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Article

Greek Exit from the Crisis—A Pressing and Much-Needed Public Service Reform

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Abstract: Greece is in a deep crisis; the worst in all of Europe and the worst experienced in 45 years. Greece is no stranger to crises, but most have been exogenous: the Second World War and the Cold War, for instance. Sadly, unlike these crises, the present one is home-made. The wounds that it has caused are largely self-inflicted. It is especially difficult to fathom the logic of strikes by public service unions—repeated, relentless and militant. They paralyzed the country, drove investors and tourists away and added to the burdens that the economy and the people have had to bear. These strikes, and some public servants' attitudes in the face of the crisis itself, brought into sharp relief the serious *capacity deficit* in the Greek administrative system, which has been at the root of the problem the country is currently facing. This statement begs the question: how can that be? What, after 30 years of public service reform, presumed to modernize and help the country approximate the standards embedded in the *Common European Administrative Space*? The paper will suggest that the reforms of the 1980s were only superficially reforms to improve the effectiveness and quality of the Service. Like parallel changes in higher education, the principal objective was harnessing officialdom, and as many voters as possible, to the chariot of PASOK—the political party established by Andreas Papandreou—which effectively governed the country for most of the period in question. The lesson from this experience may be none other, in fact, than clear convincing proof that partisan concerns and institution-building seldom make a good combination. For Greece, in light of the crisis, effective integration in the EU remains a daunting challenge. It calls for bold reforms, but these must be undertaken with institution-building, the country's general interest, and long term needs in mind.

Keywords: administrative reform; institution-building; public service professionalism; strategic thinking; public service unions; union militancy and strikes; populism; political clientelism; overcoming the crisis

1. Introduction

It pains a Greek to admit it: Greece is in a deep crisis, the worst in all of Europe[1], and the worst in almost half a century. Sadly, Greece is no stranger to crises: calamities are part of our history and heritage. The author of this paper remembers a few in his life-time. He was six when the War started—the Second World War. It was followed by occupation, famine and civil war. This significantly added to the casualty toll and destroyed what resistance and the strife had left in the country unscathed. But these were exogenous crises—calamities whose source and causes lay far outside the borders of Greece, like the Second World War or the Cold War, for instance. Unlike these crises, however, the present one is home-made. The wounds that it has caused are largely self-inflicted. The shock it has occasioned has hurt all the more deeply, because the crisis came after almost three decades of uninterrupted prosperity—a euphoria subsidized by EU development funds, culminating in the Athens Olympics, in 2004 and the European cup, which Greece secured in Lisbon after a match with Portugal.

Now, Portugal and Greece are both in a bind, but of the two it is Greece that faces the steepest challenge. It took the Greeks some time, arguably far too long, to internalize precisely what had happened. Three years of disbelief, acting as if the crisis were merely a passing storm did not help, to say the least. Suspicion that Europe was bluffing, that Greece had cards up its sleeve receded only slowly. It explains, to a large extent, the tactics of the unions which tried to intimidate the Government, but merely undermined what was left of its credibility.

Much of this makes little sense, like shooting oneself in the foot. It is difficult to fathom the logic of the strikes of public service unions—repeated, relentless and militant. Often punctuated by violence, these massive general strikes paralyzed a weak economy, drove investors and tourists away and added to the burdens that the country and its people have had to bear. They did not move the country one inch towards recovery, or influence Greece's creditors, but merely compounded the problem. It has been hard to countenance that leading those general strikes were two unions: ADEDY, of public employees and GSEE, the general workers union. It is difficult to admit it. However, this defiant and angry response, rejection of compromise, refusal to cooperate in the country's general interest and, instead, repeated calls for a "fight to finish" did little to conceal the core of the problem at hand: the unions' ineffectiveness and their addiction to methods which have not moved one inch since earlier days, in spite of vast amounts expended in an effort to modernize them, and corresponding *deficits* in

[1] According to statistics provided by *Eurostat*, the European Statistical Service, fully one Greek out of three lives below the poverty line. Indeed, the numbers rose from 27.7% in 2010 to 31% in 2011. They may be higher still, as this paper goes to press. This proportion is the highest in Europe, with Ireland (29.9%) and Portugal (24.4%) following closely behind. Significantly, however, both Ireland and Portugal registered a decline of poverty levels from 2011 to 2012. *Ephimerida ton Syntakton*, 23–24 February 2013 [1].

critical capacities of public administration to do what it would take to pull the country back on its feet and onto the road to recovery.

This statement begs the question: how could that be, after 30 years' efforts to comply with the *Common European Administrative Space*? The paper will suggest that the reforms of the 1980s were only superficially reforms to improve the effectiveness and quality of the Public Service. Like parallel changes in higher education, the principal objectives were mostly partisan: the harnessing, in fact, of public service voters, as many voters as possible, to the chariot of PASOK—the political party established by Andreas Papandreou—which effectively governed the country for most of the period in question. The lessons from the crisis should make us realize that partisan concerns and institution-building seldom mix together well. If institution-building, through public service reform, had been the goal in the 1980s, a very different structure and culture might well be in place by now. To be sure, the crisis, which is global, might not have been averted. The Greek public service, however, could have been at the forefront of striving for solutions instead of being a stumbling block, as well as a part of the problem.

The last few years have shown that, given the nature of politics in democratic governance, a country needs a corps of dedicated officials armed both with deep knowledge and skills, but also with the needed professional ethos to keep the ship of State on an even keel. Reform and capacity-building take on additional salience in light of the Recession not merely on account of the flaws it has brought to the surface, but also of the urgency of pressing on with the process of convergence and overdue integration in the EU which is, visibly, still incomplete.

2. The Backdrop

That Greece is still in crisis may not be unprecedented, certainly not surprising given the chronic failure of its successive governments, over the past decades, to build the basic structures and public service capacity that every country needs to keep up with developments, to cope with new contingencies, with stressful circumstances, or when calamity strikes. Some steps in that direction were taken in the 1960s when Greece had first been slated to join the growing community of nations, now known as the EU. As we well know, these early tentative steps were brusquely interrupted in April 1967 by a military coup. Although the country's "marathon" to Europe was resumed in the mid-1970s, the necessary process of institution-building and capacity development was manifestly not. It is clear in retrospect that, in spite of much lip service to modernization, none of the needed accoutrements were put in place to enable Greece to join a club of well-administered and mostly advanced economies as a full-fledged member. Under these circumstances, when crisis struck, it expectedly found Greece less prepared than other countries to cope with mounting adversity.

There is about this crisis an element that makes it especially irksome, indeed humiliating. Though to *cognoscenti* it has been long in coming, it took the vast majority of the people by surprise. Disbelief was in the air when, more than three years ago, the new government in power went back on campaign promises and, much to its embarrassment maintained, not very credibly, that it had been mistaken about the state of the nation's finances. From then on the situation has gone mostly from bad to worse. To add insult to injury, the country has been forced to swallow its pride and submit to *conditionalities* imposed by foreign governments and international agencies. Conditionalities came with a barrage of criticism, which called the country's word and very credit-worthiness into question. Repeatedly, its

willpower and capacity to "walk the walk" have been cast into doubt, with the country's credit rating plunging to, "the bottom rung in Europe" [2,3]. Worse still, a global survey has recently portrayed it as "the most corrupt country in Europe" [4].[2]

Concurrently, editorials in the international press as well as scholarly journals, have voiced their disagreement over the austerity program, which is seen as compounding the problem; not helping to resolve it. Specifically, according to *The New York Times* the economic implosion may be preventing the country from meeting its fiscal commitments by reducing the tax revenues and by increasing expenditure on automatic programs like unemployment insurance. Despite the spending cuts, Greece had a budget deficit of close to ten percent in 2011, "half a percentage point above target" [2].

With the unemployment rate at 27% and all the visible signs of a profound recession, one may not be surprised to observe a loss of nerve, afflicting the people at large and giving rise to a mood of dejection, despondency, deep pessimism and alienation. Political extremes are steadily on the rise, with SYRIZA on the left and *Chryssi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) on the right claiming, between them, more than 30% of the electorate [7]. Reports indicate that young people are leaving the country in record numbers, unsure about the prospects of either Greece or Europe (with the exception of Germany) during the present decade. This mood is clearly widespread and skepticism is rampant, discounting a speedy recovery in Europe or in Greece, but also casting doubt on both the fledgling Euro and the future of the Eurozone ([8]; [9], pp. 105–16; [10]).

This paper eschews pessimism but knows that it runs deep, leaving large numbers of people dumbfounded, unable to make sense of their plight or fathom the complexity of the crisis that befell their country and continent. Misfortune, people tell you, hit like a storm out of the clear blue sky. It needs to be remembered that, just eight years ago, Greece hosted the summer Olympics and, almost at one go, won the European cup in a memorable match with Portugal. What these combined events did *then* for the Greek psyche needs no elaboration. After more than two decades of development assistance from the European Commission to smooth its integration into the EU, the country was experiencing the crest of a wave of prosperity. Euphoria was in the air. Few people cared to admit it or could internalize the obvious fact that an economic prosperity, dependent very largely on big external subsidies, might not be there forever. Regrettably, few people, certainly not the government, prepared for rainy days. Three major reforms in particular, which might have eased the country's current plight, were then too lightly assigned to the Greek calends, avoided or postponed. The long overdue change and modernization of the country's educational and social security systems and public administration might well have been accomplished less painfully and much better at times of growing prosperity than now, with widespread unemployment and a steeply declining economy.

4. Populism and Clientelism

A toxic mix of populism and clientelist politics stood in the way ([11], pp. 94–112). Whether this is going to change in the face of the deep crisis, and the nation's political mores improve as a result is a

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[2] In a recent joint report, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) took the Government to task for failing to put its fiscal house in order. The report went so far as to ask for disciplinary action and dismissal of 130 revenue officers [5,6].

"million dollar question" that it is still too early to answer. Considering, however, the country's long term needs, it ought to be reaffirmed that the country urgently needs an administrative reform. Attempts to deal with the crisis brought into sharp relief the extent to which the rudiments—the basic policy tools required in personnel management and public administration (e.g., job descriptions, performance management systems and benchmarks and, most of all, a rational pay and grade structure)—are either nonexistent or patently dysfunctional. Proponents of reform will tell you that it needs to be designed and carried into effect with modernization and Europeanization of the Greek institutions in mind, not clientelist purposes or partisan concerns, as was mostly the case in the past, the 1980s especially.

Talking of clientelism, it ought to be remembered that "it takes two to tango". Political clientelism has deep roots in Greek society. It permeates the culture of the political class, as well as union leadership. To a very large extent, the administrative system and public service of Greece are, in essence, the creations of this clientelist culture, which proves resistant to change. Even today, much needed policy measures on the redeployment of staff are systematically blocked or met with rearguard action on this account. With this in mind, Greeks, focused on the crisis, advised against elections in early 2012, on the grounds that they would rouse to fever pitch the worst clientelist instincts among the politicians, as well as the people at large. Elections did take place, twice as a matter of fact, in May–June 2012. They produced a weak coalition which took charge of the government of a very restive country, with a vocal opposition in Parliament and elsewhere refusing to cooperate, but demanding fresh elections. It is generally believed that public service unions contributed to the confusion, having shifted their allegiance to the opposition parties, chiefly adding to the rise of the left coalition SYRIZA in the polls.

In clientelist systems, votes are traded for favors. With a bloated public sector and public service posts viewed by all too many people as a sure way to allowances, job security and a pension, a "*favor*" came to mean a remunerated "job", soon be converted to life-time employment at the taxpayers' expense. Tenure has long antecedents, going back to 1911, when the country's leading statesman and reformer Venizelos made it a constitutional principle, in an attempt to stem the tide of corrupt practices which, as in the USA during the 19th century, dominated the political landscape ([12], p. S-175). In Greece it has endured, arguably exacerbated in the past three decades. In 1951, tenure served as the foundation for a grade and salary structure with a career progression modeled largely on Western Europe. These provisions were enshrined in the *Civil Service Code* promulgated in that year. The Code had been prepared with help from the US, and a Public Service Commission on the Anglo-American pattern was established, with a view to making it operational. The author of this paper served on that Commission briefly, from 1965 to 1967. One of its major functions was the organization and conduct of competitive examinations for public service posts, with the twin goals of stemming ingrained clientelist practices and of mainstreaming merit in public service recruitment. Abolished by the Junta, the Commission was not re-established after 1974.

According to most critics [13–18], the core enduring problem, which persisted after these changes, lay in the public service's demonstrated inability to attract, recruit, retain, develop and motivate high quality administrative and technical staff. This became the pivotal challenge, which the country tried to address during the early 1960s, this time in cooperation with the OECD, as well as bilateral donors (Great Britain, France and The Netherlands). A series of recommendations were advanced by the

OECD, in the framework of the "*The Langrod report*" [19] and accepted by the government of the elder George Papandreou, grand-father of the present political leader. This note on the family history sheds light on the course of reform, which followed in the 1980s and 1990s. As Minister of State for Planning and Coordination in 1965, Andreas Papandreou, son of George Papandreou senior, endorsed the recommendations of the OECD enshrined in the Langrod report. Soon afterwards, however, he fell from power. A military coup imposed a crude dictatorship from 1967 to 1974. What happened in the aftermath of this seven year regime has shaped the country's fortunes, for better or for worse, and largely set the stage for what we witness today.

Post-dictatorial Greece looked both to the past and to the future. A core strategic vision, which resonated well across the political spectrum (except for the extreme left and discredited right-wing), was speedy accession to Europe—the EU and the Eurozone—not merely to safeguard the country's borders, sustainable peace, and development but also to forestall another *coup d'état*. Successful integration in the EU (1981) and in the Eurozone (2002), called for structural reforms to make the country's economy competitive with those of its more advanced European partners and, with this end in view, to modernize and streamline the two core institutions of public education and public administration.

The contention in this paper is that neither institution came out of the reforms of the early 1980s duly strengthened and improved. Both reforms plainly lacked strategic direction. They failed to exemplify a vision of the future and of a country capable to cope with the steep challenges of the 21st century. Partisan considerations and short-sighted clientelism won the day, instead. A populist agenda rapidly sapped the capacity of these two institutions to move the country forward towards the global economy and a competitive world. The two institutions in question now lie at the heart of the problem that the country has to face. In their present shape and form they are no part of the solution, which the country sorely needs. The record of the crisis, over the past two years, has brought into sharp relief what many a foreign leader coming to Greece has found: the country's institutions' ingrained resistance to change and deep reluctance to embark on the needed course of reform, in line with the requirements of contemporary Europe and added steep demands from long term global challenges.

In arguing the Greek case, it needs to be remembered that both reforms were sponsored by Andreas Papandreou, founder of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). Both, in fact, were introduced on the morrow of his impressive and sudden rise to power in 1981. It so happens that those moves coincided with momentous departures in at least two other countries: the UK and the US. Mrs Thatcher and President Reagan were in charge in 1981. In fact, the latter chose to inaugurate his term with an attack on "government" ([20], p. S-231). Politically, these two and Andreas Papandreou stood at the opposite ends of the political spectrum. Surprisingly, however, they had a lot in common. They shared, among other things, a populist proclivity bound to personal charisma. Not unlike the American President, Andreas Papandreou excelled as master tactician. In spite of political differences, both felt and projected a deep distrust of "bureaucrats", *i.e.*, career officials but also, one suspects, discounted the significance of public administration as a field of study or discipline, and the institutional inputs of permanent officialdom. At times it would appear as if, to both these leaders, "bureaucratic" institutions represented disposable tools—convenient when they served the tactical needs of the moment, but totally unacceptable if they ever stood in the way of political agendas or "reforms", mostly conceived in short-sighted partisan terms ("*Allaghe*", *i.e.*, change, was the Greek Premier's motto.)

A Harvard-educated Professor of Economics, Andreas Papandreou became professor at Berkeley before returning to Greece to establish and direct a Centre of Economic Research in the early 1960s. Thereafter, he entered politics and briefly, as previously mentioned, served as Minister of State for Economic Planning and Coordination until 1965 ([21], pp. VII–X). The author of this article also worked in that Department, which had been tasked, *inter alia*, with administrative reform. In the turbulent environment which preceded the military coup of April 1967, conditions did not favor the enactment, let alone implementation, of public service reforms, though these had been prepared with help from the OECD and had received the government's—and Papandreou's own—stamp of approval. In any event the plans, elaborated during the early 1960s, had no discernible impact on the measures enacted in the 1980s. Of course, the times had changed. One may hypothesize that the traumatic experience of the seven years dictatorship both served to radicalize segments of public opinion, which lent support to PASOK, and probably also exerted a catalytic influence on the leadership itself.

Whether they came to power transformed by this experience, Andreas Papandreou and many of his Ministers viewed the senior public service with a high degree of suspicion. In circumstances different from those of the late 1970s and 1980s in the US, they nonetheless approached it in a manner and a spirit not unlike those which prevailed during the Ronald Reagan and even Carter years: as "*the suspect handmaid*" and, in a sharp contrast to the administrative heyday of the earlier decades, as a "significant barrier to performance" ([20], pp. S-229, S-231). In a parallel even more striking, none seemed concerned to shield and insulate officials from party political pressures (ibid). Departing from traditions which, in European democracies and the United States, had underpinned reforms of the administrative systems both in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Papandreou reforms ostensibly discounted the value of safeguarding, for public administration, a measure of neutrality and professional autonomy from party political pressures. Instead, they embraced the tone, the substance, combative populist rhetoric, and radical proclivities of a deeply partisan platform.

4. The Legacy of Reforms

The public service reform of 1982 inaugurated a process ostensibly designed to "hellenize the State", which the government in power portrayed as "foreign" and "client-driven", "right wing and oligarchic" [11,22]. Arguably, most radical was the abolition of all the highest grades (director-generals and deputy or alternate director-generals), ostensibly on the ground that they had been irremediably contaminated by the preceding regimes. This step, which took the form of Law 1232/1982, left the political heads of government directly in charge of units already too fragmented, too disparate, and numerous to coordinate effectively.[3] To address the ensuing quagmire, this and succeeding governments resorted to the expansion of political superstructures in the departments on the one hand, (Deputy and Alternate Ministers, Secretary-Generals) and to parallel hierarchies of special secretaries, advisers and special advisers to whom representative functions and policy formulation were devolved. The combined effect of these trends, other than political "colouring" of all the senior echelons, was to

[3] The posts have since been restored, with incumbents mostly assigned to these positions on a temporary basis, for specific periods of time which may, of course, be extended at the government's pleasure. Much of the current criticism has focused on the tendency to appoint "political friends" to senior Service posts.

sharpen the dichotomy between policy-making and administrative tasks, effectively diminishing the status of the latter and their perceived significance [23].

In much the same direction, a law of 1983 purported to reform the system of recruitment into the public service. Ostensibly the objective was "to eliminate clientelist practices and to establish criteria altogether objective and irreproachable" [18,22]. A points system was devised and introduced for this purpose. Departing from past practices, the system gave much weight to the candidates' social background and antecedents (family, place of birth, *etc.*). Educational accomplishments, professional experience and demonstrated skills receded by comparison. Although a main objective of the law may have been to reinforce the "representation of disadvantaged groups", we need to be reminded that this had hardly ever been a challenge to the Greek public service. Unlike its French or British counterparts, the Greek administration—its senior ranks included—had never been a magnet or a career of choice for the country's social elites, certainly not to the exclusion of other social strata [19]. The need to make the Service and career progression attractive to promising young graduates from top schools internationally, and offer it the ability to take on and pursue the drive for modernization apparently gave way to other, more mundane and partisan concerns. When all is said and done, the effects of all these measures pointed in the direction of further reducing the appeal, as well as the capacity, of the public service profession, which had never been too strong. Valued for job security and seen as mostly a refuge, it was sought after mainly on account of the stability, generous leave allowances, health insurance, old-age pensions, and several other benefits which it afforded.

Combined with the prevalent pattern of political appointments to senior posts of substance and visibility, the image of the Service as employer of last resort only served to reinforce two deeply-rooted practices, which public service reforms in the 1950s and 1960s had vainly tried to address and to arrest [19,24]. One, *political clientelism* and clientelist politics, is old and not unique to Greece but, given party loyalties that run remarkably deep, remains starkly resilient, feeding on long traditions of patronage, which are rampant throughout society. The other, *union activism*, is new mostly in its militancy and propensity to strikes. It has been calculated that from 1979 to 2010 there were as many as 5,280 general and sectoral strikes involving on average 96% of public sector employees. The damage to the economy has been estimated at tens of billions of dollars [25]. In the twelve months preceding the fated resignation of Premier George Papandreou, Andreas' elder son, more than twenty general strikes took place paralyzing the country in the midst of its deep crisis. At the forefront, stood two unions: GSEE, a mostly workers' union and ADEDY representing public servants[4]. Paradoxically, PASOK, with strong political ties to ADEDY, had widely been considered as well positioned to exert a measure of restraint on this particular union. This was clearly not the case and no longer is, of course, with ADEDY supportive, to all intents and purposes, of the opposition SYRIZA. Significantly, "entitlements" and "acquired rights", mostly in the form of bonuses, allowances and benefits, which represent the core of the employees' emoluments, constituted the substance of grievances, a source of resistance to change, and cause for disaffection.

After all that has been written on the financial crisis afflicting Greece and other Member States of the EU, no-one may any longer question its severity or widespread ramifications. That it touches

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[4] There are currently approximately 725,000 public servants in a country of 11.0 million.

public servants along with the other citizens is also beyond doubt. But whether employees of the broad public sector have been more gravely affected by the economic crisis than those of the other sectors remains at least debatable. However, with the jobless, mostly in the private sector, at 27 per cent of the workforce, and public employees periodically on strike, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, in these difficult times, faced with a major crisis, the Government of Greece has clearly been unable to count on the loyalty, commitment, and capacity of its officials to pull the country through [26].

The right of public servants both to belong to a union, and even go on strike has never been in doubt. Of course, it must be respected, but within bounds. The *frequency*, *relentlessness*, and *scale* of these general strikes raise two related questions. The first bears on the status of public employees. Their permanence, safeguarded and hallowed by the Constitution, has been intended to shield them from party political pressures, but also from the vagaries of market oscillations, so that they may ensure the needed *continuity, quality, and dependability* to the service of society and the long term public interest. These needs they have not met. The second question bears on public service *professionalism* and duty to the State. It needs to be emphasized that the right of public servants to go on strike, though protected by the Constitution, is plainly not unconditional ([27], pp. 13, 22). Furthermore, when it comes to permanent cadres where does allegiance lie: to the union or the State? to the needs of the community or a group's particular claims? The centrality of this question to public service professionalism raises a number of issues, all of them pressing. They need to be addressed and resolved for the good of society.

In retrospect, it is reasonable to affirm that the Papandreou reforms of the early 1980s put their stamp on subsequent trends. They largely shaped developments in public service policies, as well as the structures and culture of public administration, from the 1980s onwards [11,15]. In light of recent events, it cannot be denied that they have set the Service on a path of militant activism and politicization. A similar remark would also be appropriate with regard to the university system, a group of institutions of pivotal significance both to the country at large and to the public service. There is reason to believe that, in both cases, "politics" and tactical considerations took precedence over long term strategic concerns and the need to overhaul these two key institutions in light of global trends, as well as the requirements arising from the EU. It has been said before, but bears repeating, that on improving their performance both the country's future development and students' career prospects largely depend.

Elaborate details of the reforms of the early 1980s, which gave these institutions their present shape, can be readily obtained from independent sources and are not necessary for the purposes of the present study ([28], pp. 63–77; [29], pp. 17–31). Two reports of the OECD, both of 2011 [30,31], amply corroborated the findings of this cursory assessment. Suffice it to remark that, if pronounced as "radical" by their proponents, they plainly subordinated traditional concerns in higher education and public service professionalism to partisan expediencies. In spite of subsequent changes, the core characteristics of these reforms persisted: goal displacement, a patent disregard for major trends and practices in Europe and the world, compression of hierarchies, dilution of incentives, devaluation of merit, and lack of preparation for a competitive world and a globalized society in rapid change. These have been perpetuated, as well as accentuated, by a high degree of *militancy* and *politicization* in both cases. Of the public service, especially, it has been rightly noted that, "a massive goal displacement has turned the civil service into an instrumentality for unemployment relief or, worse still, the recruitment

of captive clienteles in partisan strife. It does not always work... Often the captives, become the captors instead. The net effect, however, has been to obscure … the nature … of the selection process. Merit has gone by default." ([28], p. 66; [32])

5. Conclusions: Rebuild Public Service Professionalism—a Must

No one who knows the country denies the stark reality and gravity of the crisis. One ventures to describe it as an *existential* crisis. The future of democracy and of the country itself may well be at stake. At the root of it all lie two divergent visions of Greece and its place in the world. One is of Greece as a modern, European, progressive, and open society in sync with current trends in the world at large. The other, in sharp contrast, is dim and ill-defined, but marked by fear, suspicion, complacency, and xenophobia. It harks back to the past, and isolation, looks to the future with diffidence, refuses to take charge, rejects responsibility, and shows an alarming propensity to weave conspiracy theories ([11], pp. 105–07). It very largely accounts for the alarming surge of political extremism—right and left—since May 2012. In the eyes of these extremes, "dark forces" *(scoteines dynameis*, in Greek) emerge at every corner. They change according to circumstance. Now the "*troika*" (*i.e*., EU, ECB and IMF) and immigrant workers are in the cross hairs [7].

Although this might be expected at times of deep *malaise*, one hoped that leading members of both the universities and the public service profession would stand up to the unions and their antics; that they would take a lead at the forefront of a movement for reform, paving the way to the future. In the past four years, however, this has seldom been the case. What conclusion may one draw from a certain strange passivity on the part of civil society, and the relentless strikes of public service unions which paralyzed the country? What can one make of unions going so far, in one instance, as to block access to a Ministry, thus preventing EU delegates from attending scheduled meetings? Arguably, such actions were taken by a minority of heady militant activists. That may well be the case, but then where were the level-headed, industrious, conscientious, professional public officials? How many of them came forward to voice their disapproval of such egregious practices or simply take a stand? How many signified their disagreement with irresponsible tactics, as true professionals should?

Professionals do know that public service reform and institution-building cannot be the product of slogans or populist rhetoric bandied about the streets, let alone of demonstrations, occasionally leading to violence. Public service reform calls for serious exploration, extensive social dialogue, grass roots participation and informed professional inputs. They need to be the outgrowth of surveys and research, debate and consultation, always conducted in earnest, keeping an open mind, with a long term strategic intent. Proposals for reform will certainly be heard during the months to come. In light of past experience, none could be more important or catalytic than a concerted action to build the needed *structures*, as well as a *culture* of dialogue, tolerance and respect, conciliation and accommodation. Given the poor performance of the Greek administrative system, no sustainable reform can be accomplished overnight. To strike deep roots in the country, it requires concerted efforts over a period of time. It, therefore, needs tenacity, capacities, and skills for the long haul. It ought to build commitment and synergies for change and modernization. Indeed, the current Minister for Administrative Reform avowed as much quite recently, on February 20, 2013. Writing in the Paris *Le Monde* on public service reform, Mr. A. Manitakis, a Professor of Constitutional Law, had this to say:

> "Reform is predicated on a measure of consensus and compromise. Even so, it will require considerable time in order to bear fruit because reform runs counter to a broad range of interests and deeply rooted attitudes or mindsets … Greece is facing countless obstacles, already for three years, as it struggles to survive and remain in the Eurozone."[5]

In public service reform, the country's long term interest should top the list of criteria. Both management professionals and union leaders should play a major part. The quality of their inputs depends, however, chiefly on public service professionalism, their sense of responsibility to society at large, commitment to their calling and total dedication to democratic governance and the future of their country. ([34], pp. 47–83, [35–37]) There are, without a doubt, plenty of men and women in the Greek administrative system and beyond, who could contribute constructively—*that is to say professionally*—to the institutional change and modernization that are so urgently needed [38]. One earnestly hopes that such voices will be heard and prove effective. Effectiveness, however, and quality depend on consistently upholding and enforcing professional standards, as well as decisively rejecting the wholly counter-productive, confrontational militant activism and opportunism that we have witnessed lately.

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