

One year of the Simitis era

Political viewpoint
by George Sefertzis

This week marks one year since the death of Andreas Papandreu, founder of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and prime minister of Greece for nearly 10 years (1981-1989, 1993-1995).

The changes that have taken place in these 12 months in the country's political and social scene, seem to be more numerous and more impressive than those that took place in 20 years under the leadership of Andreas Papandreu, either as leader of the opposition or as head of the government.

Throughout the period that followed the seven-year military dictatorship (1967-1974), Andreas Papandreu seemed to mark the destiny of modern Greece in the last quarter of the last century of the "great leaders".

Even so, one year after his political life in Greece goes down as that of the "dinosaurs" of the post-war years had never been; an era that continues to be described with the names of its political leaders, starting from Constantine Karamanlis up until Constantine Mitsotakis, the great enemy of Andreas Papandreu, but also a figure who brought expressions of personal polarity into Greek political life.

The old slogans, the old ideas, the old visions, not even the old problems survived the political careers of the main figures.

Papandreu himself passed away having bitten his opponents politically, on the one hand, but having behind him a memory that is more the object of parapolitical literature than a substantial political heritage, on the other.

Constantine Karamanlis, the founder of the conservative New Democracy party, who also governed Greece for many years and who shared power with PASOK during a rather singular period of "cohabitation" with Karamanlis as president of the republic and Papandreu as prime minister, has also retired permanently. Constantine Mitsotakis, who became leader of the New Democracy, after having previously lost the leadership battle in the 60s in his original political area to Andreas Papandreu himself, has also been essentially removed from the frontline and "marginalised" politically. His tracks in post junta Greece, in any case, are of necessity fainter since he only just barely managed to serve as premier and for a shorter term than had been his personal ambition (1989-1993).

The huge gap that everyone had expected in Greek political life, dominated by faces rather than parties or issues when the three great leaders finally departed, was filled remarkably quickly and, more importantly, very smoothly. It is certain that the "naturalness" of developments surprised many of those people who had foreseen the most improbable political reshuffling after the departure of the "great leaders" and in view of the clash of those who had aspired to succeed them.

However, neither the centre left PASOK nor the right New Democracy followed the procedures necessary for succession for



Prime Minister and President of PASOK Costas Simitis

the fear of the supporters of these political "thrillers". On the contrary, the two big Greek political parties replaced their old leaderships with new ones of a totally different type without the slightest dispute, in effect, and no diminishment of their cohesion.

Many people might interpret this development as a belated shift of the Greek political system from a long-lasting personality-led phase to a new more political phase, less personal, more faceless and less program-driven. They might also talk of a complete "depersonalisation" of Greek political configurations in view of more general ideological political and social developments that mark the movements of European countries toward the 21st century.

Such a conclusion would, however, probably be hasty. And this seems to be incompatible with the true events.

We must not forget that the developments that marked firstly the succession procedures in PASOK clearly bore the personal stamp of those vying for the recently empty throne. The choice of the new prime minister in the first phase, when Andreas Papandreu was still alive though very ill, by PASOK's parliamentary group was obviously the object of intense and primarily personal differences among the three leadership candidates, Costas Simitis, Akis Tsohatzopoulos and Gerasimos Arsenis. This was repeated in the second phase when, after the death of Andreas Papandreu, the PASOK Congress was called in June 1996 to vote for a replacement of its eclipsed president. Again, the conflict among the same lead players was repeated with personalities very much in the forefront and political profiles on a much lower pitch.

The fact that Mr. Simitis expressed a more collective and program-led political platform as head of the "modernising" movement does not mean that his final victory over his competitors was due to the political content of his candidacy.

It is more than certain that the key reason why Simitis was voted

president, and with an overwhelming majority, by both the PASOK parliamentary group and the PASOK Congress, was that the two bodies of electors quickly realised, as was proven later, that only with Simitis as leader of PASOK could their party win general elections again and thus retain power.

The "victorious representation" that accompanied Simitis' public image obviously played a catalytic role. However, Greek public opinion did not form this image based on an analysis of Simitis' political proposals. The image of Simitis as a reliable political leader arose not because he was the expression of a more impersonal choice, but a personality that could inspire confidence in view of the difficult moments that the country would have to go through in order to emerge from crisis. His personal style, therefore, and all that this entails, even personal trust, once more played a decisive role in Greek political developments.

The same happened again a few months later when the other major Greek political party, conservative New Democracy, was called to replace its own leader, who a few months before had lost the general elections. Simitis' personal credibility had worked equally strongly in his favour during this electoral battle in the autumn of 1996.

Even though this needs further analysis and is almost certainly a more complex problem in reality, there is little doubt that PASOK's victory over New Democracy in the last general elections was due to differing political positions, a supreme ideology or to a superior planning. It was due primarily to the incomparably convincing image that Simitis managed to present as a national leader, nullifying any attempts by Militates Evert, then leader of New Democracy, to discredit him on a purely personal basis. It would have been illogical, in any case, if things had been different.

In an age when political differences are becoming less acute, ideological differences are becoming

minimal, and the criteria that form public opinion are being transformed, the choices are shifting more towards evaluation of personalities.

It is natural that criteria such as ability, effectiveness, reliability and personality should rule the final choices made by both public opinion and party officials. Costas Simitis has succeeded in winning the battles he has fought until today precisely because he has managed to become identified with these qualities. Any attack on him, should it succeed in its aims, will succeed precisely because it has managed to discredit his image as an effective manager of modern Greek economy and society.

The Simitis era will continue to exist as long as his image continues to reveal the personal characteristics that have maintained his power until now.

The modernisation of Greek political life is not a consequence of a process of depersonalising political developments, but a process of personalising society's need to create a new political culture, new political behaviours and put forward new political considerations.

To recollect an "older" distinction used in political science terms, parties have always been divided into "mass movements" and parties of the "elite". Due to the very nature of social developments, mass movements of the classic type are doomed to pass into the archives of 20th century history. In the politics of the 21st century, it is logical and inevitable that parties of "executives" will prevail, where the role of manager will be the decisive one and the decisive criteria for choosing him or her will be personal characteristics. Even though they are not private companies, parties cannot afford to ignore the rules by which modern businesses are managed. Because it is simply a question of organization and effectiveness and Greek society knows, also, that it won't get anywhere without organization and effectiveness.

George Sefertzis was born in Athens in May 1953. In 1974 he decided to enter law school at the University of Athens. He later continued his studies in Paris until his return to Athens in 1984. Sefertzis specialized in political and corporate communications and image making.

Sefertzis worked as a university researcher at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales of Paris and was a Scientific Advisor for the Schlumberger Foundation. In addition, his work has been published in various international and national publications.

Between 1985 and 1988 Sefertzis was a Special Advisor for the Foreign Affairs Ministry, was appointed as General Secretary to Press and Information and, furthermore, was appointed General Secretary to the Ministry of Culture.

Sefertzis was the successful strategic planner for the following campaigns:

1. SYNASPISMOS for the European elections of 1994.
2. The elections for the Mayor of Piraeus of 1994.
3. The Bulgarian elections for the Socialist Party in 1994.
4. The Cypriot elections for the Democratic Party in 1996.

Political Briefs

Simitis chairs Cabinet meeting

There will be a Cabinet meeting at the end of this week, chaired by Prime Minister Costas Simitis, in which the new code of conduct for public servants will be discussed, along with higher education and policies on the establishment and running of casinos.

Meeting of Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly

Gathering at the 9th Plenary session of the Black Sea Organization's Parliamentary Assembly (PABSEC), representatives of parliaments of Black Sea nations discussed economic, political and social issues on June 18. The meeting was officially inaugurated by President of the Republic Kostas Stephanopoulos. Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and the Ukraine are the ten Black Sea nations represented. Observing the meeting were representatives of the Egyptian Parliament, the president of the Bulgarian parliament and Israel's Knesset and the UN High Commission for Refugees PABSEC, which aims at cooperation between the peoples of the region to create a zone of stability, prosperity and peace in the larger effort for a new Europe, was created in 1993.

FYROM president visits White House

During his first visit to the White House early this week, President of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) Kiro Gligorov expressed his country's approval to US President Bill Clinton of the role played by Greece in the Balkans.

Gligorov told reporters that the issue of his country's name was not discussed with Clinton. He said that he briefed Clinton on his country's views on Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis' present policy, and that they evaluated that policy, "particularly Greece's orientation to be a more important factor in this region compared to how it was until now."

Gligorov also expressed his country's appreciation over the UN peacekeeping force's catalytic role in safeguarding peace and stability, and called for the renewal of the mandate for its stay.

Avramopoulos and V. Papandreu discuss tourism

The issue of Athens' better tourism development was the focus of a meeting between Development Minister Vasso Papandreu and Athens Mayor Dimitris Avramopoulos earlier this week. Avramopoulos is concerned about the continuing decrease over the past few years in the number of tourists staying in Athens, noting that 30 percent of tourists go directly to other destinations in Greece, without even stopping in the capital. The two agreed that a specific framework for upgrading Athens must be formed.

Turkish request for information on Imia rejected

In a continuation of last year's tense stand-off between Greece and Turkey when Turkey disputed Greece's sovereignty, Turkey's request for information on Greek navigation around the Aegean islet of Imia was rejected by Greece earlier this week.

Acting government spokesman Yiannis Nikolaou said that the Turkish government had requested the information but avoided calling the request a formal demarche, stressing that "such acts are steadfastly rejected."

Avramopoulos visits Moscow

At the invitation of Moscow Mayor Yuri Louskov, Athens Mayor Dimitris Avramopoulos left Athens this week to attend the fifth conference of the "world's largest cities", being held in Moscow. Avramopoulos is expected to try to gain accession for Athens to the international network of the world's largest cities.

Georgian parliamentary president visits Athens

Georgian parliamentary president Zourab Zhvania began a four-day official visit to Greece this week. Scheduled are meetings with Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos, opposition leaders and businessmen. Zhvania met with President of the Republic Kostas Stephanopoulos and Greek counterpart Apostolos Kaklamanis, and also attended the official inauguration of the Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly plenary session.

INTERNS NEEDED TO WORK FOR THE HELLENIC TIMES AND SCOPE WEEKLY. GET PRACTICAL HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE IN ALL FACETS OF PUTTING TOGETHER A NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE!! FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 3631.562, 3633.120.

ΕΝΑΣ ΧΡΟΝΟΣ ΕΠΟΧΗΣ ΣΗΜΙΤΗ

Αυτήν την εβδομάδα κλείνει ένας χρόνος από τον θάνατο του Ανδρέα Παπανδρέου.

Οι αλλαγές που συντελέστηκαν αυτούς τους 12 μήνες στην πολιτική και κοινωνική σκηνή φαίνεται να είναι μεγαλύτερες και περισσότερο εντυπωσιακές από αυτές που έγιναν τα τελευταία 20 χρόνια, κατά τη διάρκεια της αρχηγίας του Ανδρέα Παπανδρέου είτε ως αρχηγού της αντιπολίτευσης είτε ως επικεφαλής της Κυβέρνησης.

Ένα χρόνο μετά τον θάνατό του η πολιτική ζωή στην Ελλάδα προχωρεί σαν να μην υπήρξαν τα μεταπολιτευτικά χρόνια οι «δεινόσαυροι». Μια εποχή που συνεχίζει να χαρακτηρίζεται από ονόματα πολιτικών αρχηγών αρχίζοντας από τον Κων/νο Καραμανλή μέχρι τον Κ. Μητσοτάκη, μεγάλο εχθρό του Ανδρέα Παπανδρέου, αλλά επίσης και φυσιογνωμία που προκάλεσε εκδηλώσεις προσωπικής πόλωσης στην ελληνική πολιτική ζωή.

Ο Ανδρέας Παπανδρέου έφυγε αφήνοντας πίσω του μνήμες που αποτελούν περισσότερο αντικείμενο παραπολιτικής φιλολογίας παρά ουσιαστική πολιτική κληρονομιά.

Στο τεράστιο κενό που περίμενε κανείς να δημιουργηθεί στην ελληνική πολιτική κυριάρχησαν περισσότερο πρόσωπα παρά κόμματα.

Είναι βέβαιο ότι ο φυσικός τρόπος εξέλιξης εξέπληξε πολλούς από εκείνους που είχαν προείδει τους πιο απίθανους πολιτικούς ανασχηματισμούς, μετά την αποχώρηση των μεγάλων αρχηγών και ενόψει της σύγκρουσης όσων φιλοδοξούσαν να τους διαδεχθούν.

Το γεγονός ότι ο κ. Σημίτης εξέφρασε μια πιο συλλογική και βασισμένη σε πρόγραμμα πολιτική πλατφόρμα, σαν επικεφαλής της κίνησης «εκσυγχρονισμού», δεν σημαίνει ότι η τελική νίκη του έναντι των ανταγωνιστών του οφειλόταν στο πολιτικό περιεχόμενο της υποψηφιότητάς του.

Είναι περισσότερο από βέβαιο ότι η αιτία κλειδί για την εκλογή του κ. Σημίτη ως αρχηγού και με μια συντριπτική πλειοψηφία και από την ΚΟ του ΠΑΣΟΚ και από τους Συνέδρους του Κόμματος ήταν ότι και τα δύο Σώματα γρήγορα συνειδητοποίησαν, όπως αποδείχθηκε αργότερα, ότι μόνο με τον Σημίτη αρχηγό του ΠΑΣΟΚ θα μπορούσε το κόμμα τους να κερδίσει τις εκλογές ξανά και έτσι να εξασφαλίσει την εξουσία.

Η φυσιογνωμία του Σημίτη ως αξιόπιστου πολιτικού αρχηγού αναδείχθηκε όχι σαν έκφραση μιας μάλλον απρόσωπης πολιτικής αλλά σαν μια προσωπικότητα που θα μπορούσε να εμπνεύσει εμπιστοσύνη ενόψει των δύσκολων στιγμών που θα είχε ν' αντιμετωπίσει η χώρα προκειμένου να βγεί από την κρίση. Το προσωπικό του ύφος με ότι αυτό συνεπάγεται, ακόμη και η προσωπική εμπιστοσύνη για μια ακόμη φορά έπαιξαν ρόλο αποφασιστικό στις Ελληνικές πολιτικές εξελίξεις. Η προσωπική αξιοπιστία του Σημίτη, λειτούργησε εξίσου σημαντικά υπέρ του κατά τη διάρκεια της προεκλογικής μάχης το φθινόπωρο του '96.

Αν και αυτό χρειάζεται παραπέρα ανάλυση είναι βεβαίως στην πραγματικότητα ένα σύνθετο πρόβλημα. Ελάχιστα αμφισβητείται ότι η νίκη του ΠΑΣΟΚ επί της Ν.Δ. στις τελευταίες εκλογές οφειλόταν σε διαφορετικές πολιτικές θέσεις, στην ανώτερη ιδεολογία και σ' έναν καλλίτερο σχεδιασμό. Οφειλόταν κατ' αρχήν στο ασύγκριτα πειστικό ύφος που παρουσίασε ο Σημίτης σαν εθνικός ηγέτης εξουδετερώνοντας κάθε προσπάθεια του Μ. Εβερτ να τον ανφισβητήσει σε προσωπική βάση. Θα ήταν παράλογο εν πάση περιπτώσει εάν τα πράγματα ήταν διαφορετικά.

Σε μια εποχή που οι πολιτικές διαφορές γίνονται λιγότερο έντονες και οι ιδεολογικές μικρότερες, τα κριτήρια που διαμορφώνουν την κοινή γνώμη μεταβάλλονται, οι επιλογές γίνονται περισσότερο μόνο από την αξιολόγηση προσωπικοτήτων.

Είναι φυσικό ότι κριτήρια όπως ικανότητα, αποτελεσματικότητα, αξιοπιστία και προσωπικότητα θα καθόριζαν τις τελικές εκλογές .

Ο Κώστας Σημίτης κέρδισε τις μάχες μέχρι σήμερα, ακριβώς απειδή χαρακτηρίστηκε από αυτές τις ιδιότητες. Κάθε επίθεση εναντίον του για να πετύχει θάπρεπε να αμφισβητήσει το image του ως αποτελεσματικού manager στη σύγχρονη ελληνική οικονομία και κοινωνία.

Η εποχή Σημίτη θα συνεχίσει να υπάρχει όσο το ύφος του θα συνεχίσει να διατηρεί αυτά τα προσωπικά χαρακτηριστικά που του εξασφάλισαν την εξουσία μέχρι τώρα.

Ο εκσυγχρονισμός της ελληνικής πολιτικής ζωής δεν είναι συνέχεια μιας διαδικασίας «αποπροσωποποίησης» των πολιτικών εξελίξεων αλλά μιας «εκτός προσωποποίησης» κοινωνικής ανάγκης να δημιουργηθεί νέα πολιτική κουλτούρα, νέες πολιτικές συμπεριφορές και να γίνουν στο εξής νέες πολιτικές παρατηρήσεις, μελέτες.

Ακόμη και αν τα πολιτικά κόμματα δεν είναι ιδιωτικές εταιρίες, δεν μπορούν να αγνοήσουν τους κανόνες με τους οποίους οι σύγχρονες επιχειρήσεις διοικούνται. Είναι απλά ζητήματα οργάνωσης και αποτελεσματικότητας και η ελληνική κοινωνία γνωρίζει πλέον ότι τίποτα δεν γίνεται χωρίς οργάνωση και αποτελεσματικότητα.