

Social Partnership in Greece: Is there a Europeanization effect?

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine the impact of Europeanization on Greek social policy, focusing especially on social partnership and the role of employers and trade unions in the formulation of labour market policies. Specifically, I will focus on the impact of the European Employment Strategy (EES) and the resulting policy choices of the social partners. The EES provides a testable case because, in contrast to policy areas where enforcement of EU-stemming initiatives is obligatory, its realisation rests on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which permits ample scope for a plurality of national policy responses.

Europeanization is here seen as a process rather than an effect. In its OMC variety, it seeks to promote policy learning and the upgrading of standards for all member states towards a common European norm. Europeanization can thus have two potential sets of influence: 1) a cognitive, leading to a gradual alteration of policy discourse in line with what is perceived by policy actors as the 'EU norm' and b) a transformative, which not only leads to a change in discourse but facilitates policy reprioritisation over the long-term and, through policy learning, opens up the space for reforms in the relevant policy actors' administrative and organisational capacities.

The first part of the paper begins with a discussion of the EES and the OMC method. I will then set this policy initiative in the wider context of Europeanization and its effects in Southern Europe. Focusing on sociological institutionalism's structuralist and agency-centred approaches, I will assess the extent to which Europeanization has produced domestic changes in Greek industrial relations. The third part of the paper seeks to measure the actual effects of EES on Greek social partnership, focusing on the two sets of potential impact outlined above. The fourth part will make discuss the salience of national legacies and administrative abilities in the implementation of the Strategy, underlining the importance of 'reading' Europeanization on the basis of policy legacies and historical precedents.

Introduction

The process of European integration, whereby 'distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states' (Haas, 1968: 16), received a strong boost following the signing of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986. Apart from reinvigorating the process of 'ever closer union', it became the first in a series of steps towards 'a comprehensive strategy of Europeanization capable of producing and sustaining a new equilibrium between the Community, the state and an emergent transnational (civil) society' (Chrysochoou, 2001: 95, parenthesis in the original). Subsequent developments, such as the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 that expanded the realm of autonomous decision-making by the Commission, indicated that the analysis of European integration could not be restricted to a debate centred on the jurisdiction of national governments and the extent of their authority, but had to incorporate the notion of governance as a key element of EU policy-making (Bulmer, 1998: 367).

This paper seeks to add to the literature on the effects of Europeanization at national level, and the role of interest groups in particular. It will thus examine the impact of Europeanization on social partnership and the role of employers and trade unions in Greece. To assess the evolution of Greek social partnership, the paper will utilise the European Employment Strategy (EES), which is based on the Open method of Coordination (OMC), and examine whether a 'logic of appropriateness' has reshaped Greek labour relations. Apart from the fact that the OMC's 'soft law' character is meant to facilitate policy learning and adaptation to a multi-level regulatory environment, an explicit part of the EES agenda is to strengthen the Social Dialogue at national level and the role of the social partners in policy implementation. To that extent, the EES represents an attempt to 'Europeanize' weak, fragmented and rudimentary industrial relations regimes. Such an exercise has acquired particular significance after the 2004 Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, as those countries' industrial relations regimes are by and large characterised by the above characteristics. Weakness and fragmentation have, however, also characterised labour relations in Southern Europe, and Greece in particular.

The first part of the paper begins with a discussion of the EES, highlighting the important extent to which the EES aims and objectives are conditioned on high levels of social partnership, both in the policy execution and policy implementation levels. I will then set this policy initiative in the wider context of Europeanization and its effects in Southern Europe, discussing previous research of both Europeanization in general and its effects on Southern European politics and policies in particular. Focusing on sociological institutionalism's structuralist and agency-centred approaches (Börzel and Risse, 2000:8), I will assess the extent to which Europeanization has produced domestic changes in Greek industrial relations. The third part of the paper seeks to measure the actual effects of EES on Greek social partnership, focusing on two levels: a) the cognitive impact of its operation, and b) the transformative influences of EES on the political role of employers and unions in Greece. The fourth part will make an overall assessment of the findings, discuss a few observations on the salience of national legacies and administrative abilities in the implementation of the Strategy, and underline the importance of 'reading' Europeanization through diverse

lenses and on the basis of policy legacies and historical precedents. The conclusion will then sum up the paper's overall findings.

The European Employment Strategy and OMC

The European Employment Strategy began to take shape in the mid-1990s and in the context of a welfare crisis brought about by high unemployment and rising pressures on social expenditure budgets. Following the 1994 Essen European Council and the publication of the Commission's White paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment, the Council opted to adopt a strategy located between solidarity and competitiveness (De la Porte and Pochet, 2002: 17). Following years of debate and contrasting priorities by different member states, agreement was finally reached in the 1997 Amsterdam Summit as to the content of an Employment Strategy for Europe: following the path first opened by EMU, it was decided that employment policy should also be fuelled through a multilateral integration process (De la Porte and Pochet, 2002: 19). The fact that the EES became integrated in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty added to its significance.

The principal aim of the EES was to promote policy coordination with each member state working through its own institutional methods towards achieving commonly agreed goals (Martin and Ross, 2004b: 322). The EES was the fruit of Third Way policy advocates who saw in 'activation' (Begg 2003) a way: a) out of the unemployment trap, increasing the levels of productive employment and b) a formula to retain the European social model whilst enhancing its ability to survive the fiscal and budgetary pressures stemming from EMU (Zeitlin and Trubek, 2003). Within the framework of EMU and the economic policies this entailed, an attempt was therefore made to craft 'an alternative social agenda' (De la Porte and Pochet, 2002: 22).

On that basis, the Council adopted nineteen Employment Guidelines centred on four themes: adaptability (new forms of flexibility), employability (emphasis on active labour market policies enabling labour market entry and participation), equal opportunities (encourage an increase in female employment rates) and entrepreneurship (SMEs, start-ups and entrepreneurial skills) (b and Ross, 2004: 323). On the basis of these Guidelines, every member state would draw a National Action Plan (NAP) explaining how it intended to put these Guidelines in practice and in line with its own institutional background (Ardy and Begg, 2001: 8). The Council, the Commission and other member-states could then scrutinise the success of the strategy, while the Commission and the Labour and Social Affairs Council would synthesize the National Reports and assess both individual performances and EU-wide performance (De la Porte and Pochet, 2004: 72). The result of this synthesizing and mutual monitoring is the Joint (by the Commission and the Council) Employment Report, next to the Commission's own Annual Report on employment performance. Moreover, an Employment Committee consisting of two representatives from each member state and two Commission officials was set up to draft the Guidelines and monitor progress (Jacobsson, 2004: 358).¹

¹ The Employment Committee has been modelled on the Economic Policy Committee advising the ECOFIN, along with the Social protection and Education Committee. It also takes part in the Macroeconomic Dialogue ('Cologne process'). In general, although the institutional set-up of the EES has imitated EMU, the key difference between the two lies in the absence of compulsion mechanisms in the case of EES (De la Porte and Pochet, 2002: 295).

Employment Guidelines have been revised annually. After 1999, policy reforms on the basis of the NAPs started to be implemented. After the 2000 EU Summit in Lisbon and the 2001 Stockholm Summit, the EES has also encompassed 'horizontal objectives', namely a) reaching specific overall employment targets, female employment and old people employment targets, b) promoting quality of work and lifelong learning, c) further incorporating the social partners in the process, d) striving to achieve full employment. In 2002, the first 'impact assessment' exercise took place, taking stock of 5 years of EES. The overall conclusions pointed to signs of convergence of employment policies of member states and structural improvements in the EU labour market, whilst also pointing out the persistent misfit between tax and social policies in some member states (European Commission 2002). Finally, in 2005 the EES has been reformed altogether: following a re-emergence of sluggish growth and persistently high unemployment levels, the Commission decided in July 2005 to revamp the EES. Guidelines are now presented in conjunction with macroeconomic and microeconomic policy guidelines (attempting to sever the link between economic and labour market policy) for a three-year period. The so-called 'Integrated Guidelines for Jobs and Growth' form the basis for the successors of the NAPs, the National Reform Programmes (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/2005/04/feature/eu0504203f.html>).

Ever since its inception and implementation, the EES has been distinguished by the precedent it set: it was the first policy area that came under partial EU authority to operate according to what the 2000 Lisbon Summit termed the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).² Often seen as the Union's institutional response to the multi-level governance literature and the increasing complexity of policy-making (De la Porte and Pochet, 2004: 71), the OMC is essentially a form of inter-governmental cooperation combined with supranational elements (Jacobsson, 2004: 357). In the Lisbon definition mentioned above, OMC means three main things. Firstly, establishing Guidelines and translating them into policy initiatives to reach goals on a national and regional level. Secondly, establishing quantitative and qualitative benchmarks to assess best practice, and thirdly, the periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review of the process (Jacobsson, 2004: 357). Essentially, OMC translates into 'management by objectives', working on the basis of statistical data and encouraging policy convergence among member-states, policy coordination on different levels and the use of benchmarking to elicit useful conclusions. 'Because this new type of governance does not rely primarily on top-down command and control-type regulation backed by sanctions', it has often been described as a 'soft law' policy area (Trubek and Mosher, 2003). The impact of OMC on EU integration is open to diverse interpretations. The most sympathetic accounts of OMC treat it as a new way of articulating progressive political demands in the Union by encouraging positive reform (Vandenbroucke 2001; Martin and Ross, 2004b: 324). Sceptics, on the other hand, suspect that its usage betrays an attempt to move away from uniform rules regarding employment and social protection, as well as the erosion of Europe's commitment to its social model (Degryse and Pochet, 2000). It has also been deemed ineffective due to its non-binding character and its limited content (Keller 2000).

² In 2000 pensions and social inclusion became also part of an OMC process. It has continued to spread in ever more policy areas ever since.

Underpinning all EES initiatives, proposals and policies is an attempt by the Commission and the Council to strengthen the role of social partners in the EU. In particular, the EES calls upon the social partners to become active participants in the process, along with the government, and play a particularly active role in the realisation of the adaptability pillar (De la Porte and Pochet, 2004: 74). They have also been encouraged to make direct contributions to the NAPs and provide their own input to the document. More recently, the Commission has reiterated its belief in social partnership as 'subsidiarity in practice' and a form of governance that is effective due to the proximity of the social partners to the workplace and its real needs (European Commission, 2004). The re-emergence of 'Social Pacts' in Europe (see below) has been partly influenced by the strong pressures exerted by the Commission (Martin and Ross, 2004b: 324). The latter has thus attempted to foster a broad-based, consensual framework of policy reform in the context of EMU and the member states' drive to fulfil the conditions set out in the convergence criteria.

Europeanization: a literature review

Over the 1990s, the debate on the effect of the European Union on member-states gathered pace. 'Europeanization' entered the vocabulary of practitioners and academics alike. There is, however, no overall definition of the term: Europeanization is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, whose reading and interpretation differs (Morlino, 2002: 238; Radaelli, 2000). Part of the difficulty in defining the term lies with the flexible interpretation it can acquire, either as a *cause* of policy change towards a certain 'European' norm, or as a *consequence* of gradual adaptation to European norms and modes of policy behaviour acquired through participation in the EU decision-making machinery and interaction with policies and politics at the EU level (Martin and Ross, 2004a: 17). In fact, the challenge is to avoid the generic usage of the term with Europeanization becoming a 'catch-all' explanation, devoid of any precise characteristics and synonymous with all kinds of policy changes taking place in the context of European integration (Pirro and Zeff, 2005: 209). To make matter worse, there is confusion as to the link between globalisation and Europeanization. While the latter can be seen as merely the regional form of the latter due to their close interaction (Wallace and Wallace, 2000), others prefer to view Europeanization as a distinct process that aims to the creation of a new political entity – Europe- regardless of globalisation and the need for policy convergence regarding a tight fiscal straitjacket (EMU). In fact, rather than running parallel to globalisation, Europeanization has been discussed as a *reaction* to it, providing a bulwark for European states wishing to preserve certain policy characteristics (the 'European Model of Society' ?) and shield EU member states from the undesired effects of globalisation. An example of the latter is EMU, the creation of which signalled the Union's intention to protect 'Euroland' from global currency markets' fluctuations and the volatility of floating exchange rates (Cowles and Risse, 201: 220).

For some, Europeanization is a method of explaining institution-building at the European level and the development of the integration process. Within this framework, Europeanization is but one of the factors leading to 'ever closer Union' and contributes to the eventual arrival to a European polity (Wallace and Wallace, 2000). With time, Europeanization has acquired a second distinctive trait, and is also

studied with regard to its effects at the national level. This, in turn, has taken the form of studies measuring the effects of Europeanization on a regional basis (Haverland, 1999; Duina, 1999) or its impact on a national scale (Katzenstein, 1997; Schmidt, 1996).

Other scholars have read Europeanization as a two-way process, with policy input flowing both from the EU level to the member states and vice-versa (Cowles et al. 2001). Their focus is on the top-down path and Europeanization is synonymous to the formation of policies and institutions at the European Union level. In order for these to work, a certain 'goodness of fit' is required. EU policies will have a discernible impact on the domestic level only if there is a certain difficulty in their domestic absorption. If the existing policy framework fits well with the EU, there will be little discernible effects since pressures for change will be minimal. In cases of a 'moderate fit' however, changes will be rather significant and Europeanization likely to have the biggest impact possible (Cowles and Risse, 2001: 217). This approach owes a lot to new institutionalism as it highlights the role of domestic institutions and policy actors in rejecting or embracing 'Europe'. State structure, administrative capacities and the presence or absence of a consensual political culture play an important role in the process of Europeanization and interact with the multiple variations of Europeanization across different policy areas (Cowles and Risse, 2001: 225). Still, this approach has been criticised on various grounds, including the mono-dimensional assumptions implicit in its belief that policy flows from Brussels to passive member-states, the rather low levels of adaptational pressures exerted on national governments in policy sectors such as telecommunications (Thatcher 2004) and the existence of institutional veto players in national contexts that can successfully resist pressures of adaptation (Haverland 2003).³

Vivien Schmidt has also adopted a neo-institutionalist approach in analysing the form and effect of Europeanization. In particular, she has differentiated the process of integration (a top-down method) from Europeanization, which she sees as emerging from the bottom-up and referring to the domestic impact of European processes and policies. Europeanization undermines national authority and encourages the policy convergence of member-states and the European Union: 'Europeanization then is the execution of policies designed to move European integration forward' (Schmidt, 2002; Pirro and Zeff, 2005: 212). Schmidt (2002) shows how Europeanization may not necessarily result in policy convergence, as national policy responses will differ according to existing contextual circumstances, history, values and the framing of the Europeanization discourse.

Sociological institutionalism has provided two possible avenues for exploring the impact of Europeanization on the domestic policy setting. Operating according to the 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 1989), sociological accounts argue that actors act in accordance with what is perceived as proper in a given rule-based structure. Such an approach is particularly relevant to the OMC-based EES, as it focuses on the informal pressures exerted upon policy actors to conform to best practice standards, not least through periodic monitoring of policies and peer pressure. One explanation for domestic change derived from this framework argues that frequent institutional interaction will lead to gradual homogenisation of

³ More recent versions of the 'goodness of fit' explanation have incorporated the role of institutional veto players in their analyses (Börzel and Risse 2003).

organisational structures, as a result of changes in the cognitive and normative environment of their operation (Börzel and Risse, 2000: 8). A second explanation for domestic change, more agency-oriented and incorporating the diversity of policy responses evident in various policy fields, argues that actors' socialisation in new norms and procedures will lead to a redefinition of interests and identities. If European norms and practices do not 'fit' well with existing institutional arrangements, they are likely to produce important domestic change (ibid).

For all its different readings and interpretations, Europeanization unites scholars when it comes to the importance of policy learning. In this respect, emphasis needs to be placed on the role of ideas and how these affect not only the specific goals to be attained by governments but also 'the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing' (Hall, 1993: 279). Whether it emanates from the top-down or the bottom-up, Europeanization involves the inauguration of a process of learning from others and the potential imitation of successful policy paradigms implemented at the supra-national, national, regional or local level (Morlino, 2002). The EES has been seen as an ideal forum for the dissemination of policy learning because it is based on ideational convergence on what constitutes the best employment strategy (Bulmer and Radaelli, 2001: 11). Both its overall objectives but also the use of benchmarks as learning instruments to disseminate best practice are capable of altering prior understandings and lead to important changes (Trubek and Mosher, 2003; De la Porte and Pochet, 2004: 73). Its iterative, cross-cutting and deliberating nature facilitates the exchange of information and engagement of diverse actors in the process of policy formulation (Trubek and Mosher 2003). In fact, it has been argued that the whole point about using the OMC is that ideational convergence will produce policy change at the domestic level (Bulmer and Radaelli, 2001: 12). Due to its character, therefore, the EES' impact can be clustered into two groupings. Firstly, the *cognitive* one, where policy actors modify their language in discussing and analysing issues, perceive problems and reform points in a European rather than national context, draw comparisons with their EU counterparts in relation to reform needs/requirements at the national level and widen their agenda to address EES requirements (Guillen and Pallier, 2004: 204). Secondly, the *transformative* impact whereby, in accordance with the explicitly stated EES objectives, the social partners become actively involved in labour market policy formulation and cooperate closely to implement policies. Evidence of such processes and the existence of such an impact would signify the Europeanization of social partnership.

Europeanization, Modernisation and Policy Learning in Southern Europe

The emphasis placed on policy learning, that is, the adoption of policy norms exported to member-states either by European institutions or other member-states is especially salient in the case of Spain, Portugal and Greece. This is primarily due to their recent political history but also traditionally weak administrative systems, which have rendered the process of Europeanization mono-dimensional, at least with regard to the transfer of policy competences and the adaptation of their institutional framework to EU-wide norms and rules.

To start with, Spain, Portugal, and Greece have all experienced severe economic crises during the 1980s, and overcoming that meant an increasing reliance on EU

assistance. At the same time and due to their relative economic backwardness, 'Europe' signified for these countries the opening of a window of opportunity regarding their administrative and economic modernisation (Morlino, 2002: 254). Moreover, economic underdevelopment, administrative inefficiency, unstable domestic politics (until the 1990s) and recent accession (for Spain and Portugal) meant that these countries have been unable to provide policy input to the European level, and have therefore sought to adopt the rules and regulations emanating from Brussels. While the impact of Europeanization on Southern Europe is undisputed, it is fair to hypothesize that its effects will differ from country to country and in line with constraints or opportunities shaped at the domestic level. Furthermore, European policy initiatives interact with domestic institutional arrangements in different ways depending on the scope of decision-making and the importance attached to that particular policy area by domestic political actors.

The effects and impact of Europeanization on domestic political consolidation are well-documented (Pridham, 2002; Castanares and Juste, 2002). Aside from the strictly political effects of association and/or membership to the EU, Southern Europe has also been subject to policy changes on different fields as a result of European policies compelling domestic political and institutional activity. Increasing attention has recently been paid to the area of social policy, with the structure of Southern European welfare states and their labour markets being at the centre of attention. With regard to the welfare state, it is now widely accepted that Southern Europe has succeeded in the politics of 'catch-up' with those West European countries whose welfare states it saw as the paradigm to follow at the time of accession (Guillen and Pallier, 2004: 203). Even in the cases where a Europeanization of the welfare state has been less pronounced, important cognitive changes have been taking place, and policy tools emanating from the EU have gradually been adopted (Sotiropoulos, 2004: 267; Guillen and Alvarez, 2004). Regarding labour markets and the relations between social partners, Spain and Portugal provide evidence of a re-appearance of new forms of neo-corporatism, not least through the attempts by the social partners to regulate the labour market and reach agreements through concertation (Magone, 1998). It is worth pointing out, however, that it would be difficult to understand the growth of 'Social Pactism' in Europe in the 1990s in the absence of EMU and the increasing pressures exerted upon states to conform to the Maastricht convergence criteria at first and the prescriptions of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) after 1997. Losing control over the interest and exchange rates has meant that for Euro-zone countries to remain competitive, wage moderation became a *sine qua non*. Securing such moderation whilst maintaining social stability presupposes the involvement of the social partners (Martin and Ross, 2004b: 320).

There have been numerous studies on the Europeanization of the Greek polity as a result of EU accession (Moschonas, 1997; Kazakos, 1999; Featherstone and Kazamias, 2000; Ioakimidis, 2000; Tsoukalis, 2000). During the 1990s, a general consensus emerged among Greek policy-makers that convergence with EU standards regarding economic development ought to be prioritised in order for Greece to join EMU as soon as feasible (Kazakos, 2004: 906). 'Convergence with Europe' articulated both a pragmatic policy goal safeguarding the Greek currency from world market volatility, but was also part of the modernisation process inaugurated after the Civil War and aiming at the acceptance by Europe of Greece as

an equal and legitimate partner. Policies and ideas are interwoven, the later reinforcing the drive towards the adoption of policies conducive to the realisation of Europeanization as modernisation. In one of the most comprehensive assessments of the Union's impact on Greek politics and policies, Ioakimidis has argued that there are three discernible effects: a) the strengthening of civil society, a historically alien concept in Greece, b) a drive towards the decentralisation of public administration and c) a reduction in the pervasiveness of the erstwhile omnipresent statist culture (Ioakimidis, 2000). Looking at the impact of Structural Funds in particular, Verney and Ioakimidis confirm their decentralising impact on the Greek unitary state, as well as the added momentum they offered to the modernisation of Greek transport and industrial infrastructure (Ioakimidis, 1996; Verney, 1994).

Greek Social Partnership

The relationship between the Greek social partners on the one hand⁴ and the state on the other has traditionally been problematic. Phenomena common to Southern Europe, such as excessive reliance on party links, the overhauling of civil society by political parties and networks of clientelism contributed to the formation of 'disjointed corporatism' (Lavdas 1997) as the dominant form of interest representation. At the same time, a plethora of associations and groups divided employers and employees in numerous interest groups that lacked coherence and organisational resources.

Prior to democratisation in 1974, the system was largely characterised by its exclusionary nature towards trade unions and restrictive labour practices. 'Strict labour laws, hostility towards collective action, interference with union internal affairs' were the system's main characteristics (Koukias, 2003: 125). Collective bargaining was state sponsored and sanctioned under the terms of the relevant 1955 Law, leading to a centralised and hierarchical structure of industrial relations (OKE 2002). That Law had created arbitrating tribunals and made referral to arbitration mandatory, whilst providing a narrow scope for collective bargaining. In the post-1974 period, traditions of state assistance to business on the sectoral level have remained intact in those areas where business power has remained considerable (Lanza and Lavdas, 2000: 218). Attempts to institutionalise structures conducive to social dialogue, such as the 1978 Social Policy Council and the National Development and Productivity Council of the 1980s, failed.

Greece's turbulent political history, the legacy of civil war and a lack of conciliatory political culture prone to the accommodation of diverse interest has stifled attempts for structural negotiations between the two sides. Gradually, however, a series of changes led to the transformation of Greek social partnership and the emergence of concerted action on the part of labour and business representatives. *Firstly*, the toning down of the Socialist Party's (PASOK) anti-business rhetoric after 1985 meant that SEV acquired a dominant position in business representation.⁵ SEV also

⁴ In this paper, the term 'social partners' denotes the main representatives of labour and business. On the labour side these are the Greek General Labour Confederation (GSEE) organising employees in the public and private sector, and its public sector equivalent (ADEDY). On the employers' side, the main organisations are the Federation of Greek Industry (SEV) and the National Confederation of Hellenic Commerce (ESEE) and the General Confederation of Greek Small Businesses and Trades (GSEVEE).

⁵ After PASOK's election victory in 1981 SEV had contributed to the establishment of a business front (ESIP) hostile to the government. ESIP gradually emerged as an antagonistic force to SEV but lost in importance after PASOK's 1985 U-Turn in economic policy (Lanza and Lavdas, 2000: 222-224).

managed to achieve important growth rates in both coverage and membership in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. *Secondly*, the liberalisation of the legal framework regarding interest representation confirmed the equal status of business and labour as legitimate representatives of their respective members. Concretely, Law 1876/1990 passed under a National Unity government and with the assent of both GSEE and three employer organisations (SEV, GSEVEE and ESEE) institutionalised free collective bargaining. It also created a framework for decentralised bargaining and restored the notion of collective autonomy. For the first time, two new levels were recognised in the bargaining sphere, the sectoral and enterprise levels, taking priority over the sectoral one (OKE 2002). The tradition of craft-based representation was therefore made irrelevant. The two new levels dominate bargaining in Greece, and complement the centralised National General Collective Labour Agreement (EGSSE) that SEV and GSEE have been regularly signing every few years. EGSSE sets minimum wages and basic labour conditions, is legally binding and covers all employment relationships (OKE 2002). Also, Law 2738/1999 introduced collective bargaining to the public sector (OKE 2003). *Thirdly*, new institutions were created during the 1990s to promote the Social Dialogue. The most important of these institutions were, the Arbitration and Mediation Organisation (OMED) (created due to the 1990 law), the Economic and Social Committee (OKE) in 1994 and the National Employment Committee.

The Impact of EES on Greek Social Partners

To assess the impact of EES on national settings, the point of departure needs to be the domestic context. Problems, resources and ideas prevalent at that level (Bulmer and Radaelli, 201: 14) should be analysed before an attempt can be made to deduce the cognitive and/or transformative influence of a Strategy based on OMC.

With regard to social policy and the impact of 'Europe' on the Greek labour market, evidence is rather thin on the ground. The studies that have been conducted to date show limited effects, not least due to the limited institutional capacities of the EU in influencing national social policy (Koukias, 2003). Policy areas that remain the prerogative of nation-states, and where the pressure for adaptation towards a certain norm is low, highlight the domestic institutional context and the difficulties in overcoming entrenched policy-making attitudes. An example of that is the failure of the 2000 Greek labour market reform (Papadimitriou, 2005) as well as the failure to transform social policy towards a sustainable basis, prioritising short-term political expediency instead (Venieris, 2003). What is different in the case of EES is that the policy mis-fit between the European and domestic level is, in the case of Greek labour relations, high. Adaptational pressures to change the operation of social partnership and institutionalise the Social Dialogue (Majone 1998) should therefore be high.

Impact Assessment I: Cognitive Change

Based on the Open method of Coordination, the European Employment Strategy relies to a great extent on social mechanisms to impact upon the formulation and execution of policy. Based on a slightly modified categorisation from the one developed by Jacobsson (2004), I outline a set of practices that, though not unique to

OMC, are systematically used by it to promote policy change. These are: a) the changed use of language towards a Europeanised framework of action, b) developing common statistical indicators and other scientific pools, c) the strategic use of comparisons and evaluation with European counterparts, as well as d) the diffusion of knowledge through the creation of new institutional mechanisms and the broadening of the social partners' labour market agenda. Relying on the identification of such mechanisms as denoting cognitive transformation and the impact of OMC, I apply them to the case of the Greek social partners to measure the impact of EES in altering the cognitive landscape of employers and unions in Greece.

There is strong evidence of a changing discourse on the part of the Greek social partners in the 1990s. This, however, seems to be less related to the EES process and more a result of the institution-building of social dialogue structures. OKE is an example of that: its own-initiative Opinion⁶ on the progress of Social Dialogue in Greece begins by emphasising the government's inspiration from the European ECOSOC as well as the fact that 'the social dialogue in all its form is a component part of the European Social Model, which incorporates values such as responsibility, solidarity, participation and joint action' (OKE 2002). Trade unions appear to continue operating on a more traditional framework of reference when it comes to labour and economic policy. The Information Newsletters released by the unions' Labour Institute between 1995 and 2003 cover 24 thematic categories, only one of which (No. 18) relates to 'EU-EMU-Social Europe' in a systematic manner. While the number of contributions and attempts to disseminate information to members and the wider public in this category is large (56 articles in total), the distinction between the domestic and European sphere is clear-cut (<http://www.inegsee.gr/εuropeτρήσιο%20πλεπ.-ενημ.doc>). On the other hand, the creation in 1990 of the Labour Institute by GSEE points to its willingness to expand the scientific poll of conducting research. More importantly, there is evidence that the LI is engaged in systematic cross-European comparisons to determine income, taxation and social benefit levels in the EU and compare these to the Greek equivalent.

As documented above, Greek social partners have traditionally approached the country's labour market problems from a rather static viewpoint, concerned more with 'bread-and-butter' issues and ignoring the wider socio-economic context of their demands and/or proposals. The mis-fit between that heritage and the attempt to form a holistic approach to the problems of economic growth, population ageing, and unemployment through the EES was therefore high. While the inauguration of the EES in 1997 appears to have hardly affected the discourse and strategies of the social partners, the Lisbon Agenda and the discussion on the European Social Model that resulted from it affected their phraseology and attitude to economic reform.

Agreeing on the goals of more competitiveness and flexibility with security meant that both employers and unions acquired a new point of reference in formulating their demands and strategies. SEV has created a separate section under its 'Positions' Archive entitled 'The Lisbon Strategy'. The unions' studies and reports on Greek economic policy are increasingly formulated in a European context, drawing parallels

⁶ Following the ECOSOC example, OKE can issue Opinions on its own initiative on issues pertaining to general issues of economic and social policy. However, consulting OKE is compulsory when it comes to passing Laws related to labour relations, tax reform, social insurance, investment, exports, consumer protection and competition policy (www.oke.gr)

with countries of a similar socio-economic outlook in the EU (usually Spain and Portugal) and calling for reforms to meet the Lisbon targets in a worker-friendly manner. Annual Reports published by the LI since 1999 are indicative of the new approach. In the last report published in September 2005, the unions called for the creation of a 'knowledge economy', emphasising employee retraining and the enhancement of knowledge-intensive activities to offset low-wage pressures from neighbouring Balkan countries (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/2005/10/feature/gr0510103f.html>). A Europeanization of the social partners' discourse is increasingly discernible through the adding of an explicitly EU pillar prior to the Greek one on issue pertaining to economic and labour market policy reform (OKE 2004, OKE 2005). Furthermore, the EES has facilitated policy learning from other EU countries regarding the Social Dialogue and its potential for employer-union collaboration. Based on an analysis of Vocational Learning and the role of the social partners in 1997, the two sides agreed to the creation of an Account for Employment and Vocational Training (LAEK), which they also administer (OKE 2002). This was achieved through the EGSEE. A similar process, that is an institutional innovation based on general collective agreement, had led to the establishment of the Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (ELINYAE) in 1993 (ibid). LAEK and ELINAYE are administered exclusively by the social partners, a sign of significant progress regarding the ability of unions and employers to break the chord that used to link them with the state and/or political parties.

On the cognitive level, the impact of Europeanization on Greek social partnership appears limited: domestic transformation, particularly regarding the liberalisation of the legislative framework on employment in the 1990s appears more important in shifting the direction of policy behaviour. State initiatives, rather than an upgrade in the social partners' organisational capacity and concerted action, were of decisive importance in strengthening the legislative framework, not least through the creation of the National Employment Committee further to the 2002 Employment Guidelines (EIRO 2003) and the National Committee for Social Exclusion. Having said that, the impact of the 'European' factor cannot be ignored. The Lisbon Agenda in particular has intensified the use of the European yardstick regarding policy proposals (INE 2005), and quantitative research and data analysis by both employers and employees is increasingly conceptualised within a pan-European framework of operation and comparison. This may be due to the concrete goals established after the Lisbon and Stockholm Councils, which allowed governments and social partners alike to utilise a concrete framework of operation to achieve their aims.

Impact Assessment II: Transformative Change

This second set of variables employed to study the impact of the EES encompasses the degree of change of the social partners' agenda and the strengthening of their role through their participation in the NAPs and policy implementation of the NAPs.

Strengthening the role of employers and unions has often been linked to the re-invigoration of Social Pacts in the 1990s. They have been reached on a bipartite (Finland, Netherlands), tripartite (Ireland, Italy and Portugal), or mixed basis where the government has supported agreements reached between business and labour representatives (Spain) (Rhodes, 2001). In Greece, attempts to imitate such

developments started in earnest in 1997. In an effort to adapt the Greek economy to EMU requirements, the government invited the social partners to the first of a series of rounds aiming at the institutionalisation of Social Dialogue procedures. In November 1997 deliberations led to the signing of a Confidence Pact 'towards the year 2000'. However, its content was vague and no agreement was reached as to the desired direction of labour market and economic policy reform (Papadimitriou, 2005: 386). The process was repeated in 2000 and 2001 respectively with discussions aiming at reform of the labour market and social security. Both employers and unions declared their disappointment, as none of the two sides had managed to persuade the government to legislate after the social dialogue in the way it saw fit (Kioukias, 2003: 128).

For all the air of disappointment that covered these deliberations, and the lack of institutionalised Social Dialogue structures in Greece, there is evidence to suggest that employers and unions have made persistent attempts to act in accordance with a 'more "grown up", socially responsible profile' (Papadimitriou, 2005: 392). Though it is impossible to determine whether this is a direct effect of socialisation in EU circles and the participation of SEV and GSEE in the European Social Dialogue through UNICE and ETUC respectively, similar negotiations in other member states and the pressures for reform emanating from the EU are likely to have played a role. Importantly, there is evidence that the social partners are shedding their old dependence on the state and are ready to reach self-initiated agreements to intervene in the labour market. In 1999, GSEE and SEV established a Joint Committee to study reductions in working time, following the example of EU states where such a reform had materialised (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/1999/08/inbrief/gr9908147n.html>). While the Committee's deliberations ended in disagreement, the two sides tried a year later to reach a bilateral agreement on labour reform, urging the government not to legislate before the end of their talks. The government, however, went ahead with its own reform that, once more, left both sides dissatisfied (Papadimitriou, 2005: 392). Agreement to move ahead with common propositions has been, however, the exception to the rule: to this day, institutions such as OKE function on an overtly pluralistic and purely advisory role, registering the divergent views of their member without meaningful outcomes (OKE 2004, OKE 2005). Employers and unions remain highly politicised actors and the conflict-ridden character of industrial relations has remained largely unaffected by changes in the external environment (Venieris, 2003: 137).

The involvement of the social partners in National Action Plans had been rudimentary and of little value to the final draft until 2001. In that year, the social partners (and local authorities) were for the first time able to participate in the drafting of the NAP (and the adaptability pillar in particular) and the drafting of the 3rd Community Support Framework (Hellenic Ministry of Labour, 2001: 12). Even then, however, the views of the social partners were merely considered in the final NAPs, with no input from their side incorporated in the final text. Moreover, there has been no attempt to synthesise the two sides' views and propose common actions, as differences and disagreements remain too large to bridge. In both the planning and implementation stages of the NAPs, the social partners were essentially left out of the procedure, and complained of insufficient consultation (EIRO 2003).

Another channel of potential influence and coordination by employers and unions has been the creation of Local Employment Pacts (TSAs). These began as an initiative by the Commission to boost local employment and in the Greek context were meant to translate into special collective agreements at the local level stemming from the collaboration of local actors (OKE 2002). Once more, vagueness characterised who was to participate in the TSAs and which areas the agreements were meant to cover. Unions saw them as an attempt to deregulate the labour market and abolish principles of collective labour law, while the employers derided the state-centrist character of their set-up and urged a reform of the labour law to make TSAs attractive to employer participation (<http://www.euro.euroworld.com/1997/03/inbrief/gr9703109n.html>). In the end, the absence of incentives for employers' participation meant that the experiment with a social dialogue at the local level was not crowned with success (OKE 2002).

The Limits of Europeanization and the Domestic Context

This paper has sought to assess the impact of Europeanization in domestic policy settings, focusing on Greece and social partnership. It has utilised a sociological institutionalist approach, according to which the logic of 'appropriateness' influences policy actors as they participate in iterative interaction and learn from each other. The European Employment Strategy based on the Open Method of Coordination, provided, at least in theory, the ideal policy tools for the Europeanization of Greek industrial relations to take place.

As documented above, however, the impact of Europeanization on the Greek social partners has to date been merely indirect, and inadequate to assist the strengthening of their role. While evidence of cognitive Europeanization does exist, albeit in conditions and ways only loosely related to the EES, the policy-oriented and 'hands-on' impact of Europeanization in the policy behaviour of employers and unions has been very limited. Even at the time when Social Pacts were signed in countries where such a tradition had been previously absent, the Greek social partners failed to reach similar agreements. Their role in the formulation and implementation of National Action Plans has been rudimentary and there have been no attempts to formulate common positions.

These results verify the salience of mediating factors in the process of transmitting policy ideas from the European to the national level and the internalisation of European norms. The most important of those factors is to be found in the characteristics of the social partners and the state prior to the onslaught of Europeanization, that is, the historical evolution and institutional structures that have shaped the two sides and gave rise to the particularistic attitude that characterises their function. As argued by Börzel and Risse (2000), confrontation hampers domestic change. In addition, 'the existence of norm entrepreneurs and consensus-oriented cultures affect whether European ideas, norms and the collective understandings which do not resonate at the domestic level, are internalized by domestic actors giving rise to domestic change' (Börzel and Risse, 2000: 9). The absence of such characteristics, themselves the result of historical and institutional developments, is likely to impede change. Both of these characteristics are present in the Greek case.

On the one hand, traditionally conflict-ridden labour relations are linked to the intense politicisation of trade unions (Petmesidou 2000). Mavrogordatos (1998) has neatly demonstrated the state corporatist tradition in Greece and its asphyxiating impact on the social partners. For the greatest part of trade union history the legitimacy of the movement depended on state control. Following the First World War, the practice of appointing state-sponsored union leaderships became widespread, as did the state financing of workers' organisation (Triantafyllou 2001). This resulted in a weak and fragmented trade union movement, whose ability to articulate an agenda distinct from the state in the post-1974 era was replaced by party political patronage fuelled by PASOK. In post-1974 political parties became the aggregators of societal interests and their tactics spilled over to the corporatist arena. The clearest articulation of this practice, which seriously hampered the ability of unions to overcome party political divisions, was the imposition of proportional representation in the elections of GSEE's leadership (Mavrogordatos 1998). State control of union activity was thus replaced with party political control. Placing the 1990s legislative reforms in their historical context provides important insights as to their inability to acquire a prominent role in the EES process and Europeanise their *modus operandi*.

Furthermore, Greek political culture has traditionally been characterised by the absence of broad-based consensus and conciliatory mechanisms to facilitate long-term reform. Again, the reasons for such an absence need to be traced back to the historical evolution of the Greek polity, distinguished by major cleavages along political lines, political and economic instability, and party-political radicalism in the early years of the post-1974 restoration of democracy (Diamantouros 1995; Tsarouhas 2005). 'The two civil wars of [the 20th] century and a lack of culture of elite accommodation and of conciliatory party leaderships deprived Greek political development of a critical background factor for the consolidation of long-term societal corporatist arrangements capable of negotiating social pacts' (Lanza and Lavdas, 2000: 216).

Conclusion

The EES operating through the auspices of OMC seeks to fuel the Europeanization of social partnership. Such an exercise is meant to take place through the instruments favoured by OMC and which rely on policy learning mechanisms facilitated through peer observation, peer pressure, benchmarking and collaboration to establish and observe best practice. In the absence of compulsory instruments, OMC can favour such Europeanization through cognitive harmonisation and a transformation of the perceptions and subsequent policy action of the relevant actors.

The evidence thus far points to serious limitations in the Europeanization of Greek social partners, a rhetorical shift and a few minor institutional amendments notwithstanding. The failure to Europeanise beyond a limited extent, only loosely related to the EES process itself, points to the inadequacy of cognitive Europeanization in the presence of historical and institutional factors blocking the re-articulation of policy preferences along conciliatory lines and away from conflict-ridden understandings.

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