

Party organization as a ‘test tube’: PASOK before and after the ‘debt crisis’

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Abstract

The purpose of the proposed paper is to examine the transformation of PASOK's organizational structure under the leadership of G. Papandreou. First we shall describe the main characteristics of the so-called “participatory project” emphasizing in the relationship between the leader, the parliamentary group and the party activists and members, the role of the party's collective bodies in shaping PASOK's policy agenda, candidate selection procedures and the effort to establish an “open party” based on “cyber membership”. Second we will examine PASOK's first year in government, mainly at the level of the party's adaptation to the new governmental needs. Our theoretical framework stems from Katz and Mair “cartel party model”. Our assumptions are the following:

- PASOK's organizational transformation is essentially interpreted by its dependence on state resources. Most of the organizational innovations implemented during the 2004-2009 period, recur as governmental practices, making the party in opposition a “test tube” for the party in government
- The Greek debt crisis deepened the party's links with the state and favored the induction of an ‘autocratic’ model of PASOK's intra-party politics management. The alienation of PASOK's leadership from its party base creates new tendencies in Greek party system resulting in a phenomenon Peter Mair described for the British party system as ‘partyless democracy’.

I

Introduction

Since 1974, the Greek party system is characterised by the pivotal role of Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) (Spourdalakis and Tassis 2006). PASOK has been characterized as the “hegemonic” political party in the Greek party system (Tassis 2008), because it managed, through its structure, its values and its program, to fulfill different necessities in different times: a) the democratic process after the fall of the Greek junta as the first non communist mass party with political radicalism and structural innovation, b) the “modernization” strategy during the 1990’s when PASOK adopted a moderate strategy and came closer to the economic orientation which is hegemonic worldwide, and c) the adoption of the necessity of the “reforms” with the sign of the Memorandum in 2010 which seems to fulfill its transformation from a mass party during 1970’s to the cartel or state-confined party. For this reason an examination of PASOK’s organization is important to understand the evolutions and the dynamics that take place in the Greek party system (Spourdalakis & Tassis 2006: 498).

The Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) comes to power in October 2009 after 5 years in opposition. The opposition period [2004 – 2009] was a shocking experience for the party (Spourdalakis & Tassis 2006: 503) because it was under question its capacity to govern. PASOK has managed to remain in government for almost twenty years (1981-2004) with the exception of the period 1989-1993. Thus, in the period 2004-2009 the new leader of the party, G. Papandreou, tries to reassure that PASOK remains a governmental party, through introducing specific innovations in party organization. These particular innovations do not appear only in the Greek case, but their context consist a broader discussion among the European social-democratic, socialist and labor parties. Moreover, they seem to be placed into a more general trend of these parties to make their local branches more “open” to the society. This particular tendency has been interpreted, either as an adaptation to the new relations between the state and the political parties, or as adaptation to electoral needs.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a new context for he theory of the “cartel party” or “state-confined party”, through connecting PASOK’s organizational changes during the period 2004-2009, with the formation of the governmental mechanism during the period 2009-2011. The basic argument of the paper is that the party in opposition was used as a “test tube” for the governmental model. Furthermore, this particular practice seems to be the result of the close ties that PASOK has developed with the State and its necessities. Thus, PASOK’s strategy seems to try to impose the readjustment of the party structure with the tendency of the autonomy of the “party in public office” from the “party on the ground” and the collective bodies of the party, central and regional. This particular evolution appears to be as an essential one, in order to promote the policies which come from the Memorandum that the socialist government signed with IMF and the EU. Moreover, the essential legitimization of this choice does not come from the

party itself, but mainly from technocrats that are connected with the extended, because of the Troika, State.

Theoretical Framework: “cartel party” or “state-confined party”

According to R. Katz and P. Mair (1995) the “cartel party” or the “state-confined party” (Spourdalakis 2003), tends to prevail in the modern party systems with basic characteristic the development of close ties between governmental political parties and the State. In this frame, the basic criterion for the electoral predominance of the parties and their maintenance to power is their ability to fulfill the necessities of the State. In this paper, the term “state-confined party” is used to describe the tendency of political parties to shift their policies, programs and values from the society to the State, and how this tendency influences the party’s internal life and the organization as well.

On the correlation between the State and the political parties, Nicos Poulantzas (2001) suggests that the governmental parties seem to adopt the ideology of the “neutral state” which represents the general interest of the society, undertaking the role of arbitrator between the social classes (Poulantzas 2001: 223-4). Moreover, he considers that the state is the place that the dominant social class organizes its strategy, reflecting the balance of power among the social classes (Ibid: 211-212). Thus, the state, taking into consideration the particular balance of power, adopts specific decisions which are included finally in a particular strategy that serves the reproduction of the political hegemony of the dominant capitalist class and finally ensures its dominant position over the masses (Ibid: 266)

Therefore, the State seems to have the capability to determine decisively the limits of the governmental choices and to play a crucial role in appearing the specific choices as necessities which reflect the general will of the society. That happens because the State manages to present them as objective and as a common place either for the society or the political parties and this trend is called “political hegemony”. (Tassis 2008:366). Thus, the real force of the capitalist system is come upon the acceptance from the lower classes of an explanation of the world which belongs to the dominant one. In addition, a hegemonic ideology can provide a systematic analysis, which not only influences the whole population, but it is also used as a role model for the structure of the social institutions. In this frame, a political party can be characterized as a hegemonic when: a) it creates a structural model which seems to be imitated by the other political parties; b) it can decisively influence the political agenda by setting the agenda of the political issues and by framing the political dialogue, c) it is presented to have the most capable political personnel in order to fulfill the governmental needs and therefore it can determine the characteristics of the “capable” leadership; d) it imposes its political program as a hegemonic opinion which unifies different social interests and therefore is presented to be the most appropriate political party to undertake the governmental affairs · e) even its absence from the government his hegemonic place in the party system is not under question,

because its main choices are considered as “necessities“ by the party in power (Tassis, 2008:35).

Party in Opposition: 2004 -2009

At 2004 the new party leader George Papandreou promised broader participation for all citizens and members of PASOK in the internal life of the party. The political slogan “George change everything” was interpreted as an effort to re-connect the party with the society and with its political tradition, as the “participative” argument was appeared to promise a different role of the political party and its mediation between the leader and the members of the party. Actually, however, party organizational change is evident during the “modernization” period (1996-2004), where the transformation of the party (creation of the “issue branches”, unification of local braches etc.) was considered as an essential tool for the success of the moderating governmental choices under the leadership of Costas Simitis. Despite the fact that during this period Greece managed to participate in the Euro-zone and demonstrated increasing rates of economic growth, PASOK’s popularity fell drastically because its policy created a huge social deficit which led the party to face social and political discontent in 2004. (Spourdalakis & Tassis 2006: 502).

The “participative” project appeared to promise a “return” to the structural and political tradition of PASOK during the 1980’s, nevertheless it resulted in opposite results. More precisely, the “participative” election for the president of the party in 2004, while it appeared that it corresponded to a social demand for mass participation in intra-party politics, it came “from above” as an electoral strategy. The symbolism of the “leadership delivery” from Costas Simitis to George Papandreou, the lack of any other possible candidate for the leadership, the process of the Extraordinary Congress (February 2004) and the rushed inclusiveness of “friends” in the party selectorate, seemed to reveal mainly an effort of electoral exploitation rather than a real participatory democratic process.

Despite the huge electoral defeat in 2004, the mass participation of the members and friends of PASOK in the direct election of G. Papandreou provides the necessary legitimization he needs to advance all the changes in the structure of the party as he is presented as the basic factor who can guarantee the “renewal” of the party.

In this frame, the basic pillars of the organizational changes are the following:

- A. “Friends” participation in party procedures, apart from the direct election of the President, is also extended to the elections of the rest institutions of the party (Congress, Prefectural Committees, Local Branches)
- B. The institution of Regional Committee is founded, that corresponds in the 13 Regions of the State, with strengthened responsibilities, which appears to resemble the structure of the state, while the role of the older Prefectural Committee is diminished and the Local branches are unified per Municipality. Moreover, the Professional branches are abolished.

C. The “deliberation process” is established as the basic communicative principle between the “party in central office” and its members. Thus, the local branches undertake an advisory role to the leadership. Internet via the portal and intranet of the party is rendered as the basic communication structure in order to connect the members with the leadership.

D. “Central Committee” is replaced by the National Council, which has become a broader institution as its members are doubled. It assumes a ratification function than a decision-making, while only 50% of the members of the National Council are elected from the party Congress. In addition, at the bureaucracy of the “central party”, the “Action Sectors” which connect the party with the society, are incorporated with the Policy Sectors that have a technocratic orientation. Moreover, the members of the Political Council, that replace the old Executive Office, are selected by the President of the party himself.

E. In the 7th Congress of the Party (2005) an issue-orientated logic was followed, as the discussion on the program was divided in many different issue tables, while the only members who have the privilege to make a central political speech are the President and the Secretary General of the party.

F. With the establishment of the “Committee of Statute and Certification” the leadership exercises power over the Local Branches through imposing disciplinary measures, while the members can refer their complaints to the “Advocate of the Member and Friend”, which functions as an independent institution inside the party and its suggestions do not have any obligatory character.

G. The candidate selection process for the formation of the Parliamentary Group has changed. The candidates send their CVs to the central party, which in its turn returns them for evaluation to the corresponding Regional Committees and the Local Branches. At the end of the day, the final choice comes exclusively from the central bodies, as the suggestions of the regional Committees and the Local Branches do not have any obligatory character. Thus, the candidates for the Parliamentary Group of the party may not have neither any political or organisational relation to the party nor a result of a democratic process.

The 2007 elections seemed to function as a brake for the completion of the particular organisational innovations. The defeat of PASOK and the consecutive party internal crisis compelled the two main opponents – G. Papandreou, Ev. Venizelos - to turn to the party’s middle level elites in order to win at the election process. Both candidates, in their organizational proposals for the structure of the party, seek to redistribute intra-party resources to middle-level elites. Thus, G. Papandreou, after his win, restores some pre2004 regulations, mainly regarding the role of the congress and the local branches.

Especially after September 2008, when PASOK seemed to be ahead New Democracy at the polls, “party in central office” prepared itself for its reentering in the state. Party bureaucracy became stronger with the proliferation of the sectors of the National Council and the establishment of “staff circles” which coordinated the actions of the party bureaucracy with the parliamentary group. In addition, the candidate selection process for the 2009

elections was controlled by the leadership and the party's electoral manifesto was not the outcome of the party's internal deliberation process, but it was published only four days before the elections in PASOK's website.

With regard to the evolutions of the "participative discourse" during the period 2004-2009, one may reach to the following conclusions:

A. Through the new organizational model of the party the leadership appears to ensure its absolute autonomy from the party members. The party President stands beyond the control of any collective body. Moreover, he has a decisive role for the appointment of the party candidates. Furthermore, he overpasses the collective bodies of the party developing direct relations with the members and the friends and finally he can decide about the political orientation of the party along with a narrow circle of his colleagues.

B. "National Council" is dysfunctional because of its size and its responsibilities lie mainly as a part of party bureaucracy which has a technocratic orientation and supports the action of the Parliamentary Group

C. Local Branches gain a relative autonomy in the forms of intervention, but their decisions - either programmatic, or for the selection process for the candidates - are not obligatory for the party. Thus, the Local Branches end up as simple elements of the "party machine", without any ability to influence the political orientation of the party.

Party in Government: 2009-2011

Once PASOK comes to power in 2009, it has to confront a basic contradiction: on one hand, its pre-election commitment for adopting a governmental policy which could guarantee the real income of the working class and the pensioners, that are condensed in one phrase of G. Papandreou during his speech in the Salonica International Financial Exhibition ["Money exist"] and on the other hand, facing up the "government necessities" that promote an austerity frame for the economic policy because of the international economic crisis and of the bad condition of the Greek economy.

1. In this frame, the first priority for the government is to find the "appropriate" staff to run the machine of the State. Thus, the process of selection of the governmental executives (Secretary-General of ministries, hospital managers etc) is introduced through the website www.opengov.gr. In this site, governmental positions are uploaded and the candidates are asked to express their interest for a place of their preference. The basic criterion for the selection process is the possession of certain qualifications, based on the degrees of the candidates and not on their involvement in politics or in intra-party procedures. In addition, these positions are presented as occasions of employment for the entire society not only for the party members. As a result, this process seems to emphasize exclusively on the technocratic process of politics as a unique criterion for the occupation of a government position. Finally, this process led to severe bureaucratic problems as thousands CVs

record for each place and important delays (about four months) have occurred for their fulfillment.

Actually, this particular process created more problems in the state as it led to more stagnancy of the government mechanism and overloaded the system with unsolved requirements, without the mediation of the intermediary bodies. On the other hand, it seemed to have led to further concentration to the leadership of the party, since the selection process was not an object from an enacted body with clear regulations. Special advisers of each Minister graded the CVs, but the Minister's decision was not obligatory, since the final decision was exclusively held by the Office of the Prime Minister.

2. From the early stages of the government G. Papandreou declared that each voting in a bill constituted a vote of confidence for the government. This announcement appeared to empower the role of the Prime Minister and the Government itself in the formation of the governmental policy and downgrade the influence of the Parliamentary Group, while the party was absolutely absent in this process. The Parliamentary Group functioned as a ratification body with no decisive role, a tendency that was developed in the structure of the party in the relations between the President and the National Council.

3. The government introduced the "Kallikratis" law for the Local Government with the merger of the Municipalities and the creation of powerful Administrative Regions. This model resembles to the organizational reconstruction of the period 2004-2009 with the merger of the Local Branches and the creation of the Regional Committees. In the same way, the relative autonomy of the Municipal Branches reflects the autonomy of Municipalities in the policy planning. The Central State appears "to withdraw" itself from basic welfare state functions, while in other sectors, labor relations, for example, its intervention was strengthened.

4. For the introduction of the laws the practice of public deliberation was chosen, through the website www.opengov.gr, following the model of pasok.dialogos.gr. This process was held exclusively through comments which were placed by the users without the obligation of stating their name and with no commitment that the particular comments will be adopted as legislative regulations. As a result, this practice is characterized by the absence of any deliberation process since the opinions are not the subject of a public dialogue, and they do not have any obligatory character. In addition, the administrator of the system has the authority to adopt those elements that support his legislative regulation and to ignore those which are opposite, and in the same time, appear to support an enlargement of a direct democracy. Moreover the low internet penetration in Greece in comparison with the E.U. average and the low digital literacy, especially in elder people, limits the deliberation to a small number of people of a specific education level. Furthermore, the participation of the citizens in the commentary of the legislative regulations is undermined by their weakness to express their views on the whole issue. Therefore, this process finally appears to promote the technocratic orientation of politics and is giving priority to few "specialists"/connoisseurs, something that is exactly the opposite in what that wants to cure.

5. In May 2009 with the adoption of the Memorandum the contradiction between pre-election announcements and governmental necessities is solved and PASOK evolves as a “state-confined party”. Three members of the Parliamentary Group (G. Dimaras, V. Oikonomou, S. Sakorafa) voted “present” on the Memorandum legislation, were expelled immediately from the Party Parliamentary Group with decision of the President. The autonomy of the government in comparison to the Parliamentary Group is also revealed with the adoption of a law which provides the ability to the Minister of Finance to bind the country in revisions of the Memorandum with his signature only and with no ratification from the Greek Parliament, while the Minister himself is not even a member of the Greek Parliament.

6. After the ratification of the Memorandum at the Greek Parliament, this choice is legitimized as an afterthought by the party in a meeting of the National Council in Thessalonica. In this way the “party” has no role in the planning of the policy and has only a typical ratification character

7. The undermining role of the party in the internal balance of power took place during the Regional and Municipalities elections in November 2010. In this process the Prime Minister himself gave the character of a vote of confidence for the Government especially in the case of the Athens region. In this case, one may observe the connection of the whole political system and not only of the party system with the government necessities.

Conclusions

The pressure of the Government under the Memorandum era to promote a set of policies which are not popular to the members of party sets the relations between the party and the government in a different base. The party is considered as a “burden” which should be overpassed in order to avoid any internal reactions that may disturb the unity of the governmental actions. In this frame, it seems that the operation of party should focus only on the ratification of the choices made by the leadership even if these deviate dramatically from the programmatic positions of the party. The “key” for the comprehension of this particular arrangement-settlement appears to be the structural reconstruction of the previous period (2004-2009).

The constitution of a “powerful” prime minister office, which according to the American model, in many cases, substitutes the action of certain Ministers, derives from a perception of the autonomy of the party leadership, which substitutes the operations of the collective bodies of the party. Indicative for this correlation is the example of the scorn of the role of the Secretary General of the National Council, who is charged with the structural monitoring of the party, while the President during the period 2004-2007 takes over the structural reconstruction of the party.

During the governmental period, it is sought the reduction of the role of the Parliamentary Group, the most representative element of governmental part, in three ways. Firstly, the political orientation of the government is decided

exclusively from the Prime Minister and the Ministers and is given to the Parliamentary Group for a simple ratification. Secondly, the non approval of the Memorandum from three Members of Parliament is accompanied by “hard” disciplinary sanctions (expel from the Parliamentary Group and from the Party). Thirdly, with the government reshuffling the 1/3 of the Parliamentary Group takes ministerial positions, something that leads to a further attachment of the Parliamentary Group with the State necessities and priorities.

The governmental choices – Labour Relations, Social Security, “Kallikratis” – are passing through an informal deliberation with the Secretaries of Prefecture Committees. However, this process does not produce obligatory results. Moreover, the National Council which meets regularly, does not been gathered urgently in order to decide over the policy shift under the memorandum, but it comes as an afterthought to ratify the governmental decisions.

According to the above, it is rendered obvious that without the structural changes during the period 2004-2009, the adaptation of PASOK to the new government necessities perhaps would not be possible. The shift of balance of power from the elected government to the “Troika” and the necessity of a radical rearrangement of the State in order to fulfill the obligations of the Memorandum seem to strengthen the tendency of PASOK to be a “state-confined party”. During this process, the “party” adopts the strategy of the State, as the party abolishes its main function of representing social demands or its capability to the “unification different social demands”. Therefore, as a “hegemonic party” PASOK manages to materialize the particular strategy, having a formal legitimization from a wide social alliance, repressing the internal reaction and strengthening its executive part. This development seems to have important implications increasing the democracy deficit in the Greek political system and this is a hypothesis that would need a further study.

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