

EUROPA FORUM WACHAU (AUSTRIA),June,16 2012

Paper presented

by Ambassador (Ad hon) Alexandros Mallias,

Special Advisor to ELIAMEP (Athens)

On Sunday ,as Greeks are massively going to cast their vote I humbly hope that we shall be able to draw some didactic paradigms from classical Athens. Whatever is the outcome of the election the Greeks and their fellow Europeans will have to find the day after the right solutions to secure Europe's security and stability. There is no solution outside the European Union's framework.

The remedy to existing existential problems of Europe as well as of Greece is not less or no Greece. Also ,from the Greek perspective it cannot simply be less or no Europe.

We need more and a better Europe. Indeed,a European Union focusing mostly on its own values , based on the principles of humanism,compassion ,allelopathy and dignity.

What kind of advice could be adequate for Athens ,Berlin and Brussels ? Well let's seek advice from the Greek classics .

Some of the best advice, a recipe, comes from Euripides' tragedy The Phoenician Women (Phoinissai); the two sons of Oedipus and Jocasta fight each other for power over Thebes. Jocasta advises her son to think before he acts: *"Stay a moment" she says; "haste never carries justice with it; but slow deliberation often attains better results"*.

At some point in the play, her son Polynikes says to her: *"The words of truth are simple, and justice needs no subtle interpretations, for it hath a fitness in itself; but the words of injustice, being rotten in themselves, require clever treatment."*

When talking with her other son, Eteocles, he says to her: *"He ought not, mother, to have attempted reconciliation by armed force, for words compass everything that even the sword of an enemy might effect."*

Justice ,patience and slow deliberation versus haste and soft power may bear the desired policy results. Let's keep it as a basic common european polity recipe.

Aeschylus masterpiece "The Persians" is the oldest surviving play in the history of theater, and dramatizes the Persian response to the news of their military defeat at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC.

As I listen to the words of the messenger who delivers the bad news to Queen Atossa, the mother of Xerxes, giving a graphic description of the battle, it is impossible not to relate it current events, not to think of present miscalculations, and not to appreciate the relevance of this play to today's global developments.

Aeschylus himself was a soldier not a pacifist demonstrating in the streets of Athens ,as many Athenians do in our days .Sometimes even for good reasons related mostly against the dramatic failure of our elected political masters and the austerity leading to poverty program imposed on us practically with no negotiation .

Yet, "The Persians," remains a masterpiece of compassion for the defeated; it is an elegy to moderation and to the importance of thoughtful and deliberate action when contemplating war; it is also a blunt condemnation of arrogance, because it was arrogance that led Xerxes to that expedition far and away from the Persian outposts and thence to the catastrophic defeat.

Some lessons to be learned from "The Persians" are that:

- one ought not to underestimate the motivation of the other side; -
- political and economic might and numeric superiority of forces cannot make up for the lack of knowledge of the enemy's battle tactics and positions.

Though,Xerxe's military expedition was a foreign policy as well as a military blunder, later ,the Athenian themselves forgot history's lesson; during the Peloponnesian war, led by Alciviades ,they were driven into the disastrous Athenian expedition to Sicily .Athens never recovered.

I thought useful to refer here to Xerxe's miscalculations and Salamis because I feel that some European leaders and the Greeks ,as well, try to follow his strategy. A recipe to failure. Overestimating your own capabilities,underestimating the other's determination ,willing to charter into potentially dangerous waters ,without a clear prognosis of the steps to follow.

The Greek classics engage us in seeking answers, but also in asking the right questions. Today and in particular tomorrow with the outcome of the elections in Greece known ,"the right question leading to the right answer" method should be at the center of the dialogue to be engaged between Greece and its natural partners in the European Union.

The Greek classics also struggle with the fundamentals of organizing a society, a state, and with the fundamental political issues that decide the fate of a nation;they also shed light on everything that concerns the man, and they urge us to check ourselves, our lives, our values, our politicians our governments. From them, we should have learned to avoid the pitfalls, which the Greeks themselves ,more that once in our history,often fell into.

Unfortunately, the absence of the Aristotelian " μ " from politics and economics has brought Greece on the verge of catastrophe. It is mainly a failure of politics and political elites. The same elites that are today supported by the political and economic European establishment.

The plausible confirmation of the fall of certain traditional political parties in the Greek elections does not imply the end of Greece; nor the end of politics.It will lead to the birth and awakening of new democratically elected political forces . Yet, they must be able to govern and to lead .Unlike , I hope at least,those who dramatically failed their mandate. If this is the case, then let's give them a chance.

Hubris and Nemesis are still present in politics.

In Thucydides' "History of the Peloponnesian Wars" you will read about the political miscalculations made by Athens in Sicily and see some relevance to current events. Thucydides records a speech by Archidamus, King of Sparta, who addresses the Spartan assembly trying to convince them not to go to war against Athens, even though they had already made the decision to go. His advice, I consider invaluable. I quote : *"Let us assume that they (the Athenians) have common prudence, and let our preparations be, not words, but deeds. Our hopes ought not to rest on the probability of their making mistakes, but on our own caution and foresight. We should remember that one man is much the same as another, and that he is best who is trained . . . "*

Listening to the emphatic statements from Athens as well as from several European leaders, institutions and capitals throughout the electoral campaign in Greece , I was not surprised to find some relevance to Thucydides .

Isocrates, one of Athens's greatest orators , proposes with his famous oration "On Peace" to the Athenians ways to accomplish lasting peace with their neighbors, providing advice on how to treat partners and allies, how to prepare for war, on the value of good advisors, warnings as to the hegemonism and arrogance, as well as the limits of power.

Isocrates tells the Athenians *"We must be willing to treat our allies as we would our friends. . . . and not exercise our leadership as masters but as helpers, since we have learned the lesson that while we are stronger than any single state, we are weaker than . . . all states put together . . . So we shall not lack allies. . . . and shall find many ready and willing to join their forces with our own. For what city or what men will not be eager to share our friendship and our alliance when they see that we are at once the most just and the most powerful of peoples?"*

The first way improve the condition of our state is to select as our advisers on affairs of state the kind of men whose advice we should desire on our private affairs.

One of the most important lessons to be drawn from Isocrates' oration "On Peace" is that justice and interest are not mutually exclusive. This conclusion is particularly pertinent and should become the basis for addressing as from Monday, June 18, the pitfalls of the uneven austerity program imposed to the Greeks. To those who have as well to those who do not have.

Isocrates also argues that the virtue of justice, while making us better individuals or better nations, is also a means of protecting one's self interest; power without justice leads to ill repute; power without justice will not win friends, partners and allies. Let's keep that in mind.

In fact, the maintenance of political and economic power presupposes the existence of justice. Hegemonism is synonymous to fear and domination. We obey because there is fear of the hegemon or the hegemonic country. A didactic conclusion and guidance for handling the present European and Greek crises.

The other lesson to be learned is that, unlike we did in the past, we should never trust and vote for political leaders whom we would never have trusted to manage our own business. Notwithstanding the fact that some of them did better in their own affairs than coping with the national interest.

In ancient Greek drama, you will also see the main characters challenging prevailing norms, questioning authority; questioning the morality of the laws.

In Sophocles' "Antigone," we have as central point the concept of civil disobedience. Creon's daughter breaks her father's the king's law, which

she considers unjust; she buries her brother and is willing to suffer the consequences. In this manner, Sophocles tells us that being noble presupposes the courage to challenge the societies in which we live, provided we are willing to pay the price. This is exactly the profoundly human dilemma that we Greeks are facing today when we cast our vote. How can you not think of Antigone who said: "I will not obey an unjust law, and if something happens because of it -- so be it." ? Not very absent indeed from many Greek hearts and minds.

Furthermore, as Greeks realized that the "polis", country, community, were the ultimate outcome of individual actions, social responsibility and the concept of accountable public service, have also their beginning in ancient Athens. In his famous Funeral Oration, Pericles expounds on the opportunity and prestige of serving your country, your society, presenting it as reward rather than an obligation.

Man, "anthropos" was at the center of Greek thought, of Greek philosophy and politics. We see the "anthropocentric" view of cosmos, but not in the misunderstood way we have been living currently, where we neglect the politics and economics of the "metron" .

The g

oal was to be the best that you could be; to strive for excellence, to fulfill certain ideals, achieving what Aristotle calls a "happy life," a life based on the pursuit of virtue, excellence and ultimately the common good. Priority to public service and political accountability,regrettably often absent from modern Athenian politics ,should be the axiom not the exception.

This is the kind of qualitative change we should aiming at Sunday's elections in Greece.

The EURO value is important ;yet, more important are Europe's values .
I earnestly hope that whatever is the outcome of June 17th vote, these values will stand and prevail in Athens and in Brussels. Unlike the era of the Peloponnesian Wars, we are not split between Athens and Sparta. We are all part of the common process ,based on shared values and interest, under the brand name European Union.

As profoundly European and as Greek , I say that (for us) there is no substitute for Europe; neither may Europe feel or do well without or with less Greece.-