

Greece turns left

Democracy" and of a shrunken, left-based Pasok. By winning the support of the Right, it would take power away from Papandreou's socialists. If Papandreou is to prevent this, he will have to stay his present course, since only this would seem to promise fewer losses to either side, besides blocking the country's slide to national adventure.

It seems that, given his unpredictability, none of Papandreou's options can be precluded a priori. But it must be emphasized that, just as his recent losses could well be temporary, his first-year policies may be said to be consistent with his pre-election posture. This, at least, is the argument of his party's young spokesmen. A visit to Pasok's headquarters last August convinced me of the deep faith of its young ideologists in Papandreou's skill and commitment. This commitment was said to be steadfast on the "eventual" withdrawal of the American bases from Greece, on the country's "ultimate" disentanglement from NATO, and on the future joining of the non-aligned movement. It presupposes, of course, both economic recovery (the present crisis is squarely attributed to the international syndrome) and the eventual establishment of an indigenous military industry. It involves improved relations with the Arab countries and the Eastern bloc, including the USSR. And it is premised on an anti-superpower doctrine, national disappointment with NATO, fear of the EEC, and so on. Now if even part of this is true, Papandreou could indeed be tempted to play for time: he could keep Greece in the West, as long as its interests are served or not opposed. He would then try to persuade the Greeks that their country does not "belong" to the West, if this implies loss of national autonomy, that is, economic and political dependence. On this assumption, Papandreou will hope to make a case for the irrationality of remaining in NATO, and of remaining in the EEC, for a country incapable of competing with Europe's industrial giants which threaten to swallow up its developing potential. If Papandreou succeeds, the voters could well entrust him with a new mandate, and Pasok may return to power with its strength reinforced.

Needless to say, Papandreou may not be endorsing the picture as just given. It seems true that his policies have already contradicted the romanticism of his party's youthful intellectuals. And it is not cynical to suppose that, if the present course bears fruit, the doctrinal discrepancies between Pasok's factions will disappear. Indeed, an upturn in the economy would go a long way toward establishing Pasok, autonomously and on the present moderate pattern, as the best of all Greek political worlds. By cultivating a balanced mixed economy, introducing medical care, improving education and environment and by enriching the moral purpose of a society in transition, Pasok could fulfill a variety of needs without recourse to authoritarian experiments.

The crucial dilemma

This framework, however, presupposes the solution to yet another dilemma. Traditionally, the share of the Greek budget allocated to defence has been equal to the amount allocated to health, social welfare and education combined. The central reason is the deep-rooted crisis in Greek-Turkish relations. There is a widespread sense of

threat to Greek security from Greece's eastern neighbor, a sense now shared by government and opposition. Turkey's challenge to Greek sovereignty over the Aegean airspace and the continental shelf of the Greek islands is clearly regarded as unfounded and provocative (and perhaps not unrelated to the continued Turkish occupation of 36 percent of Cyprus ever since the 1974 invasion). It follows that by strengthening Greek defence, social services might stagnating near present levels despite prospects of rationalized planning. But a reduction of defence expenditures might make Turkey's posture more aggressive.

It is arguable that Pasok exaggerated the possibility of Turkish adventurism partly in order to appease the military. But it is also arguable that Papandreou needed a firm Western commitment on Greece's borders and on sovereign rights, in order to begin his social services program unimpeded. In the absence of NATO guarantees, Pasok's recent shift in foreign policy signals the decision to deal with Turkey from within the Alliance instead of from the position of an alienated ex-ally. Now this very shift might have disappointed Papandreou's left, although they would be hard-put to spell out their alternatives. In any case, just as Papandreou's stance towards NATO may be inherently problematic, the attitudes of many Greeks themselves towards the Alliance are equivocal.

These attitudes can be explained as a function of the idiosyncrasies and vicissitudes of Greek history (including its recent phases), which account for the sensitivity of the nation's self-perception. This image — which involves the notion that the Greeks have consistently stood by the common Western causes — is currently determined in great measure by the country's relations with Turkey. It follows that Greeks expect a lot from the Alliance in the prevention of an absurd conflict between two fellow-members.

A number of components, therefore, seem to define Papandreou's dilemmas and to make Greece's long-term development one of passionate fluidity and indeterminacy. Although it is hard to tell which faction in his party will win the upper hand, Papandreou must decide whether he will choose concrete and moderate principles over "utilitarian" or pragmatic politics. Otherwise, he risks losing the decisive support of centrists and democratic socialists. Second, the country's economic performance is plagued, beyond the current world crisis, by parasitism, untapped agricultural and mineral potential, incomplete industrialization and lopsided (centralized) development. If Papandreou succeeds in combining "structural" changes with overcoming stagflation (for instance, by convincing domestic and foreign investors about Greece's considerable attractiveness), then he will no doubt receive a further mandate. Third, strained relations with Turkey presently cause the country's budget imbalance in favor of defence expenditure. If, however, Greece's and Turkey's friends manage to effect a compelling improvement of these relations or if Papandreou himself (with political imagination as rich as his political charisma) were to initiate a comprehensive bilateral compromise with Turkey, then his crucial dilemmas can evaporate, and Greece, anchored in the West, could reach a euphoric period of prosperity and peace. □