



INSIDE EUROPE

GREECE

PERCHES BETWEEN CULTURE AND CRISIS

BY ANDREAS L. KATONIS *

A small country in Southern Europe with a population of about 11 million, Greece has a long history and culture. Officially known as the ‘Hellenic Republic’, it is inhabited in majority by the Greeks.

Greece is considered ‘the cradle of Western civilization’, the birthplace of democracy, Western philosophy, Western literature, historiography, political science, mathematics, the Olympic Games and Western drama.

History

Archaeological findings date back the origins of Greek settlement to 2200 BCE, while the Greek language appeared only in the 17th century BCE. The period from the 17th-12th century BCE is often called the “Mycenaean” epoch, a duration characterized by a centralized state, until the time of the mythical Trojan War.

The Mycenaean Civilization possessed writing, called Linear B, originating from one or more previous script systems. The writing went into oblivion, as we know it

today, with the present Greek Alphabet appearing in the 8th century BCE. This was the epoch of Homer – and together with Homer’s achievement – the beginning of the great age of Greek civilization, considered to have lasted till the 2nd century BCE, until Greece became a protectorate of the Romans.

After the Western Roman Empire (476 CE) fell, the Eastern part, later called Byzantine Empire survived for a thousand more years, before it fell victim to the Turkish conquest. It may be remarked that the Byzantine State considered itself Roman, i.e. officially it was the Eastern Roman Empire.

With the Turkish conquest, many Byzantine Greek scholars fled to the West taking with them a large body of literature and thereby, significantly contributing to the Renaissance.

The Greece of today, like its language, has many pasts or folds. Nonetheless, the country presents a composite picture without fractures to separate languages or countries. Cyprus –

the only exception – presently contains a Greek and Turkish sector. While Modern Greek is noticeably different from the classical language, the present spoken Greek is as much the same as its great predecessor some 2500 years ago.

Modern Greece is a unitary parliamentary republic. The nominal head of the state is the President of the Republic elected by Parliament for a five-year term. The current President of Greece is Prokopis Pavlopoulos, who has been in office since 2015.

Education

Greece, whereas it could be an ideal place for scholarship, it is not yet the country where advanced classical or other studies can be initiated. Everyday climate is political – with schools, universities, research institutes witnessing the scene of political discussions. Educated minds may leave the country – an age-old problem, frequently afflicting social and rural layers. Nevertheless, Modern Greece is a founding member of the United Nations, and participates in a number of international institutions like the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Eurozone etc.



Tourism

Greece still offers much for the visitors; despite the fact that artefacts like statues began to be transported to the West as early as by the Romans and then in modern times, by European rulers and archaeologists. Still, an indefinable quantity of antique objects is on exhibition in museums of Greece with excavations enriching the number of findings. Greece is home to several antique buildings, like the Acropolis in Athens, one of its oldest architectural marvels.

The climate of Greece is primarily Mediterranean featuring mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. The unique climate, together with the historical wealth of the

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country and the healthy Mediterranean kitchen attracts a number of tourists which is only increasing. The country has thousands of small islands and a few large ones, with innumerable beaches which provide an ideal summer vacation with unlimited possibilities of bathing in the sea, whether in Northern or in Southern Greece or in Attica, the peninsula where the capital is seated. Among the most popular islands are Mykonos, Rhodes, Santorini and the biggest island, Crete.

Economy & Politics

Greece is considered to have the largest economy in the Balkans with a per capita income at \$21,910 for nominal GDP. However, by the end of 2009, as a combination of international and local factors, the country's economy faced its most severe debt crisis. With the economic crisis going on, wages and even pensions are being reduced again and again. The only way out seems to be either a radical change in economic policies, or, in the long run, contributions by the ‘heavy industry’ of the country, i.e. by tourism.

Meanwhile, the political map has gradually changed with about 30 percent of the leftist government substituted and a new coalition of SYRIZA with a minor right-wing party called ANEL coming into being. Thus, Greece’s belonging to NATO, the European Union and the Eurozone is not questioned by the present governance. Whereas this party won the elections in January 2015 with a relatively high percent, its popularity decreased considerably, and New Democracy, the biggest opposition party gained prominence distinctly. If nothing changes, the country will proceed to new elections in a year. Current public-opinion polls predict New Democracy’s emergence than that of the government party in position.

** The author is Chair of Greek Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*