



Frontier Regions of the European Union: The National State and the European Union as significant factors to the function of local communities

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Abstract

This article investigates how the National State functions as a member of the European Union in respect to social minorities. Especially, it is examined whether the National Government can resolve the problem of social minorities by itself or can it be more easily handled within the framework of European integration. From this point of view we deal with the case of the Greek National State, which is part of the European Union of the “27”. The analysis presents the economic and other social characteristics of the region of Thrace. We examine the decentralized policy of the government, through the institution of the local self-government, along with the politics of the European Union concerning those social minorities.

Keywords: local communities, national state, European Union regions

JEL classification: H7, N9, P1, P2

Introduction

This article is focused on how the National State functions as a member of the European Union in respect to social minorities. For example, what is the meaning of the European citizenship that is enacted by the Treaty for the constitution of the European Community? The question posited is: Can the National Government resolve the problem of social minorities by itself or can it be more easily handled within the framework of European integration? From this point of view we deal with the case of the Greek National State, which is part of the European Union of the “27”.

Greece constitutes the typical form of a National State, with the exception of Thrace, a region in the northeast border of the country. In Thrace (and especially in the prefectures of Xanthi and Rodopi) there is a recorded Muslim minority. Our analysis presents the economic and other social characteristics of the region. We examine the decentralized policy of the government, through the institution of the local self-government, along with the politics of the European Union concerning those social minorities. The question is: Is the centralization of the government or the institution of the local self-government that better facilitates the social accession of those social minorities? This is examined through quantitative analysis of the participation of Muslim minorities living in Thrace within the local councils of the local self-government. It puts the question: Does the Muslim minority, especially the women, participate in the local elections as candidates? Do they ultimately participate in the decision making process as local authorities? Finally it questions the extent to which the membership of Greece within the European Union enables the social integration of the Muslim community.

The notion of Nation and minorities

The integration of the Muslim minority within the Greek society and furthermore within the European Union requires our looking back to the notion of nation and the politics of minorities, which is nowadays very popular, especially within the greater homelands.

According to Stalin, the nation is not an ephemeral gathering, but an established community of people, where language is considered a significant characteristic. There exists no nation having its people speak two languages simultaneously, but this does not necessarily mean that it is impossible to find two nations which use the same language. British and North-American people speak the same language but they don't constitute one nation. Nation creation is the result of the feudal

system's dissolution and capitalism's emergence. During capitalism's growth in the West, self-contained national states were formed while in Eastern Europe multinational states were constituted, that is states that were composed by several nationalities¹.

The incommensurability of political and economic growth was of such an extent that more than half of humanity consists of 15 nationalities, each of which has more than 50 million people².

As it has been already mentioned, one of the fundamental characteristics of the nation is common language. However, the institutionalization of a common language during the period of globalization seems like a contingency. This is vertically opposite to the nation-state. The planetary forces attempt to impose their own language and culture throughout the world.

As Lenin states: "we can form an idea as far as the progress of the nations' assimilation in the advanced capitalism is concerned by data concerning for example people's immigration to the United States of North America. Over a period of 10 years, from 1891 to 1900, 3,7 million people migrated there from Europe, while within 9 years, from 1901 to 1909, 7,2 million people. According to 1900's census more than 10 million of foreign people lived in the United States. New York State, where according to the same census lived more than 78.000 Austrians, 136.000 British, 20.000 French, 480.000 Germans, 37.000 Hungarians, 425.000 Irish, 182.000 Italians, 70.000 Polish, 136.000 Russians (most of them Jewish), 43.000 Swedish etc.- seems like a mill that crunches national discriminations. And what happens in New York to a great, international extent occurs in every big city and factory district. Whoever has not bogged down into nationalistic discriminations can think of this process of nation's assimilation from capitalism like a monumental, historical course that ruins the national arteriosclerosis of various remote regions"³. This is the capitalist mill that continually crunches nationalities with the aim of imposing a general equivalent, that is an international language. For example, English language.

¹ I.V. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", KOMMOUNISTIKI EPITHEORISI, Issue 3/1999, page 90

² Ar. Manesis, "The cosmopolitan nationalism and the bulge of racism", TO BIMA, 20.6.1999

³ V.I. Lenin, "Complete Works", Issue 24, page 126

On the same topic, we should mention Gellner's⁴ interesting point of view, that states: If we suppose that a nation is defined on the basis of its language and people that speak the same language constitute a nation, we must admit the validity of the following elements: that at this moment there are about 200 nation-states on earth, that there are about 800 nationalities that simultaneously pretend to become nation-states and that at the same time there are 8.000 conditional nation-states, just because there are 8.000 different languages. In the era of globalization it is really hard to imagine 8.000 different states, competing with each other, which can barely maintain the international system's equilibrium without completely destroying our planet.

We can fill in that humanity has for sure no threat of being destroyed from the renaissance of thousands of nation-states because this is a step backwards when compared to the great imperialistic homelands, where labor is much more productive than in dwarf states. The number of nations may be really big, yet what matters more is that the number of powerful nation-states is much smaller.

To the rebirth of racial theories of nationalism and chauvinism and to the hypocritical imperialistic declarations concerning an alleged "advocacy" of national minorities we will contrast the tenets of fighting materialism in order to reveal the imperialistic deception.

Nationalism attracts people's attention from social problems and turns class struggle to the national matters, the hypothetical "common" matters of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The politics of irritating one nation against the other, often takes awesome dimensions, threatening to drown the workers' case in blood and tears. "Divide and reign", this is the aim of irritation politics. The imperialist states always force nationalities that live within their borders to learn the language of the majority so as to serve the needs of economic circulation.

All nations within the USA speak English and become integrated under the powerful "roof" of the dollar. The same happens in the United Kingdom, France, Germany etc. However, the small and "neutral" state of Switzerland, which has the highest per capita income in the world, seems not to lose but gain from the fact that it has not only one official language but three: German, French and Italian. The use of different languages within the country does not

⁴ Gellner Ernest, "Nation and Nationalism", page 44-45 Oxford, 1983

provoke any hatred because they are languages of free, civilized nations, and they are not imposed through abhorrent, police means⁵.

Let us put the nation's matter linguistically. On the one hand, there is the issue of separate languages and on the other the idea of the official language. The point is how we can intervene between these two levels, and not how to raise abstractly the mother-language to official status. In essence this is affiliated to the struggle of enlightenment against romanticism, either to a linguistic or a political level. Romanticism is identified with provincialism, while enlightenment with cosmopolitanism. Imperialists, while being countryless themselves, "pay obeisance" to others' countries and at the same time accuse the repressed and benighted of provincialism.

The imperialist president Clinton uses romanticism as an alibi to move on to globalization and cosmopolitanism. Perverting the philhellene Schelling and his saying "We are all Greeks", he flatters Balkan people, acting like a Greek in Athens, a Bulgarian in Sofia and a Kosovar in Kosovo in order to remain an American cosmopolitanist. He manoeuvres within the epoch's spirit claiming in a folklore way that "small is beautiful" in order to bring about the global spirit of his dominance.

Imperialist countries cross 21st century's threshold through enlightenment while people living in Balkans and Eastern Europe are marked as romantic and devotees of their countries. The countries of developed capitalism choose the enlightenment of Diderot-Montesquieu-Voltaire and the global spirit while the Balkans are identified with the father of 18th century German romanticism, Herder, and the folk spirit.

The debate is based on the possibility of retreat of the nations' importance, within the 21st century, in favor of the development of a new community, that of the district. We refer to the nation-state's future, one of the most significant problems that humanity will face.

And another important thing: The nation-state will not pull back as far as the capitalist system of social reproduction still dominates the world. This is a declaration, a utopia. The final extinction of the nationalist movement is possible only with the downfall of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of socialism.

⁵ V.I. Lenin, "Critical notes on the national matter", *Sinchroni Epoxi* publications, Athens, 1992, page 11

The Muslim Minority of Greek Thrace

In the dawn of the 21st century the Muslim minority of Thrace is of particular interest. Turkey uses this minority in order to promote its own national interests. USA, as NATO's "ally" of the Greeks and Turks, often protects the minority through the old imperialist doctrine of "Divide et Impera" in order to promote the American interests within the area. The nationalist bulge, as we will see, has only negative effects firstly on the minority, in Greece and Turkey, and gains for the great country of the USA.

After the Greek army's defeat in the Asia Minor disaster, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed on 30th January 1923, which among various matters, allowed a mandatory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. As exchangeable populations were specified the Greek orthodox inhabitants of Turkey, except for the inhabitants of Istanbul and the islands of Imbros and Tenedos, and the Muslims of Greece, except for the inhabitants of West Thrace. Within this agreement the basic criterion of exchange was people's religion and not their language.

The Treaty of Lausanne also established the principle of population equilibrium between the two non-exchangeable minorities. In order to abide to this equilibrium principle, and due to the fact that in 1924 Greeks living in Istanbul were 279.788⁶, some categories of the Greek population of Istanbul were included in the exchange, while Muslims who had abandoned West Thrace during the 1913-1923 period were allowed to return to the area with the result of increasing their numbers from an 86.793 figure in 1920 to 106.000 in 1923⁷.

According to the Mixed Committee of Populations' Exchange, which wrote out the placement certificates, in 1923 the non-exchangeable attribute was given to the people below: a) 73.000 Greek orthodox, Istanbul's citizens, ex Ottoman b) 30.000 Greek orthodox, Istanbul's citizens that had Greek nationality and who were given residence permit, c) 7.000 and 1.200 Greek orthodox, Imbro's and Tenedo's citizens' respectively and d) 106.000 Muslims citizens of West Thrace⁸. As far as Muslims were concerned, 50%, were "Turkish", more than 30% were Pomaks, and almost 20% were Gypsies.

⁶ Alexandris Alexis etc. "The Greek-Turkish Relationships 1923-1987", Gnosi publications, Athens, 1988, page 38

⁷ Alexandris Alexis etc. page 38-39

⁸ Alexandris Alexis etc. page 38-39

The Treaty of Lausanne defined the coexistence condition of different social groups dividing them as Greek orthodox and Muslims. With this arrangement, which was made acceptable by the Greek state, different national and cultural social groups like Turkish, Pomaks and Gypsies were classified within the same category. The most important cultural difference between these three groups is language. The vocabulary of Pomaks includes Bulgarian words to an extent of more than 50%, a great percentage of Greek words that are mainly verbs and a smaller percentage of Turkish words.

Since 1923, the Cemalic regime attempted to intrude within Greek Thrace nourishing Turkish nationalism. An insuperable obstacle though in the “turkification” of the minority was the older Muslim spiritual leadership, which was against Cemalic Turkey. As a result, after the Greek-Turkish approach in 1923, Ismet Inonou requested from Eleftherios Venizelos the expulsion of the older Muslim headship and succeeded in doing so. Turkish nationalists, who founded the first associations in 1928 with the term “Turkish” in their title, filled the gap⁹.

On 5th May 1941, Germans accorded the area between the rivers Strimona and Ebro to their Bulgarian allies. The Bulgarian occupation aimed at turning the Slavic Pomaks into Bulgarians. Within most Muslim schools, religious teaching was limited to one hour in Arabian language. The remaining courses were taught in Bulgarian. The Bulgarian occupiers walked out on 9 September 1944.

The conservatives, who prevailed over communists during the Greek civil war in 1946-1949 stuck on the West’s side, following anti-communist politics, and making Turkey’s plans easier. During the 1950’s decade the first post civil war government of general Papagos not only officially approved the term “Turkish minority” but also commanded the obligatory replacement of the term “Muslim” with the term “Turkish” in every single signboard! We are in the middle of the Cold War and the conservative government of Papagos places its class interests over the national ones. It also acted in the same manner when Tito named the sixth Federal Democracy of Yugoslavia as Macedonia. That Tito was Moscow and Warsaw’s Pact enemy was sufficient enough. The well-known class games of history. After NATO’s word of command, Athens attempted to turn the Pomaks of Greece into Greeks aiming at affecting the numerous Pomak element of Bulgaria and destabilizing the communist regime,

⁹ Stavros Lygeros, “West Thrace’s problem over time and the contemporary, different Turkish leadership point of view”, H KATHIMERINI, 16.5.2004

irrespectively of Pomak' resistance! All this happened just before the pogrom against Istanbul's Greeks in 1955¹⁰.

The Muslim minority in the contemporary time

Statistical data show that the Muslim minority of Greek Thrace seems to have made progress. The population image of the Muslim minority has made advances, since the primary population of 106.000 Muslims, which according to the Treaty of Lausanne had the right of placement within Greek Thrace, has increased to a level of over 130.000. This is in deep contrast to the Greeks of Turkey, who from an initial number of 180.000 have been reduced to less than 3.000 by direct or indirectly caused abandonment of the country. This figure includes mainly older people, grievous relics of the once thriving minority¹¹.

Greece applies the principle of equality of rights and democracy for Christians and Muslims in Thrace. The minority is always represented within the Greek Parliament. In the 2004 elections a Muslim member of the Parliament was elected. Moreover, in the municipal and prefectorial elections (2002) an important number (almost 250) of Muslim municipal and prefectorial councilors, as well as mayors, was elected, while the vice prefect of Rodopi is Muslim.

In Thrace there are 215 minority primary schools, in which teaching takes place both in the Greek and Turkish language while more than 400 Muslim teachers work in them. There exist also two minority high schools and lyceums along with two Seminaries. On the basis of an indenture, textbooks sent from Turkey can be taught on the condition that they will be firstly examined from Greece. The enactment of educational programs takes care of the enhanced use of the Greek language by Muslims. Moreover, a quota of 0,5% regarding Muslim entrance in Greek universities has been established. The Turkish state's policy combined with Greece's compliance have ultimately deprived the minority of the effectual use of the Greek language. Within these minority schools, the conditions of teaching of the Greek language as a second, non mother tongue are not fulfilled. This fact leads to a limited communication with the Greek social setting and with the state's services.

¹⁰ Stavros Lygeros, "West Thrace's problem over time and the contemporary different Turkish leadership point of view", H KATHIMERINI 16.5.2004

¹¹ <http://ikath.kom.duth.gr/paraviasis.htm>

The religious rights of the minority are respected. In Thrace, there are 3 Muftis, one for each district (Xanthi, Komotini and Didimoteixo), 270 imams and about 300 mosques. The Muftis, who are brought out on the basis of a specific procedure, and approved by Muslims theologians, are graduates from theological university departments, and are duty bound with administrative and judicatory tasks, apart from their religious ones.

Turkey's policy, which some minority associations' support having obviously friendly to Turkish nationalism goals, attempts to merge every Muslim group under Islam's faith, with the aim of overcoming the most important differences, concerning family and cultural standards and thus, forming a common, corporate Muslim identity. Over the last decades, a significant approach between Turks and Pomaks and to a smaller extent between Turks and Gypsies has been accomplished. Muslims' difficulty in integrating within the local community contributes to this approach. They cannot function effectively as state's citizens because of their low educational level and the various social constraints that the pro-Turkey group imposes on them under the excuse of religious behest. The Pomaks and Muslim Gypsies are taught Turkish as their mother language and Greek as a second one. Those two groups experience their variety while simultaneously go through the pressure that the Turkish policy exerts on them through the Consulate of Komotini, in order to become assimilated into the Turkish group.

Turkey attempts to create introversion and feelings of fear as far as the variety of Christians is concerned. It thus tries to achieve the creation of closed local markets, favors the positioning of Muslim's savings within Turkish real estate markets, facilitates Muslim students' school attendance in high schools and Universities of Turkey and attempts to politically lead the minority, strengthening the formation of independent combinations of minorities.

This Ankara policy became more aggressive after 1981, due to Greece's integration within the European Union. Muslims, along with every citizen of the European Union's member states, reaped the benefits of their integration while the rise of their standard of living worries the pro-Turkey group, because it has not managed to set under its guidance the Muslim minority, despite the establishment of its control on the majority of the minority's press and on Turkish speaking teachers. The great majority of Greek Thrace's Muslims remains satisfied from the Greek governance, especially after the measures that the Greek state took during the 1990's in order to secure equality of rights and democracy.

Christians and Muslims have harmonious relationships with each other. However, marriages between people of different religious beliefs are very rare. There is no communication on the basis of either consociation or friendship relations. The social constraints, which are imposed on Muslim women, restrain their social life not only within the framework of the whole community but also within the Muslim one.

In mixed villages contemporary life goes on smoothly, though it's a life between two different worlds. The cultural standards and especially religion perform a double function. On the one hand they inhibit people of the same religion to move into other social groups, restricting interaction potentials mainly among them, while on the other hand they raise barriers to others that want to integrate within the population. This enables religion to reinforce social coherence and thus communal identity.

Conclusions

Nowadays capitalism, especially after the socialist countries' downfall and Soviet Union's break up, has been proclaimed self appointedly as a global system of repression and suppression of the large majority of the earth's population by a small number of developed countries. Within this frame, imperialism turns to its advantage everything that contributes to its global domination without any shame. It does not hesitate to play with fire. This was shown in the example of multinational ex-Yugoslavia where it rekindled nationalism and managed to smash to fragments such a big country within which people spoke the same language and used the same currency. In other words, in Yugoslavia people sang history's song for the great homeland, which for the imperialists remains as melodic as classical music.

The imperialists follow the same policy for all minorities *mutatis mutandis*. This policy is also the one being followed in Thrace. As long as monopolistic capitalism remains dominant, no customs union, not even any European Union, will be able to tackle with the national state, this "sheepfold" of capitalism's history. The discrete nation-states, which constitute the heterogeneous European building, stand as an insuperable obstacle to the supersession of the notion of the national state. The absorption of the national state within the European Union's frame seems only a utopia.

The question now is: How is it possible to be led to a general equivalent through an administrative farrago, which is a feature of the European Union and its member states? To what extent can the community's "hard" core, through its

system of regulations and directives, manage to absorb or even extinguish multivaried differentiation?

The answer to the above questions is negative. The European Union, as far as the capitalist system of social reproduction continues to be dominant, cannot transform itself to a “mixer” that will grind this multivaried and competitive capitalist order. This can be achieved only in socialism, where both the exploitation among men as well as the exploitation among nations will be extinguished. The anticipation of an overcoming of social and national inequalities under the governance of a capitalist social system constitutes an idle wish, a utopia.

Capitalism’s enemies, capitalists themselves, constitute an overmastering obstacle to the homogenization process of the whole world to a single country and a single nation with one language and one civilization.

Within this framework, we can observe the integration of the Muslim minority of Thrace within the Greek community. The minority can benefit only if it manages to close its ears to nationalism’s sirens, which proclaim the eternal hate among people. The cosmopolitan imperialists, with Americans as their chiefs, take the Muslim minority under their protection, with State Department’s announcements, in order to condemn it to obscurantism and retardation. The sooner Christians and Muslims workers in Thrace turn a cold shoulder to the common enemy, imperialism, the better for them. Within their cultural differentiation, they should jointly reap the profits of the great benefits that their common country offers. Especially, Muslim workers should not search for lost “paradises” in the far Anatolia. The “paradise” exists among them. Within primary and high schools, universities, offices, factories, public services, hospitals etc. Nowhere else.

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