

Still Europeanized? Greek Foreign Policy during the Eurozone Crisis

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The Eurozone crisis is now widely seen as a threshold for Greek politics, society and state structures. While there has been heightened attention in Greece and internationally on the impact of the crisis across a range of policy areas, there has been less attention on the impact of the crisis on Greek foreign policy.

The published research that exists on this topic makes valuable contributions to our understanding of how the economic crisis has affected Greek foreign policy. Scholars have identified various shifts with regards to, among others, the growing relevance of economic concerns in Greek foreign policy objectives, and the development or recalibration of various bilateral and regional relations (e.g. with Russia and the Gulf countries) of Greece.



It is striking however that there has been far less emphasis on the meaning of the economic crisis for the relationship between Greek foreign policy and the EU. This is striking because a) the economic crisis has severely upset the broad pro-EU consensus in Greek society and politics, and b) the EU had been for almost a decade prior to the crisis the point of reference for Greek foreign policy.

According to the literature on Europeanization of foreign policy there had been prior to the crisis a process of convergence between national policies, with regards especially to the style and approach of foreign policymaking, the reference to European norms and values (e.g. peace and human rights), and the reflex among diplomats and policymakers to debate foreign policy issues in a European setting.

Conceptualizations of national interests remained grounded in traditional strategic considerations in most member-states, and the engagement with the European framework was in most cases instrumental. But long-held processes of interaction and the broadening of national foreign policy agendas to issues of global importance and novel policy areas made recourse to the EU framework a permanent feature of national foreign policymaking in Europe.

Much the same applied to the case of Greece, whose foreign policy approached the EU from the late-1990s onwards. Greece decided then to embed its major foreign policy considerations (Turkey, Cyprus, FYROM name-issue) to the European framework. It decided to pursue these goals via EU institutions and policies, and to reformulate them with reference to EU's normative international goals (peace, stability, rule-based international politics). At the core of Greek foreign policy remained instrumental considerations, i.e. to use the EU for the more effective pursuit of national goals. But a process of reliance on the EU framework and the socialization of pro-European elites also brought about a subtle adjustment to, if not full internalization of, EU priorities as part of national foreign policy considerations.

The Eurozone crisis can be seen as a severe challenge to the pre-existing equilibrium between national and EU foreign policies. Indeed, the Eurozone crisis signals a full-scale crisis of intergovernmental governance in the EU. The inability to formulate solutions on the supranational level meant that tackling the crisis relied on externally sanctioned and supervised national adjustment and coordination of economic policies. As a result, relations between EU countries were severely affected and this spilled over in other arenas of intergovernmental interaction such as foreign policy.

One can identify specific pathways of how the Eurozone crisis can affect EU foreign policy. First, one can expect national foreign policies to become much more geared towards the pursuit of national interests, given the

challenging economic climate. This will make it harder for national foreign policies to take account of EU normative considerations and will increase unilateral policies outside of the EU. Second, common EU positions will become weaker (a 'lower common denominator'), leaving member-states with fewer leads from the EU framework to direct their foreign policies. Third, the crisis has upset in most countries the domestic political context. As Europeanization literature has long acknowledged the importance of national politics for the ways Europe's influence is absorbed, one should expect this to significantly influence the tendency of member-states towards more autonomous foreign policies.

One can see how these pathways of influence are present in the case of Greece. The rapid deterioration of the economic climate has made it imperative for Greece to seek economic benefits in its foreign policy, while its once stable pro-European two-party system has crumbled under the pressure of anti-austerity Eurosceptic parties. The question is whether these developments have had any bearing on how Greek foreign policy engages and views the EU framework.

One way to examine this question is by looking into policy areas of increasing salience and flux in recent years. Two such areas for Greek and EU foreign policy are energy security and migration and border control. In both cases Greek foreign policy was already in tension with EU priorities well before the crisis. Already since 2008 Greece was trying to Europeanize border and migration control by asking from the EU to consider Greek borders in the Aegean as 'European borders'. The EU's priority however was to externalize migration control on the Greek islands. On the other hand, Greece's effort to become an 'energy hub' ran against the EU's pipeline politics in the Balkans and the Black Sea.

During the crisis the instrumental dimension became more prevalent in Greek foreign policy considerations. National geopolitical considerations in energy and security considerations in border control trumped the EU's normative sensibilities in these areas (that were anyway very little considered prior to the crisis). This did not mean however automatic alignment with EU's strategic goals. Even under pro-European governments Greece continued to engage Russia in energy matters, while efforts to multilateralize the mounting migration problem in the Aegean only elicited limited technical support from the EU.

The most important effect of the crisis was the polarization between two different instrumental views of Europe in foreign policy that closely reflected patterns of political opposition domestically. For the pro-European parties implementing austerity while in government in 2010-2015, maintaining the image of alignment of Greek foreign policy interests with EU priorities was essential to support the narrative of Greece's strategic alignment with Europe, upon which lay a major justification for difficult economic reforms. Reference to Europe took place even in the face of major inconsistencies (e.g. the simultaneous support of the TAP and South Stream pipelines).

The anti-austerity SYRIZA-ANEL government that came to power in 2015 took a different view of linkage between foreign policy and economic issues. Its goal was to effect a recalibration of Greece's relationship with the Eurozone, and to this end foreign policy issues were seen as parts of tradeoffs and bargains. Tsipras' visit to Moscow in April 2015 and the signing of the Turkish Stream pipeline agreement, and his government's posturing during the migration crisis (emphasizing Greece's identification with European humanitarian values despite the burden it faces, but evading strong-armed responses as prompted by various circles in the EU) can be seen in this light.

Identifying the independent effect of specific factors is always a tricky exercise in foreign policy, including in studies of foreign policy Europeanization. The crisis has had subtle effects on Greek foreign policy and its use of the European framework.

What the crisis has done however is to reveal two different instrumental viewpoints of Europe and of how foreign policy goals relate to the economy and the EU. For pro-European parties, presenting the EU as congruent with Greek national interests corresponds to their strategy of presenting economic reform as a question of Greece's geopolitical orientation. For anti-austerity parties on the other hand, misfits between Greek and EU foreign policy priorities are an opportunity to highlight the need to recalibrate the Greek-EU relationship, especially with regards to

economic policy. In this context, foreign policy goals can be reformulated, transformed or downplayed in the search for tradeoffs and bargains.