

## **THE INGLORIOUS END OF THE THIRD HELLENIC REPUBLIC, 1974-2008**

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The tragic killing by the police of a 16-year old on the night of 7 December 2008 in central Athens may well herald the long-awaited end of the so-called “Third Hellenic Republic” (the First being the years of revolution against the Ottomans in the 1820s and the Second the inter-war period). It is significant to point out that the post-1974 Greek polity, although founded on the tragic event of Turkey’s two consecutive advances on Cypriot soil, did not make any significant attempt to rationalize and modernize its branches, particularly those that are directly relevant to its internal and external security: I am referring here to the civil service, police, the army and the ministries of interior, national economy and foreign affairs. Once in power, the ruling groups of the parties that instituted the Third Republic got their priorities backwards. Their analysis went as follows: the main problem of the pre-1974 Greece was lack of democracy; the remedy, therefore, should take the form of deepening the people’s participation into the state’s governing branches in order to re-build the lost consensual nexus between civil society and political elites. The approach, however, was deeply flawed.

First of all, the diagnosis was half-correct. There was a problem of political democracy in Greece since the end of the Civil War but, equally, there was a lack of national independence. The obscure and authoritarian character of the Greek state from 1949 down to 1974 was underpinned by the very transatlantic protectors of it, namely the USA and Britain. And when these protectors decided that Turkey carried more weight than Greece in the Near East, they threw this “protection commitment” down the drain over the Cyprus issue in 1974. In other words, whereas the mass movements of the 1950s and 1960s were correctly placing the authoritarian character of the Greek polity in the context of the West’s imperial undertakings in the region, the post-1974 political regime crossed out the international parameters of the story.

Secondly, the so-called “democratic participation of the people into the post-1974 governance of the state” did not take the form of a rational process of normative undertakings and institutional openings in decision-making, but that of the extended reproduction of pre-1974 clientelistic networks and nepotistic practices. This, apart from having a negative repercussion on the fiscal performance of the polity, it created a corrupt and bi-partisan oligarchic system mediating between bureaucratic privileges and comprador/parasitic capitalism. This is the way in which the new consensual nexus between political parties/system and civil society came into being after 1974. Characteristically, one of the reasons why there is so little foreign direct investment in Greece since the 1980s is the fact that foreign governments cannot institutionally justify the illegal hand-out practices of Greek state authorities that are required to pay under the table in order to invest in the country.

Thirdly, and even more importantly, none of the Greek cabinets since 1974 has taken care to address the core issue facing Greece, namely that the post-1974 Greek state is the product of a defeat, namely the defeat over Cyprus. It is of utmost importance to understand every single bit of this core issue. Every rational polity emerging out of a defeat would have tried to remove the causes of it. In Greece's case, the political elites should have addressed issues such as the dilapidating and disorganized character of the Greek state and the inability of its institutions to respond to external threats. In addition, it should have tried to discuss publicly the degree of responsibility of those external agents that had created specific structures of influence directing and/or misleading the actions of Greek governing classes in certain circumstances before 1974. But nothing of this has taken place. The causes of the defeat of 1974 were brushed off. The Cyprus files (even those concerning the 1950s) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are, following a decision by the Greek parliament, hermetically closed. In their stead, we have had a two-party system, conveniently situating across the extended bureaucratic apparatuses comprador mechanisms of bargaining and wheeling and dealing in order to feed itself consensus via corruption and embroilments. Thus, the analysis of the Greek Left that the culprit is the state and its authoritarian tendencies is as generic as it is wrong. The future generations that will build the Fourth Hellenic Republic should remember that the Third did not suffer from authoritarianism, but from a lack of institutional norms and rules that are the requisites of every modern polity.

Lack of knowledge, discipline and professionalism are the key characteristics of the average Greek civil servant, not least of the person who pulled the trigger on the night of December 7, 2008 in central Athens. It is a pity that we needed an event such as this to draw the attention of both the political elites and the public that the contours and the premises of the Third Hellenic Republic can no longer hold. The riots in Athens that occurred in the wake of this event are but the epiphenomenon of a deep-seated malaise that has to do with the way in which the Greek polity has been organized and governed since 1974. Defining administrative and economic measures to take this polity outside the corrupt and inefficient boundaries of the Third Republic is the first step forward. This, it should additionally be noted, is the only way to come to grips with the defeat of 1974.