

GREECE AND THE EU

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For more than a quarter of a century, Greece has been a full member of the European Union. Indeed, Greece's accession to the EU as its 10th member in 1981 marks the beginning of the latter's opening to the Mediterranean South, giving a new dimension to the European integration project.

Yet, Greece's European orientation predates the linking of the country's course with efforts towards European integration within the context of the European Union. As early as 1958, the then Prime Minister Constantinos Karamanlis pursued a consistent and dynamic policy toward Greek membership in the European Economic Community (EEC). His intense lobbying bore fruit and in June 1959, an application was submitted. This led to signing of the Association Agreement between Greece and the EEC, in June 1961. The Agreement constituted the first step towards Greece's integration into the European Community. Notably, Greece was the first country to sign an Association Agreement with the newly established European Economic Community.



Greece's progress towards joining a united Europe "froze" when a dictatorship was imposed in April 1967. It was re-activated in July 1974, after democracy was restored, thanks once again to Prime Minister Constantinos Karamanlis' vision, aiming at integrating the country into the European Community as a full member. Indeed, the application for full accession was submitted on July 12, 1975, by means of a letter that Prime Minister Karamanlis addressed to G. Fitzgerald, President of the European Union Ministerial Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ireland.

The reasons for which Greece chose full accession to the Community can be summed up as follows:

- **Consolidation of democracy:** Greece considered the Community to be the institutional framework within which stability could be secured for its democratic political system and institutions.
- **Enhancement of security:** Greece sought to enforce its independence and position within the regional and international system as well as its "power



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to negotiate”, particularly in relation to Turkey, which, after the invasion and occupation of Cyprus (July 1974), appeared as a major threat. Within this context, Athens also sought to loosen its strong post-war dependence on the US.

- **Socioeconomic modernisation:** Accession to the Community was regarded by Greece as a powerful factor that would contribute to the development and modernization of the Greek economy and Greek society.
- **Contribution to a common Eu-**

ropean future: Greece wanted, as a European country, to have an active presence in, and an impact on, the process towards European integration and the European model.

The European Community’s first reaction to the Greek application was initially expressed by the European Commission, which, according to article 237 (at the time) of the Treaty of Rome, had to state its “opinion” on the country’s application for accession to the Community. The Commission published its “opinion” on January 28, 1976. Yet, while stressing that a “clearly pos-

itive response” should be given to Greece’s request for accession, it proposed the institutionalization of a pre-accession transition period before full institutional integration, in order for the necessary economic reforms to take place.



Constantine Karamanlis

Prime Minister Karamanlis appealed to the governments of the nine member states –France and Germany in particular– and the Commission’s proposal was rejected. Accession negotiations were initiated in July 1976 and brought to a conclusion in May 1979, with the signing of the Accession Deed in the Zappeion Megaron of Athens. The Accession Treaty was ratified by the Greek Parliament on 28 of June 1979.

Thus, Greece became the tenth member of the European Community in 1981, the only country so far to enter the EU alone, rather than as part of a larger enlargement wave. The country’s drive for membership and its role and policies in the context of European integration have been subject of notable political and academic

interest over the years. For a long time, Greece was not regarded as a “mainstream” member-state. However, in the course of the years Greece has become one of the most “pro-integrationist” countries, consistently advocating deeper, more rapid and comprehensive, pro-federalist policy initiatives. This is something that enjoys widespread support both from the body politic as well as from the vast majority of the Greek people.

Greece’s participation in the European Community / Union could be divided into several phases. The first phase, from 1981 to 1985, was characterized by strong doubts concerning certain aspects of European integration. During this period, the then Greek government was openly hesitant concerning general issues related to European integration, and in particular to the efforts and plans aimed at further integration in the fields of institutions, politics and defence. Meanwhile, another goal was to re-determine the country’s position within the community by means of establishing a “special regime” of relations and regulations. For this purpose, in March 1982, Greece submitted a Memorandum requesting additional divergence from implementing certain community policies, as well as further economic support, in order to re-structure the Greek economy. The European Commission acknowledged only the second request as well-founded, which was actually met by means of the Integrated Mediterranean Programs (IMPs), approved in 1985. The IMPs introduced on behalf of the European Union, represented an effort to-

wards the development of a structural policy. This came to the forefront in 1988, with the new structural policy framework, termed the “Delors package”.

From 1985 to roughly 1995, Greek policy towards the EU was marked by the gradual adoption of stronger pro-integration positions. Particularly from 1988 onwards, Greece began to support the “federal” integration model, as well as the development of common policies in new fields, such as education, health, and the environment, the strengthening of supra-national institutions (Commission, Parliament) and the development of a Common Foreign and Security Pol-



icy by the Union. Moreover, as of 1987, Greece started to project as its main goal the securing of Cyprus’ accession to the European Community. For this purpose, Greece supported Nicosia in the latter’s application for accession, submitted in June 1990.

The next period of Greece’s membership in the Union has been characterized by further support for the idea and process of European integration. After Greece’s entry into the Economic and Monetary

Union (EMU), it is a chief priority for the coming decade to seek the promotion of further integration. Indeed, strengthening the political aspects of the European project should follow the adoption of the common currency.

Greece today stands at the core of the circle of countries struggling for more integration. As a member of the Eurozone and the Schengen Treaty, as well as an active participant in the common European Security and Defence Policy, Athens supports a strong unified Europe in the current institutional debate. It is widely accepted by political forces and the people alike that the European Union is the solid basis and the framework in which Greece seeks security, economic development and social progress.

Nowadays, following the latest developments regarding the Constitutional Treaty, Europe is facing a series of major challenges. First and foremost, the EU has to get closer to its citizens, to enhance trust in the European project. The Union needs to demonstrate solid results for the citizens, and the results have to be communicated through a better and more comprehensive communication policy. Simultaneously, it has to achieve a better, more democratic and at the same time, more effective institutional framework, and to improve its place in the world politically and economically. And last but not least, the Union must preserve its common values, cultural variety and political identity.

At this critical juncture, the Greek stance evolves around one basic argument: that the “deepening”

and “enlargement” of the EU should not be seen as two alternative choices. On the contrary, they are complementary processes that should be able to proceed together, constantly reinforcing one another. Enlargement and deepening are the two pillars of the European project, and thus they are intrinsically interconnected. Therefore, to get our institutional identity right means reattaining the adequate balance between the two processes.

Regarding the institutional reform of the EU, Greece has ratified the Constitutional Treaty with wide majority. It has repeatedly expressed its position in favour of a moving forward. In January 2007, in Madrid, Greece was among 20 member-states, the so-called “Friends of Europe” that expressed their strong support for the Constitutional Treaty and its provisions. More importantly, in case of a continuing standstill, Athens position will be among those who wish to move further and faster down the integration road should be free to do so – always keeping the door open for late developers to join.

As regards to enlargement, Greece follows a policy of active support of the European perspective of

the South East European countries. It is widely accepted that the Europeanisation of the Balkans is the strongest guarantee for peace and stability. The aim is, at the end of a long process of European adaptation of these countries, to transform the whole region, the whole of Greece’s neighbourhood, into a stable and prosperous European region. At the same time, the course towards Europe requires that the interested countries fulfil all the criteria and requirements set by the EU. Internalising the European values and principles, building solidarity, understanding and good neighbourly relations is the essence of the European project. Especially today, the efforts that states interested in acceding need to make to adapt and to satisfy criteria must be even more intensive and substantial.

Twenty six years have passed since Greece’s entry into the European Union. During this period Greece has evolved not just into a “normal” EU member-state, but into an enthusiastic and committed European at the very core of the Union. The conditions have changed, but the challenge is still the same: a stronger and prosperous Greece in a stronger, more democratic and more “political” Europe.