

International Conference

“The Challenge of Reform in Greece, 1974-2009: Assessment and Prospects”

8-10 May 2009, Yale University, USA

5-7 June 2009, Gennadius Library, Athens, Greece

Organizers:

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Rationale

Ever since Greece's 1974 transition to democracy there has been constant talk of reforms. Major changes in many sectors of economy, society and polity have attempted to bring Greek institutions and policies in line with (those of) more developed West European countries. True, there has not only been talk of reforms but efforts, too, and policies to enact them. Some reforms have come to fruition (e.g. creation of the NHS, entry to the Eurozone, banking system liberalization, some privatizations, etc), some others have been recurring with alarming frequency over the years (e.g. changes in the education system), while others have been spasmodic and elusive (e.g. pension reforms, reform of the civil service, etc). Some reforms principally entailed legal changes of importance (e.g. the mid-1970s formal recognition of demotic as the country's official language, amendments to civil and family law in the early 1980s), while others initiated changes in the organization and functioning of public institutions and state-owned firms (e.g. "socialization" of public enterprises in the 1980s, privatizations, second-tier local government). Terms such as "change", "modernization", and "reforms" have often served as focal points of political discourse over the last thirty five years and have inspired hopes for Greece joining the club of developed nations, especially since 1981, accession year to the (then) EC.

Yet, there has been widespread feeling, often captured in the polls and articulated in the media, that the country is not where it should be. Along with some other EU cohesion countries such as Portugal, but unlike others such as Spain, let alone Ireland, a wealth of indicators show Greece to be a laggard in the EU in a number of fronts, ranging from environmental protection, to incoming Foreign Direct Investment, to sinking economic competitiveness, to low performance of Greek pupils on international exams and the chronic problems of university education, to the high corruption and inefficiency besetting the civil service, state institutions, public enterprises and organizations. The

Greek malaise, widely felt and discussed in the country, has intensified the need for yet more "reforms". However, at the same time, action towards reforms has also fuelled systematic resistance from organized interest groups, which has led to a broadly perceived sense of inertia and stagnation, or at least truncated progress.

Despite constant lip-service to reform in the public discourse, and several actual waves of reform since 1974, there has been very little produced by way of systematic scholarly assessment of Greece's reform experience over the last nearly 35 years. This conference aims to provide a platform to a number of scholars and prominent policy makers to discuss the Greek reform experience and assess its prospects across most sectors of socioeconomic life.

The conference will comprise two main events. First, an *academic* conference, to be held at Yale University, on **8-10 May 2009**, and second, a *policy-making-oriented* conference, to be held in Athens, Gennadius Library, on **5-7 June 2009**. The Yale conference will be scholarly in orientation, seeking to advance our empirical and theoretical understanding of the Greek reform experience. The Athens conference will include policy makers (former and current), academics, and public intellectuals, aiming to assess the reform experience in Greece, suggest new ways ahead, and estimate the reform potential. Both conference events are generously sponsored by the Hellenic Studies Program, Yale University.

For the Yale conference, we invite both empirical and theoretical papers to discuss the following questions (the list is indicative, not exhaustive):

- What reform patterns may be discerned since 1974? How should reforms be analytically periodized and compared?
- What has been the reform record of the two main political parties? How did their reform agenda change over time, and with what results?
- When reforms have been successfully introduced and institutionalized, what explains their success?
- When reform projects failed, what explains their failure?
- Which reforms projects have been most successful or least successful, and why?
- How have reform efforts related to changes in the political system and the country's major geostrategic decisions and participation in international institutions?
- What have been the exogenous and endogenous stimuli for reform? How has the political system responded to them, with what effects?
- How does the Greek reform experience compare with that of other EU countries, especially in Southern and Eastern Europe?
- How does recent Greek reform experience compare with reform efforts undertaken in earlier periods? How do different reform areas compare to each other?
- How does the existing reform experience inform our theoretical understanding of the policymaking process? What does it tell us about institutional and policy change?

- What lessons can be derived regarding a possible “technology” of reform?

Submissions

For the Yale conference, interested scholars may submit to all three organizers an extended abstract (up to 1000 words) in English for their proposed contribution plus a one-paragraph biographical note, by **30 September 2008**. Priority will be given to papers that are both theoretically informed and empirically focused. Submission must be made via email and it must be a Word attachment. It should include authors’ names, institutional affiliations, and email and postal addresses, while the subject matter line of the email should indicate the title of the conference. Authors will be notified of acceptance or otherwise by **October 31, 2008**. Papers should be submitted to the three organizers by **April 15, 2009**. Financial support will be available to authors of accepted papers, primarily to cover accommodation and meals.