



ROMAN GERODIMOS

“Return to the Politics of Modernisation”

The next few months constitute a critical juncture for a range of national and international affairs of grave importance: from controlling the uncontrollable deficit and national debt to managing the negotiations for the European prospects of Turkey and FYROM to the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen to choosing an EU President. This period will be rich in intensive negotiations and pressures, but also in opportunities for Greece’s international position and image abroad. The clear popular mandate emerging from October’s general election, the Greek PM’s agenda and the momentum of the new government have raised hopes for a more active presence in the international community.

Greece’s representatives in international fora and decision-making centres will have to exhaust their own personal and political capital in creative and co-ordinated ways. Personal relationships, informal contacts and alliances will have to be tapped into as part of a realistic strategy. The pitch and quality of the internal public debate will be equally crucial in enhancing the country’s case. It is true that the 2009 election campaign was atypically low-key featuring substantive debate – especially when compared to previous elections.

However, in the last few weeks we are seeing the re-emergence of conspiracy theories and reactions based on fear and on the old-fashioned notion that Greece is a weak victim – a “pawn” on a chessboard dominated by major powers, secret services and closed deals. This notion is cost-free for those who advocate it (indeed, it often enhances their electoral appeal), but it’s quite detrimental to the national interest because it impedes the evolution of the political culture; it obstructs the public debate from focusing on real issues and solutions. After adopting conspiracy theories as an hermeneutic model in order to explain their own weaknesses and failures, these forces then project the same model to the national level.

A key benefit of major foreign policy successes such as Greece’s entry into the EMU, Cyprus’ accession into the EU, as well as the “diplomacy of the pipelines”, is precisely the rejection of this passive narrative which perceives of other countries as enemies. As with democratic politics, diplomacy is based upon the strategic pursuit of targets via co-existence, flexibility, negotiation, mutual interests and alliances – terms not commonly found in the dictionary of those who support isolation. Following a long period of indulgent introversion in the micropolitics of the domestic scene, there is only one way forward for Greece: the return to modernisation and europeanisation – an extrovert foreign policy.

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