displayed a strong commitment to democratic values and a more multicultural approach based on a novel understanding of the weak and the poor which included minorities and immigrants. The PASOK experience also clearly highlights the fact that an effective social agenda continues to be an integral element of contemporary social democracy. Yet, social agenda cannot simply be reduced to class-based redistribution from capital to labour. The recognition element also constitutes a key element of a broader understanding of redistribution. The PASOK experience also highlights of how a social democratic party was both transformed by the on-going Europeanization process and also became a leading contributor to the deepening of the Europeanization process. These observations could generate a certain degree of optimism concerning the current impasse of centre-left politics in Turkey and suggest that the present stalemate does not necessarily represent a permanent or sustainable equilibrium.



Turning to the Turkish context, the CHP of the post-2002 era is rather reminiscent of PASOK in the late 1970s, whereas it was the ruling party, the AKP, which in spite of its strong conservative roots, displayed the kind of adaptability to changing domestic and external conditions, displaying significant parallels with the transformed PASOK of the 1990s. There are signs, however, that things might change in the Turkish context as well. The new phase of Turkish politics from the general elections of July 2007 leading to the municipal elections of March 2009 might contain the seeds of significant change. During the final months of 2008, the CHP leadership has given signs that it could acknowledge the need for change and recognize that an effective strategy to promote secularism and national unity could not be achieved on the basis of repression of religious and ethnic identities. Engagement and dialogue are much better recipes for overcoming the current polarized state of Turkish politics and Turkish society. At a time when the AKP has lost much of its reformist dynamism and its strong pro-European orientation, the beginnings of change on the CHP front suggest that the CHP might also go through a PASOK-line transformation over time and establish itself as a major force in Turkey's revitalized Europeanization process. The obstacles on the path of such transformation, both domestic and external, are quite formidable and change, if it ever takes place, will be a lengthy and protracted process.

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