

# PASOK's modernization paradigm and new social democracy

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## ABSTRACT

The 2009 Greek elections have led to the return of the *Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement* (PASOK) in office. After assuming the party leadership in 2004, the new Prime Minister George Papandreou called for a new relationship between the party and party members/citizens based on transparency, democratic decision-making and horizontal forms of participation. PASOK's victory notwithstanding, European social democracy continues to suffer from a deep crisis of identity and political purpose.

The paper advances two sets of interrelated arguments. First, I argue that the completion of the convergence processes between social democracies 'North' and 'South' has left the latter in an advantageous position, at least in countries like Greece, on account of their late transition to democracy, the correspondingly small effect of social movements on party politics and the big parties' ability to absorb divergent social groups inside their coalition. This despite the fact that in countries such as Greece and Portugal cohesive and solidified parties to the left of social democracy remain influential.

Secondly, I argue that with the party reforms introduced over the last five years or so, PASOK's full conversion into a mainstream social democratic party is complete. This process had been ideologically completed a while back; Papandreou's reforms signal organizational convergence too. However, whilst on the one hand PASOK can now claim to be on the organizational forefront of progressive parties, its leadership-dominated heritage remains visible and conditions its passage to organizational modernity. In fact, some of the measures adopted by the new leader have a presidentialist effect that weakens the party at the expense of a direct relationship between leader and people.

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## Introduction

The 2009 Greek elections have led to the return of the *Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement* (PASOK) in office. The electoral triumph of PASOK was not widely anticipated. Whilst most commentators were certain of a Socialist victory in the wake of a crumbling centre-right administration beset by scandals and accusations of incompetence, the extent of PASOK's triumph was a personal vindication for the new Prime Minister George Papandreou. Having assumed the party leadership in 2004 and after having suffered successive electoral defeats, Papandreou led his party's arch-rival, the centre-right *Nea Dimokratia*, to a crushing defeat, a historic low in percentage of the overall vote won, and the change of its leadership after the resignation of Kostas Karamanlis. For now, the Prime Minister is the master of the game in Greek politics.

Papandreou has for a long time cultivated the public profile of a modernizer adept at the use of new technologies and a compassionate politician close to peoples' needs. Among his innovative political initiatives have been his proclaimed desire to change his party function towards a more open and participatory format that will give all citizens the right and opportunity to co-determine policy. After assuming the party leadership in 2004, Papandreou called for a new relationship between the party and party members/citizens based on transparency, democratic decision-making and horizontal forms of participation.

Given the electoral and ideological crisis of European social democracy, the enduring popularity of the Greek social democrats raises a set of interlinked questions. First of all, how can the triumph of PASOK be explained in immediate terms, i.e. what are the short-term lessons of the Greek example to its counterparts elsewhere in Europe? Second, what do the opposite trends in the rest of Europe and countries such as Greece tell us about the political and organizational transformation of European social democracy? Thirdly, what is the most likely organizational trajectory that PASOK is likely to follow, and what does this suggest about social democracy's future with respect to its organizational base, party membership and party leadership model?

The paper advances two sets of interrelated arguments. First, I argue that the completion of the convergence processes between social democracies 'North' and 'South'<sup>1</sup> has left the latter in an advantageous position, at least in countries like Greece, on account of their late transition to democracy, the correspondingly small effect of social movements on party politics and the big parties' ability to absorb divergent social groups inside their coalition. This despite the fact that in countries such as Greece and Portugal cohesive and solidified parties to the left of social democracy remain influential.

Secondly, I argue that with the party reforms introduced over the last five years or so, PASOK's full conversion into a mainstream social democratic party is complete. This process had been ideologically completed a while back; Papandreou's reforms signal organizational convergence too. However, whilst on the one hand PASOK can now claim to be on the organizational forefront of progressive parties, its leadership-dominated heritage remains visible and conditions its passage to organizational modernity. In fact,

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<sup>1</sup> Clearly, this is a simplification as no one northern or southern model of social democracy exists. It helps, however, in advancing the argument and it is used under that condition here.

some of the measures adopted by the new leader have a presidentialist effect that weakens the party at the expense of a direct relationship between leader and people.

PASOK has always differed from the social democratic family on account of its early domination by the party founder Andreas Papandreou.<sup>2</sup> This domination has been long-lasting, total and hardly ever questioned. The shadow of the past is long in the party and path-dependent elements in leadership behaviour can be discerned under Papandreou's successor Simitis and even Papandreou Jr. The ruler-based attitudes of the 'PASOK system' shaped in the mid-1970s following the clash between the party base and Papandreou (Pappas 2009) have not gone away. Also, Papandreou's leadership record suggests that the party is being made more democratic – while the grip of the party leader on its functioning becomes tighter! In that sense, PASOK's convergence with 'new' social democracy is proceeding rapidly (see Moschonas 2002).

To place the analysis in context, the paper begins with an overview of European social democracy's evolution towards its Third Way organizational constellation. The second section focuses on PASOK's remarkable ability to attract popular support under different guises and analyzes the changes introduced during the Simitis period (1996-2004). The third section then focuses on the Papandreou era since 2004 and discusses the changes introduced by the new leader. In the context of European social democracy's transformation, it argues that these changes have brought the party not only in ideological but also organizational harmony with mainstream social democracy.

## **I. European social democracy: growth, crisis and convergence**

Any discussion of social democracy is premised on the definition employed to account for its evolution. This is far from a straightforward process. Intense disagreement as to what constitutes social democracy, today and in the past, has reigned on in academic circles for a long time. The definition used is crucial, not least because this conditions the evaluation of its historical and political trajectory and influences judgement on its future prospects.

Two broad camps can be discerned. The first, more *minimalist* one argues that social democracy is a project of gradualism in political economy, a political movement intent on making capitalism more humane and democracy more widespread. It is committed to reducing inequality and working through the parliamentary system to achieve its moderate objectives (Gamble and Wright, 1999:2; Hirst, 1993: 87). In fact, there is no reason why the term socialism cannot be used interchangeably with social democracy, as long as it is used to denote the political tradition that seeks to allocate public resources, such as health and education, 'outside market mechanisms and on the basis of social citizenship, that is, without excluding anyone...' (Sassoon, 2006: 33).

The second camp embraces a more *comprehensive* definition and sees in social democracy 'a *distinctive set of institutions and policies* that fit together and worked

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to be confused with the lasting imprint that a leader can leave on the political life of his country more generally. Were I to use that criterion other Mediterranean leaders and especially Felipe Gonzales of Spain would have to be included.

relatively efficiently to reduce...both the insecurity and the inequality of income...' (Moene and Wallerstein, 1995: 186, emphasis added). Here social democracy is not *another* political project concerned with its own agenda and seeking, through the ballot box, to make it the dominant political force in the land. Instead, it constitutes a distinct political arrangement whose essential characteristics cannot but include, despite country-specific differences and national peculiarities, the following elements<sup>3</sup>: a) the interlinked relationship between socialism and trade unionism, b) working class integration in a social democratic culture marked by its educational institutions, cultural facilities, sports clubs and ideological networks, c) an ability to impose a welfare state type of political economy arrangement and d) a strong, bureaucratized and well-disciplined party organization with strong finances, membership numbers and activists.

Although it is true that the minimalist definition makes the distinct features of social democracy very difficult to detect and blurs the dividing lines with other 'compassionate' ideologies, such as social liberalism and Christian Democracy, it is equally true that the comprehensive definition is so tightly knit as to become exclusivist. It is hard to imagine such a social democracy as anything other than an ideal type (and a, by now, extinct one for that) if one was to include those few states in northwest Europe where all the features mentioned above did appear at one time or another. Such countries would be Sweden and Austria, but for different reasons the British Labour Party, France's Socialist Party or even Germany's SPD, the oldest social democratic party in the world, would have to be excluded. This is before one tries to take into account the 'Socialist south' and its distinct development, as illustrated below.

For the purposes of this paper therefore, social democracy lies somewhere in-between the two definitions suggested above. Whilst it cannot be just what social democratic parties do, its characteristics do not have to extend beyond a core of programmatic values and principles that, however incompletely or timidly, translate into policy practice once in office. These values include a commitment to democracy, solidarity, freedom and social justice. Their translation into policy practice entails measures to disperse power for the benefit of the majority of the population, including its economic and cultural underdogs, as well as the defence of the weak and the have-nots. On the organizational level, social democratic parties retain a distinct set of relations with trade unions and the representatives of labour more generally.

European social democracy has always been diverse, rooted in the traditions, cultures and institutional designs adopted by different states. History has been essential. Rooted in the industrial era and strongly affiliated with the trade union movement, social democracy fought throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century for political equality through the ballot box, the extension and expansion of the welfare state and full employment. By 1945 it had become a mainstream political force throughout western Europe, and in its most advanced versions, such as in Sweden, had created a political and ideological dominance that seemed to guarantee its longevity (Tilton, 1990; Tsarouhas 2008).

In retrospect, the golden age of welfare capitalism has been interpreted as the high point of social democracy. By the 1960s and 1970s, a combination of factors led to its decline

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<sup>3</sup> Winock quoted in Moschonas (2002), p. 16. Modified by the author.

and distinct social democratic advantages were eroded. Changes in the socio-economic sphere have been the most important and affected all of Western Europe. The manual working class, the movement's backbone and major source of strength, became numerically smaller and politically less influential (Andersson and Camiller, 1994: 12). The growth of the middle class and large zones of material affluence, itself a consequence of social democratic politics, made political demands less sharp, assisted the decline in unionization and split the previously solid inter-class alliance. It also led to the 'takeover' of social democratic parties by middle class members who carried with them their own values and approaches distinct from the working class and trade union constituencies. The transition to post-Fordism fatally undermined the goal of full employment (Goldthorpe 1984) and a globally mobile capital made neocorporatist deals less effective as labour remained immobile (Scharpf 1999).

Meanwhile, society was rapidly changing. The rise of new social movements in the 1970s resulting from affluence and the rise in post-materialist values undermined collectivist notions of solidarity and thus hurt social democracy at its core (Inglehart 1987). Identity politics grew: feminist and ecological politics split the former social democratic constituency and undermined the mass party character that social democrats had accomplished in the post-war era. The increasing influence of mass media led to the personalization of politics and a leadership-oriented model of competition. This has not always been to the advantage of social democrats, traditionally reliant on their ideas and programmatic values to convince the electorate.

Naturally, analysts diagnosed a social democratic crisis: Kitschelt (1994) detected the emergence of a new authoritarian-libertarian axis that does not sit well with traditional social democracy. Cultural choices on quality of life issues will increasingly replace traditional political conflict along the left-right axis. This postmodernists setting necessitated a move beyond the 'old' left and the neoliberal right to introduce a Third Way (Giddens 1998) as the brave new world of progressive politics. Having fully accommodated itself to the realities of neoliberalism, the 'new' social democracy of the 1990s was electorally successful until a few years back. It was, however, accused of having sold its 'soul' and thus being hardly able to carry the social democratic banner any more. Revisionism, the argument went, had gone too far (Moschonas 2002).

Democratization and the consolidation of large socialist parties in the 1970s and 1980s introduced a new sub-category to the landscape of European social democracy, that of the 'Socialist south'. Distinct from its northern counterpart on account of its late industrialization, conservative social values and weaker union influence, southern European parties nevertheless benefited from democratization and the transition to a new type of politics that necessitated less intense bonds with social movements thus being able to forego the earlier need of mass membership and party activists<sup>4</sup>. In the 1980s Southern Europe waived the social democratic flag when northern countries faced defeat and demoralization. By the late 1990s, southern European parties had gone mainstream after initial experimentations with radical leftism (PASOK in Greece is the best example) and the process of convergence between north and south was complete. A new type of

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<sup>4</sup> In Greece in particular, the social democratic party has been able to count on farmers' and petiti bourgeois support, a positive factor of diffreentiation from north European socialists (Moschonas, 2001: 16).

social democracy had been formed in the neoliberal era. Its inability to achieve full employment and create an efficient welfare state notwithstanding, some commentators now observed that, at least in electoral terms, the south compensated for the failures of the north (Andersson and Camiller, 1994: 5). PASOK under the leadership of Kostas Simitis in the 1990s is part of this 'new' social democracy, as will be explained below.

## II. PASOK: from socialist transformation to new social democracy

PASOK was formed in 1974 in conditions of political instability and the just-achieved democratic transition. Its early political message was of a radical left-wing nature calling among other for Greece's withdrawal from NATO and (later on) the EEC as well as the socialist transformation of society.<sup>5</sup> After registering 14% of the vote in the 1974 elections, PASOK doubled its percentage vote in 1977 and triumphed four years later with 48% of the vote. Andreas Papandreou became PM and the slogan of change (*Αλλαγή*) dominated the political landscape.

The 1980s is the first period of transformation for the party and the first step towards convergence with mainstream social democracy. Policy-wise, the radical era soon comes to an end. The party tones down its leftwing rhetoric and compromises with NATO and EEC membership. The party profile changes too, and early signs of authoritarian presidentialism within PASOK become consolidated. First, it gains a foothold in the labour unions, a process that began after the 1977 elections and in an attempt to gain favour with organized labour (Zambarloukou, 1997). Second, the leader concentrates all power in his hands and personal decisions are rubber-stamped by party organs. PASOK would not put up with union disagreements to party decisions, such as the U-Turn in economic policy after the 1985 elections.

The process that began in 1975, after a social democratic party faction called Democratic Defence (*Δημοκρατική Άμυνα*) was purged due to disagreements with Papandreou's royalist type of leadership, finds its apotheosis (Pappas, 2009: 61). Already after the 1974 election result and the rather disappointing 14% of the vote the party gathered, Papandreou sought to accelerate the party's ballot box success. To do so, he was determined to sidestep previous commitments for democratic procedures inside the party and the representation of all in party organs. Due to his sheer popularity among the masses, the political climate of the time and his tactical genius, Papandreou soon established his rule inside the party; only a minority took the radical option of exiting; for the vast majority, loyalty to the charismatic leader became the norm (Pappas, 2009: 99). The leader's monocratic rule becomes crystal clear over the late 1970s and especially by the early 1980s when PASOK comes to power. Papandreou has the power to fire Central Committee members, which he uses at will (Clogg, 1987: 130), keeps the number of Party

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<sup>5</sup> Due to its firebrand version of socialism PASOK had originally declined to join the Socialist International (SI), only doing so in 1992. Symbolically important and revealing of the depth of change the party has undergone is that today's PASOK leader, George Papandreou, heads the SI.

Congresses to record low levels and tolerates no internal dissent (Featherstone 1990). Kitschelt (1994: 288) likens Papandreou's scope and depth of authority in the party to Latin American leaders. Thirdly, after 1981 the boundaries between party and state will become increasingly blurred, a process that will continue well into the 2000s. The party machine is put at the service of election battle at the same time as civil service patronage becomes an effective mechanism of dominance in the public sector. 'Bureaucratic clientelism' is thus born (Lyrintzis 1984). The party is effectively at the mercy of the leader's wishes.

When it left office in 1989, PASOK was a party shaken by corruption scandals, highly personalized in its chaotic organization style and rather unsuccessful in its major goals of promoting growth through deficit spending and creating an effective welfare state. Nonetheless, it remained electorally powerful even at the peak of its economic mismanagement. Two main factors account for that. First, the leader's charismatic personality and his unique ability to 'read' the masses made PASOK the 'people's party' – moreover, a party that the expanding middle classes could now trust on account of its mainstream economic policies. Second, PASOK solidified popular support by following a tactic of polarization between left and right (Kalyvas, 1997). It sought to identify the opposition ND party with the conservative establishment thus playing on peoples' feelings of injustice and discrimination experienced in the years of 'limited democracy' (1949-1974) (Mouzelis and Pagoulatos, 2003: 88). It was a successful tactic. Pappas (2009) argues that it was followed precisely because Papandreou knew that there was little to lose from following it. He had earlier decided that social democracy was not the (electorally and organizationally) best possible option as it implied patience, a moderate political style and internal democracy. All three were in short supply and certainly less preferable than their alternatives.

The 1990s constitutes the second reconstruction phase of PASOK. After a brief interlude in opposition, it assumed office in 1993 and sought to rapidly implement an economic stabilization programme to keep the country in tune with the Maastricht Treaty and EMU requirements. In typical PASOK fashion, one of Papandreou's phrases ('we will either erase the debt or the debt will erase us') was enough to make sure that the party committed itself to the new goals and that dissent was treated as an abnormality. Following the leader's death in 1996, the modernizing faction of the party led by Kostas Simitis emerged victorious from successive intra-party contests and led until its downfall in 2004. In the 1990s, therefore, PASOK took the first step towards converging with the wider social democratic family: it renounced its past ideological radicalism and sought, in discourse and policy practice, to imitate the narrower vision of new social democracy in the era of the Third Way. According to Moschonas (2001: 12) PASOK remained a party full of contradictions and an unstable orientation all the way until 1992. It is little coincidence therefore that the party finally joined the Socialist International in 1992.

The Simitis era was, in many respects, an elite-driven attempt to push the country forward after prolonged stagnation. It has been rightly credited with Greece's EMU entry, a prospect that appeared very remote in the early 1990s, as well as some second-order reforms (to name two, the establishment of Citizens' Bureaus and the office of the Ombudsman.) However, Simitis never managed to take full control of the party or his

governments. He freely admits that in his personal memoirs (Simitis, 2004: 461). Distrusted for his modernizing credentials by PASOK personnel accustomed to Papandreou's leadership style, charismatic personality and clientelistic politics, Simitis represented something of an aberration hardly suitable to traditional PASOK loyalists.

Throughout his leadership, Simitis faced opposition by the party's 'internal opposition'. His declared intention was to revitalize the party, which had become accustomed to power and was visibly malfunctioning. One visible move was to increase the frequency of party Congresses, the highest decision-making body. During his tenure 3 such Congresses took place, in 1996, 1999 and 2001. Contrary to his predecessor's practice, Simitis insisted on a secret ballot and was duly elected in all three occasions. Nonetheless, the highest percentage he ever received, 71% in 2001, is revealing of the solid opposition to his rule.

Simitis sought to modernize the party by bringing in new candidates at local and national level, and reforming party structures. While the first move was successful to a degree the latter was never fulfilled. Making the party an agent of change alongside NGOs and think tanks to mobilize civil society failed because 'there was no time. The [big] priorities were different. EMU entry, the introduction of the euro, the Olympic Games...' (Simitis, 2004: 510, author's translation). Simitis never took full control of the party and his period in office was a constant attempt to balance out forces opposed to his rule, what Fouskas has termed 'an unstable equilibrium of compromises' (1998: 140). What is more, it is during the Simitis era that the party, more clearly than ever before<sup>6</sup>, sought to appeal to the rather vague notion of 'civil society' and the 'citizenry' rather than address class concerns or utilize the earlier class-based language (Spourdakis and Tassis, 2006: 506). In 2004 he chose to hand over the party leadership to the party's most popular figure, the Foreign Minister George Papandreou.

### **III. The New Papandreou Era: PASOK's Convergence with new Social Democracy**

George Papandreou, son of PASOK's founder, became PASOK's President and PM candidate. Circumstances were rather fortunate for the new leader. After almost a dozen years in office, it had become clear to all that PASOK was a tired party that kept going due to its highly developed instinct of self-preservation. It had long ceased to be a fighting political force and its organizational state was in disarray. Papandreou was seen as the party's saviour, the man coming to 'change it all' as the slogan of the time chanted by his supporters had it (Pappas, 2009: 239). The party's defeat in the 2004 election offered the new leader the opportunity to start the process of party renewal. Prior to that defeat, he sought to make use of the enthusiasm with which the media and PASOK loyalists greeted

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<sup>6</sup> The ideological turn of PASOK was clear by the time Papandreou became Prime Minister for a third time in 1993. This is why a fraction of the party's traditionalist wing deserted PASOK and established the Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI) led by Papandreou's former Minister Dimitris Tsovolas.

his ascendancy to the party presidency and used a radically new discourse to prove his reformist credentials (Rori 2008). Tactical mistakes led to a clear defeat, however.

Once in opposition, the new leader had time to implement his plans. He had never hidden his high ambitions. Acutely aware of the party's crisis, Papandreou had argued for the need to revamp the party from top to bottom aiming in particular at new horizontal forms of representation open to all citizens, the promotion of new political personnel and the decentralization of party machinery (Pappas, 2009: 241). To achieve his goals, Papandreou sought to establish new institutions representative of his ambitions and hoping that they would become part and parcel of the party's functioning. The most important of the institutions established are the Political Learning Unit to educate the party's new cadres, the 'party friend' with a right to vote in elections for the party Presidency, 'every day Citizen' to encourage a participatory form of democracy, and an Ombudsman for party members and 'friends' to assert citizens' rights in their dealing with the party and more. The new leader moved quickly to abolish professional branches within the party and unify all local units on a municipal level. In doing so he aimed at curbing the excess power of local party 'notables' and overcome their stifling practices of nepotism and backroom dealings.

PASOK seemed to have gone a long way from the Papandreou Sr. phase. The new leader, known among the public for his modern political ideas and consensual style of leadership was determined to finally change the party towards a social democratic direction. Politically, this was already achieved by his predecessor, if only at the policy practice level. Organizationally, it was yet to be accomplished. Papandreou did not only create new party organs. He also sought to revitalize the existing ones, changing party statutes to secure a separation of party and governmental responsibilities and the direct election of party organ members at central and local level.

The task was, however, beset with difficulty from the start. Some were path-dependent. The enthusiasm among many PASOK members and sympathizers that Papandreou's ascent to the leadership first created was highly emotional. A new Papandreou leader was synonymous, at least for the traditionalist faction, with a return to the 'good old days' of Papandreou Sr. and offered them a *carte blanche* to maintain their inner-party networks targeting vote-gathering. Simitis had never meddled in that business fully aware of the fact that going against that tradition would probably entail a political cost he could not bear. Once the early enthusiasm dissipated after Papandreou lost successive electoral battles in 2004, 2006 and 2007, the party's old guard tried to turn against him. Not only was he proving far from an electoral asset; he was also introducing organizational methods that run counter to their turf-owning mentality.

A second obstacle resulted from the party's highly personalized, leader-oriented character and its internal division into a 'modernizing' and 'traditionalist' faction. The latter division had been obvious throughout the Simitis years and was embedded in the party. Had PASOK been an internally democratic party premised on the institutionalized co-existence of diverse points of view and united by a centre-left ideology that would hardly matter. The reality, however, was that a cacophony of views and approaches to most issues was for decades held together by the sheer personality of Andreas Papandreou. His departure did

not lead to any form of serious crisis because Simitis was an electoral asset and thus tolerable. Papandreou Jr. created the impression that he possessed neither his father's charisma nor Simitis' winning abilities.

In addition, the new leader's proclamations on the need for participation, accountability and democratic decision-making were soon put to the test. Papandreou was held accountable for imitating his father's style of leadership and bypassing party organs on a number of occasions. To illustrate, Papandreou chose in person the candidate list for MEPS prior to the 2004 European elections, postponed the Party Congress twice from 2004 to 2005 and imposed the resignation of the party's Political Council members in 2006 so as to renew its membership (Pappas, 2009: 243-44). These were initiatives clearly at odds with his earlier image and indicative of the leader's insecurity. It was becoming evident that internal party tensions, moribund in the immediate period after his ascendancy, had made an impressive and not surprising comeback. PASOK remained under the shadow of its organizational inadequacies and the earlier failure to introduce accountable and democratic modes of decision-making prior to its electoral growth.

The criticism goes deeper when reference is made to some of the reforms' long-term impact on the party. It has been argued for instance that the 'party friend' innovation and US-style primaries (even if only inadequately implemented to date) signify a diminishing role for the party base and a disconnection between ruler and party members (Spourdalakis and Tassis, 2006: 506; Rori, 2008: 320). The everyday citizen institution, which is now embedded in the party statutes after the 2005 revisions, is a reinforcement of the Simitis attempts to bypass social class as a meaningful category for the party and address civil society instead (Spourdalakis and Tassis, 2006: 507).

When in 2007 PASOK lost a second successive election, the knives were out. Evangelos Venizelos, former Minister in the Simitis administrations, went into the offensive and challenged Papandreou for the leadership on election night. The party went through a turbulent, soul-searching period and the two candidates (to which a third was later added on) fought bitterly for the leadership in November of that year. The outcome of the bitter struggle vindicated Papandreou, who had insisted all along this intra-party crisis that his renewal process remained incomplete and that the party had to be re-established at any cost. Venizelos is the better spoken of the two and is a highly articulate politician. Tactical errors and some signs of presidentialism displayed during the campaign deterred potential supporters and led to Papandreou's clear victory.

In the autumn of 2008 PASOK regained the lead in opinion polls over ND. It would never lose it again until the 2009 election triumph. Marred in successive scandals, internal power struggles and loose coordination by the leadership, the ND was comprehensively outvoted in the 2009 election. After five turbulent years, Papandreou became Prime Minister. Venizelos became Defence Minister.

Table 1.  
*Share of the vote in national (N) and European Parliament (E) elections, 1981-2009*

Year	1981 (N)	1984 (E)	1985 (N)	1989 a (N)	1989b (E)	1989 c (N)	1990 (N)	1993 (N)	1994 (E)	1996 (N)	1999 (E)	2000 (N)	2004 (N)	2004 (E)	2007 (N)	2009 (E)	2009 (N)
Share of the vote, %	48.0	41.5	45.8	39.1	35.9	40.6	38.6	46.8	37.6	41.4	32.9	43.7	40.5	34.0	38.13	36.6	43.9

Source: author's compilation.

How do the Greek social democrats retain their popularity in the face of the 'new social movements' thesis and the consequences this is meant to have for parties in general and progressive parties in particular? It is undoubtedly true that the electoral system plays a significant role in influencing voters' preferences. In two-party, 'winner-takes-it-all' systems such as the Greek one, voters tend to gather around the two main political parties in expectation of victory. This tendency becomes reinforced in quasi-clientelistic regimes in Europe's south, where votes are regularly traded for political favours and form part of the patron-client relationship dominating public affairs.

I argue that this is only part of the explanation. PASOK has also engaged in a successful absorption exercise through which the party political representation of movements such as ecology and feminism has been undermined by incorporating their major goals and programmatic demands to PASOK's policy orientation. PASOK's founder had been adept at doing so with regard to the feminist movement. His son has embarked on a similar strategy with regard to the ecological movement. Not only has it been electorally successful: it has also allowed him to further party reforms in the preferred direction.

### *1980s Feminism*

Though the size, significance and membership structure of feminist organizations varied widely in post-1974 Greece, most of them sympathized with the link that PASOK sought to establish between social and female liberation from established structures (Stamiris, 1986: 106). Women played a key role in PASOK's 1981 victory and expected payback time as soon as the party emerged victorious from the ballot box. The absorption of feminist principles was a painstaking process for PASOK functionaries and the male-dominated, patriarchal nature of Greek society made clear that the struggle for the feminist movement would be an uphill one.

Even so, the ability of PASOK and the wife of Prime Minister Margaret Papandreou to incorporate a new, progressive feminist movement into the party structures proved fairly smooth and certainly successful. Heading the Union of Greek Women, one of the many organizations established at the time, Papandreou was able to put pressure on the social democrats to implement what they had been promising in opposition (Stamiris, 1986: 109). The results were quite remarkable, even if progress has been made with fits and starts and gender equality in all spheres of public life remains an elusive dream.

The 1982 Family law abolished patriarchal structures and customs such as the dowry and deleted the references to men as household heads. Divorce by mutual consent now became legal. PASOK did not stop there though: it made sure that all legislation fell into line with international principles on gender equality as adhered to by relevant UN conventions and the nascent welfare state became geared towards female protection through more generous maternity allowances, pension and healthcare services to uninsured women and the right of women to take part in agricultural cooperatives (Stamiris, 1986: 109). In its second term (1986), PASOK introduced a General Secretariat for Gender Equality and Equality Bureaus in every prefecture. By the end of the 1980s, the PASOK administration has satisfied the vast majority of mainstream feminist demands.

### *2000s Ecology*

The establishment of a credible and electorally significant Green Party in 2002 was an indicator that the ecological movement was making inroads in Greek society. Rapidly gaining in popularity, the Greens elected their first ever MEP in the 2009 European elections and gathered 3.4% of the vote<sup>7</sup>. The party could yet prove to be a source of electoral vulnerability for PASOK by appealing to urban, medium to high-education and medium to high income social strata. Until now, however, this has not materialized. The Greens failed to enter Parliament in the 2009 general election despite a rising wave of apathy towards the big parties and popular frustration with their performance. Gathering 2.5% to PASOK's 44%, they seem to have missed a valuable opportunity to position themselves in the political landscape. Opinion polls in February 2010 amidst Greece's economic crisis confirm that their appeal remains limited and below the 3% national threshold (<http://www.eklogika.gr/uploads/files/Dimoskopiseis/ektimisi-feb-2010.pdf> ).

How can this be explained? I suggest that the absorption exercise has been at work by PASOK's leadership<sup>8</sup> and in line with Papandreou's declared ambitions for a more open, democratic party. The Green Party's statute holds 'participatory democracy' to be a core political value to which the party adheres. The statute also foresees the decentralization of party operations with elections at all levels of operation starting from the nucleus organizations (Political Movement) all the way to Party Congress. Moreover, all party

<sup>7</sup> In the 2009 Greek general election their 2.53% of the vote meant that they narrowly missed out on parliamentary representation (the threshold being 3%).

<sup>8</sup> Clearly this is only part of the story. Papandreou has argued for the need of such changes before the Green Party was even established. It is also possible that the Greens have tried to make use of innovative thinking due to their more flexible structure.

officials can be recalled at all times by party organs, local issues are decided by local party officials and internal referenda are scheduled on various issues. The goal of this rather unusual (for Greek standards) party organization is to safeguard internal party differences and involve everyone within the party to the decision-making process (Green Party Statute 2008).

When Papandreou became party leader, he immediately sought to introduce party change. The 2004 party programme makes this clear. Already in page 2, PASOK argues that the mobilization of 'Hellenism' is necessary to achieve success in the new era and participatory democracy is a recipe for success in terms of contributing to growth, offers equal opportunities to all and consolidates social cohesion. In the same vein, the document continues arguing for the need of participatory modes of governance as a third sector. It is worth quoting: 'big problems cannot be solved solely by the state or the market. They are solved through active participation by citizens [who] have knowledge. Who know the issues. Who [can offer] alternatives and solutions' (PASOK Programme 2004: 2-3, author's translation). The party who had once argued for the need of socialist transformation now sees citizen involvement as the solution to structural problems. A new version of the Third Way is manifest. Participatory democracy is premised on the need to transform a 'bureaucratic and strictly closed network of rules to an open, participatory and respectable system of rules' (<http://www.pasok.gr/portal/resource/section/whatIsEkap> , author's translation. Accessed: 27 February 2010). It is for that reason that the new leader has sought to create a Committee for the Respect of Party Statutes (ΕΚΑΠ) among many more party innovations. The new institutions created since 2004 are aiming at encouraging participation by party members and friends. Participatory democracy is a horizontal goal for the party.

PASOK has embraced the principles of direct democracy too, at least at the elite level. Article 12 of the Party Statutes now mentions that internal party referenda on 'issues of major political significance' can now be realized (<http://www.pasok.gr/portal/resource/section/statuteMenu> accessed: 1 March 2010).

#### **IV. Conclusion: PASOK's Full Convergence**

PASOK was originally distinguished from other social democratic parties on account of systemic factors relating to the wider phenomenon of the 'Socialist south'. Greece's political economy evolved in ways similar to those of Spain and Portugal but very differently from the rest of Western Europe. This had a number of repercussions on its political life and party politics has been one of them. Social democracy in southern Europe has been created and grown in an institutional *milieu* separate from the rest of the progressive family.

By the 1990s, however, the convergence around a new pattern of social democratic ideology and party organization was pretty much complete. The Greek social democrats, however, remained an exception. While ideologically PASOK had indeed embraced the narrow straightjacket of the Third Way and implemented its policy prescriptions through Simitis, its organizational structure remained a relic of the past and was premised on the

complete domination of the party by its leader. For contextual reasons, Papandreou's successor left the issue pretty much untouched.

This paper has argued that PASOK's leader since 2004 George Papandreou has embarked on a process of radical party transformation through institution-building, internal reorganization and the absorption of innovative techniques used by party rivals. The strategy has for a long time been in limbo on account of the party's mediocre electoral performance but the 2009 triumph offers the party the chance to consolidate the convergence. The extent to which the introduced reforms can be consolidated remains a question mark and seems, for the moment at least, linked to Papandreou's performance as party leader and Prime Minister. The tough austerity measures taken to liberate the country from the battering of market pressures have high political cost and important dissenting voices are already heard within the party (*To Vima*, 9 March 2010). On the other hand, PASOK's rival ND has imitated a more open process of leader election following the 2009 defeat and flirted with the idea of introducing a 'party friend' category too. In important respects, PASOK remains a 'vanguard party' in Greek politics (Spourdalakis and Tassis 2006).

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