Does Greece have a foreign policy?

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Traditionally, the study of foreign policy is concerned with how and why a state conducts its external relations. Within the domestic arena, foreign policy analysis looks at decision-making processes and the factors which influence them, ranging from organisational to psychological explanations, including individual actors, groups, values and ideology. In the external arena, the study of foreign policy is concerned with the "milieu" within which states operate and which may influence their policies, as well as the goals that a state wishes to achieve through its policies. Geopolitics or a specific type of international system, bipolar or multipolar, for example, are said to influence what goals states set and how they want to achieve them. Bridging the domestic and external environment are the instruments which are available in the conduct of state foreign policy and the choice of the appropriate instruments to achieve a specific foreign policy goal. More recently, the rise of importance of the European Union as an international actor indicates that the domain of foreign policy is no longer exclusive to the state, even though it remains the primary actor of study.

This very brief explanation of foreign policy is necessary inasmuch as it shows that all states, as autonomous actors, either conduct their own foreign policy, or are affected by the foreign policy of other states and actors. States do not live in a vacuum; they have no choice but to interact at least with their immediate environment, if not with the broader international system. Even a "foreign policy passive" state interacts with its milieu. But this raises the question of whether an independent sovereign state, capable of autonomous action, can actually *not* have a foreign policy. Some states, such as Monaco or San Marino, have given

over the running of their foreign policy to a neighbouring guarantor (France or Italy). Others allow the international institution they are a member of – such as the EU – to take the lead in the conduct of foreign policy.

What this short essay wishes to examine is to what extent Greece has a foreign policy. In answering this rather provocative question, the initial consideration should be whether Greece actually needs a foreign policy (for reasons that will be explained). I will argue that, indeed, Greece does need a foreign policy, but for a variety of reasons in the last 5-7 years – with the odd period of exception – it has not had a foreign policy, at least not in a constructive, proactive sense of formulating policy through clearly denoted processes which develop achievable goals and match means to ends.

Does Greece need a foreign policy?

As we shall see in the next section, it could be said that in both past and present times Greece has not needed an independent foreign policy – or at least not an extensive one. But I would argue that, currently, Greece does need to have a foreign policy. The main reasons for this are obvious to all: as a state, Greece has a number of outstanding *ethnika themata* (national issues), which in part are destabilising and politically debilitating. In turn, these *ethnika themata* are also obvious to anyone with even the sketchiest knowledge of Greece's international relations. The three main outstanding sets of issues comprise relations with Turkey and with FYR Macedonia, and the "Cyprus problem". All of these are long-standing items topping the Greek foreign policy agenda; Turkey and Cyprus more long-standing than FYR Macedonia. Yet they remain unresolved and if progress were to be made in reaching solutions to the problems at the heart of these "conflicts", then Greece would divest itself of a terrific domestic and international political burden.

In the case of Turkey, the list of differences is long, well-known and centres on the so-called "Aegean disputes", as well as questions relating to minorities or the status of the Ecumenical

Patriarchate in Istanbul. The immanent threat of military confrontation – especially as the result of an accident – heightens the need to step up the pace of dialogue and resolution of outstanding issues. Similarly, in the case of FYR Macedonia, the name issue had been on the agenda since 1992, and is seemingly no closer to resolution. While the danger of a military crisis resulting from this dispute is minimal, the drain on Greece's political capital internationally is immense, and a resolution to the dispute would go a long way in restoring some diplomatic credit and credibility. In the case of Cyprus, the issue is somewhat different in that Greece is merely upholding the positions taken by the sovereign state of Cyprus in its international relations and the status of the political solutions possible on the divided island. A solution here would divest Greece of the need to provide unquestioning support for Cyprus, which comes sometimes at a high cost for Greece's broader international relations, and diminishes Greece's ability to act independently and in its own interests. Essentially, while these three issues are "live", they dominate the Greek foreign policy agenda, and are so emotionally driven that they dominate the domestic political scene as well. They almost provide a policy straitjacket, constraining Greece from moving beyond these problems, into a European mainstream of calmer waters and broader concerns. Furthermore, as they are still "live" as dominant agenda items, Greece *needs*, by default, a foreign policy to push forward, in terms of solutions to these problems.

When has Greece not needed a foreign policy?

There have been periods in the recent past where Greece has not needed a foreign policy, or at least not an active or extensive one, and where Greece's foreign policy interests have been guaranteed, shielded or best served by other actors or systemic factors internationally. In this section I will refer to the two cases of this which stand out. The first refers to the Cold War and the particular systemic context it provided for states like Greece to operate. The second refers to Greece's membership of the European Union

(EU) and the particular safeguards this provided for Greek foreign policy.

During the Cold War, Greece could, by and large, proceed with a minimalist foreign policy. On the broad issues and conflicts of the day, Greece was shielded by the specific character of the Cold War international system. The bipolar system of alliances and ideological camps which divided the world, perhaps artificially at times, provided a sense of certainty of purpose and a physical security which dominated all aspects of the state's international relations. All foreign policy was mediated through the lens of the Cold War. Greece was by definition part of the western bloc and by implication a democratic West, because of its anti-communism. In turn, "anti-communism", translating into "anti-Soviet dominated communist bloc" foreign policy, dominated the whole of Greece's foreign policy agenda.

On the one hand that static nature of the Cold War international system, because of its rigidity and the dominance of the superpowers (and the potential of a major confrontation ending in a nuclear disaster), did not allow for much action, movement and change through foreign policy initiatives. Greece, like many other states, was limited in the leeway it had for foreign policy action. And while on the one hand this specific international system could be seen as stifling, for the most part it provided a strong incentive and rationale for not having a foreign policy. The "Cold War" foreign policy – that is, policy towards the rival bloc – was dictated by your membership of the "West" and the dominance of the US in this system. At the same time, foreign policy on more regional or local issues, issues of immediate national interest, were dictated by the necessities of the Cold War. Therefore, by implication, in the few instances since the end of the Greek Civil War when Greece was faced, standing alone, with an immediate foreign policy dilemma, such as in 1974, it had to see the crisis not only as a bilateral one with Turkey, but as a multilateral one in the context of NATO. As such, the solutions were also sought in the context of this Cold War alliance and primarily through the guidance and mediation of the US (as senior partner).

There were exceptions to this constraint on foreign policy, this seeming lack of need for a foreign policy in the Cold War era. Konstantinos Karamanlis, in the late 1970s, for example, sought to better relations with states within the eastern bloc and especially those in the Balkans. Similarly, and more radically, Andreas Papandreou pursued what was a seemingly more "non-aligned" policy both in South-eastern Europe, the Middle East and beyond. But in both cases, and in different ways, the pursuit of these policies was still conducted within the narrower scope of the Cold War international system. In Karamanlis's case, there was no deviation from the "western line", merely a small variation on the theme carried out without criticism from allies and partners. In the case of Papandreou, the variation was much more significant, but it was highly rhetorical and served a highly populist domestic political agenda.

The second case illustrating the lack of need for Greek foreign policy is in the context of Greece's membership of the EU. Being part of this Union has resulted in the limitation on a need for foreign policy in two different ways. Firstly, in an institutional sense, being part of a Union of so many nation-states, who progressively have attempted to come up with the mechanisms to adopt joint positions and take joint actions in foreign affairs, that is who have attempted to create a common foreign policy, has provided a "shield" for countries like Greece. In effect, the Greek foreign policy interests have to a great extent been subsumed within the policy of this bigger political and economic entity. Decisions which can be made at the European level thus shielded Greece from taking unilateral action. Furthermore, decisions on broader international concerns on which Greece may not have a distinct position are also taken at the European level thus obviating the need to have a distinct foreign policy on these concerns. For example, Greece's policy on China or climate change, examples of these broader concerns mentioned earlier, will obviously be mediated by its membership of the EU: they are not vital, unilateral Greek concerns which necessitate a unilateral Greek policy.

A more conceptual understanding of the effects of membership of the EU on foreign policy (as well as all policy sectors) can be found in the academic literature on Europeanisation of foreign policy. This is a burgeoning literature which starts from the basic premise that membership of the EU results in policy adaptation and convergence among the member states. Through rationalist processes of repetitive bargaining within the EU decision-making structures, through more constructivist ideas of socialisation and social learning, and through normative convergence, member states move closer and closer together in policy terms until these policies become European policies: European policies emerge and thus Europeanisation is said to take place. This Europeanisation can take place as states adapt to the impact and influence of EU membership, but it can take place when a state projects its own narrower policy concerns onto the European level, where they become European policy. This is a long and contested discussion in the field of Europeanisation and foreign policy analysis which cannot be rehearsed at length here. Suffice it to say that Greece figures quite highly in this literature, as an EU member state which has converged to the European norm in both the style and content of it foreign policy (the example often used here is the general attitude towards the Western Balkans which shifted in the mid-1990s), and in the projections of its policy onto the European level where it has been adopted as a "European policy" (the case referred to here is that of Turkey and its candidacy for EU membership in the late 1990s). Here too there are notable exceptions, for example the case of FYR Macedonia and the blocking of its NATO membership by Greece, but more on this later.

Therefore, while it may seem outlandish to suggest that a modern European nation-state does not need a foreign policy, in the case of Greece there are at least two notable periods in which its foreign policy has been severely constrained, and its interests shielded and best guaranteed by membership in either a particular bloc in a specific international environment, or a specific international institution such as the EU.

When has Greece needed a foreign policy?

As a counterpoint to the previous section there are clear periods in the recent past in which Greece has been in need of a distinct foreign policy, primarily because of a changing international context and system.

The first challenge was provided by the end of the Cold War, which freed up the international order from the previous systemic constraints. While this provided many opportunities to overcome the stagnation of the bipolar era, it also brought with it great threats. In the case of Greece, the end of the Cold War brought with it geopolitical confusion and the questioning of its identity as a western state. If, as argued above, Greece's identity as a western state was dependent of on its membership of the western bloc in the post-Second World War period, then the end of the Cold War gave rise to questions as to where Greece belonged culturally and ideologically.

This was reinforced by the implications of Yugoslavia's collapse, and Greece's involvement in this collapse. On the one hand, throughout the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, Greece was seen to be siding with Serbia, which in turn was increasingly seen internationally as the aggressor and culprit for the wars. The point is that Greece had to have a foreign policy with respect to Yugoslavia's wars. This was a conflict on its border which had immediate consequences for its vital national interests in its neighbourhood. That Greece was not ready to construct a robust and convincing foreign policy, and that its foreign policy diverged from that of most of its partners, is not for discussion here. What is relevant is that the changing regional context necessitated a distinct Greek foreign policy which had not always been the case before. This, of course, is best exemplified by the emergence of the so-called "Macedonia issue", a product of Yugoslavia's collapse. There is no doubt that the creation of an independent "Republic of Macedonia" posed grave challenges (and potentially long-term threats to Greek interests. The Greek response and foreign policy to the creation of this state with this name is in some respects rational. In others, it went beyond the expected and

descended into a national paranoia which reinforced this questioning of Greece's cultural identity and political loyalties. The name is a problem; basing a twentieth-century foreign policy on Alexander the Great is less understandable. Nonetheless, the point is here that Greece did need a foreign policy both with respect to the challenge from Skopje and in relation to the general instability caused in the neighbourhood by Yugoslavia's wars. This is not the place to judge these policies. (There are other examples of why Greece has needed a foreign policy in the recent past – the rise in Turkey's strategic significance for instance – but the Balkan examples are the clearest and have the greatest implications.)

In short, the end of the Cold War removed the certainties in which Greek foreign policy was embedded for nearly four decades and necessitated the generation of unilateral positions on a range of issues. More specifically, this systemic change in conjunction with the events in the Balkans meant that Greece was, in a very short period of time, faced with the challenge of creating a raft of policy positions on questions of significant national interest: it needed a foreign policy.

Today: Greece needs but does not have a foreign policy

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

with Greece or, in the case of Cyprus, to bring about an end to the island's division, which would have removed a thorn from the side of the Greek state.

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

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

manifest itself in political terms but it would not surprise me if it occurred sooner rather than later.

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

The second reason for the lack of foreign policy has to do with personality rather than organisational models of decision-making. The literature on foreign policy analysis places great value of the role of personality and leadership in the foreign policy domain. In the last seven years, leadership in the foreign policy field in Greece has been sorely missed. As the powers for foreign policy decision-making are centralised and revolve around the Prime Minister, one would look at the previous and current premierships for indications of whether personalities and leadership are important. In the Karamanlis government, it seemed that the Prime Minister was not interested in foreign policy. Despite some personalised efforts with his Turkish counterpart, there is little evidence that Karamanlis wished to pursue an active (let alone activist) foreign policy. This was also reflected in his initial appointment as Foreign Minister of Petros Moliviatis, an experienced diplomat with long-standing relations with the Karamanlis family, who was installed to ensure that foreign policy would not

harm the domestic political climate and turn public opinion against the government. It has to be said that the one period of a more highly visible and more proactive foreign policy occurred under the Foreign Ministry of Dora Bakogianni, who did not feel as constrained by the premiership of Kostas Karamanlis in trying to unlock some of the issues plaguing Greece.

The election of PASOK in 2009 did not result in a difference in the area of personality. Even though George Papandreou held the office of Foreign Minister alongside the Premiership, he did not have the time to deal with foreign policy because of the looming financial crisis. It was indicative that his deputy and ultimately successor, Dimitris Droutsas, was neither a PASOK MP, nor experienced in high-level diplomacy. It came as no surprise that he was replaced in the first Papandreou government reshuffle, having no party or public support, or from within the ministry he led. Essentially, if foreign policy *matters*, then personality and leadership, as well as strong processes of decision-making, are prerequisites. Of course, all of this has now been overshadowed by the ever-growing financial crisis.

Conclusion

Greece, like many small states, especially those that are EU members, may at times allow its foreign policy agenda to be guided by its institutional partners and "bigger states". I have argued here that Greece is in dire need of an active foreign policy to provide solutions for long-standing issues. At times in the past Greece may not have needed a foreign policy or else its foreign policy interests were shielded, if not promoted, by other actors or a specific kind of international system. It is of course easy to blame others for one's shortcomings. Therefore, I also argue that for a number of domestic reasons, Greece is both unable and unwilling to develop strong foreign policy positions. In addition, the current economic situation has rendered Greece's credibility insignificant and reduced its ability to act to a bare minimum. This does not bode well for the future of Greece's foreign policy agenda.

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