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Trends in State Education Policy in Greece: 1976 to the 1997 Reform

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Abstract

This article deals with the education policy in Greece during the period 1976 to 1997, with special focus on the policy that is in practice since 1997. During the early 1990s, the important changes at international and local levels had established the foundations for this policy, which is significantly different from the ones implemented during the twenty five years before that and has effected a total transformation of the Greek educational system. The analysis of this policy, including a comparison with those that preceded it (through the study of the relevant reforms and major regulations), as well as with the "restructuring" education policies implemented in several other countries during the last 15 years, is followed by an assessment of its results up to now.

A. The state education policy and the reforms in Greece from 1976 to 1992. An overview.

The Greek educational system was created under the specific conditions that characterized the social formation in the 19th century and in direct relation to the constitution of the independent Greek State; during its development it has acquired some basic characteristics - that are attributed to a nexus of socioeconomic, political and ideological factors - such as its highly centralized and bureaucratic administrative structure (Dimaras, 1978; Eliou, 1988; Andreou and Papakonstantinou, 1994), the low levels of public expenditure on education, the absence of an overall strategy of financing education (Pesmazoglou, 1981) and - most importantly - the remarkably strong popular demand for higher education.

The latter results from, first, the extremely high prestige that general education holds in Greek society and, second, the key role the State used to have in the university graduates' labour market (Tsoukalas 1987, 1989). Relative to these is the near absence, until recently, of any strictly selective dual educational structure comparable to those that had been fashioned in other Western European countries. Despite the fact that the establishment of a dual system and the growth of its technical and vocational sector constituted an objective of all the reforms after 1929, this objective was not realized until the last twenty years of the 20th century and, even then, not to the expected degree.

This came to constitute a serious chronic problem, directly related to the distributive function of the school and a basic constitutive of the education crisis that has emerged in the ensuing conjunctures, as the school apparatus cannot successfully accomplish its distributive and/or ideological function(s) (see Althusser, 1977; Poulantzas, 1982).

The resolution of this problem and the adaptation of the educational system to the changing socioeconomic conditions (along with the enhancement of school's ideological function) constituted the core of the state education policy and of every reforming attempt of the last 25 years. Secondary and post-secondary education - that is to say, the levels at which the crisis of the school apparatus appears to be particularly heightened - had been the main domains of the changes and regulations of these reforms. Thus, the main common themes of all the reforms since 1976 are the structure of post-compulsory education and the development of its technical and vocational sector, the pupils' selection system (and in particular the university entrance examinations system) and the administrative structure of the educational system.

Up to 1997 the Greek educational system had been shaped by three reforms that had taken place during the 1976-1992 period:

A1. The 1976-1977 reform

After the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 and under the political and ideological conditions that were dominant at the time (failure of the anti-communist and "Greek-Christian"¹ ideologies, political differentiations amongst the majority of the people), the main political objectives of New Democracy (the right wing party that came to office after the 1974 general election) was the re-introduction of parliamentary legitimacy, the modernization and increase in effectiveness of the state apparatuses and the appropriation of the consent of the lower classes, all of which required the creation of a proper institutional and political framework, a framework that would ensure the unhindered economic development, so that Greece could become a full member of the European Economic Community (see Milios, 1979; Frangoudakis, 1981).

In that context, the need for an educational re-organization became urgent. The disfunctioning of the educational system was obvious, since it could not match the requirements of its new distributive and ideological roles: in school year 1972-1973, 45% of the graduates of the 6-year compulsory primary school had not enrolled in any post-compulsory secondary school type, while 80% of the rest attended general secondary schools and 20% technical-vocational schools (Frangoudakis, 1979); at the same time the hierarchical relations between school subjects in the 1969 and 1973 school time-tables remained almost the same as in that of the 1930s' (Noutsos, 1988) (e.g. in the 1973 *gymnasium* time-table the weekly hours of teaching for ancient Greek were increased from 3 to 4 and the hours for science and mathematics were decreased from 4 to 3). Thus, a

total reformation of the educational system was attempted by the 1976-1977 reform, with the following major regulations:

- ❖ the years of compulsory education were increased from six to nine: six years in the primary school - *demotiko* (ages 6-12) and three years in the unselective lower secondary school - *gymnasium* (ages 12-15),
- ❖ the post-compulsory secondary education consisted of (a) *general lycea*, highly selective general academic schools of 3-year duration, leading to Universities and Technical Universities, (b) *technical-vocational lycea* (TELEs) of 3-year duration, which could prepare pupils for "higher" (non-university level) schools, and (c) *technical-vocational schools* (TESEs) of 1 or 2 years duration leading directly to the labour market,
- ❖ the examinations for passing from the *demotiko* to the *gymnasium* were abolished, and strict lyceum entrance examinations were introduced at national level,
- ❖ the system for entry to the tertiary education (Universities and Technical Universities, Centers of Higher Technical and Vocational Education and Teacher Training Institutes) was - and still is - that of the restricted number of entrees. The entry to tertiary education schools was allowed only after examinations at national level, which were introduced in the second and third grades of lyceum,
- ❖ new curricula and school text books were introduced, and
- ❖ a 1-year duration in-service training for the teachers was established.

In general, it can be said that the attempt of the government to establish and develop the technical-vocational sector and to lower the demand for university education by achieving a balance between the latter and the demand for technical-vocational education did not succeed. The effective lack of access for TELEs' graduates to universities, combined with the prevailing low esteem for technical education in Greek society, impeded the shift to the technical sector (Frangoudakis, 1979; Kassotakis 1981, 1994; Kazamias, 1986; Kokos, 1982).

A2. The 1982-1985 reform

Between the years 1977-1981 and in view of the country's impending membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), New Democracy had lost its reliability as the main political force that could build and manage the "état de droit", because of its rhetoric of communist danger, the people's dissatisfaction with the condition of the economy (in 1980 and 1981 the inflation rate had reached 25%), the Opposition's protests against the government's disability, counterproductivity and favoritism and the prolonged pre-election period (1980-1981) (Milios, 1982). The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) appeared henceforth in this position; its pre-election radical rhetoric had convinced a large portion of the lower classes - and particularly the *petite bourgeoisie* - of its capacity to promote social prosperity and political democracy. In the 1981 general election, PASOK came to power and its victory marked politically the 1980s.

After 1976 and up to the 1981 elections, there had been an escalation of reactions against the 1976-1977 reform and the New Democracy's education policy, while criticisms of this policy and demands for a general "democratization" of the educational system and the modernization of the curricula had been shaped by the Opposition parties and the Teachers' Unions. Education, as a basic domain of the welfare state's activities, constituted an important area of intervention by PASOK's government, which expressed

the intention to reinforce the social and compensatory roles of schooling and, at the same time, adjust it to the economic developments.

The most significant changes brought about by PASOK's government during the 1982-1985 period were the following:

- ❖ the lyceum entrance examinations were abolished,
- ❖ a new lyceum type was established, namely the *Integrated Lyceum*, which was the Greek version of the comprehensive upper secondary school that had been introduced in several Western European countries two decades ago. It had been designed to provide both general and technical education, in order to improve the latter and, also, to channel more pupils into the technical-vocational branches (Kassotakis, 1994: 109; YPEPTH, 1989: 9),
- ❖ the 3-year duration Technological Educational Institutes (TEIs) were established in tertiary education and the Centers of Higher Technical and Vocational Education were abolished,
- ❖ the tertiary education entrance examinations system was modified and the graduates of TEIs were given the possibility to claim their entrance in the TEIs without examinations, on the basis of their achievement at school, in a proportion (25%) of the entrees in the TEIs,
- ❖ public "post-lyceum preparatory centres" were established, which provided free tuition to the lyceum graduates who had not entered the Universities or TEIs and wished to sit examinations again,
- ❖ the former school inspectors (whose role was to assess the teachers) were abolished and substituted by "school advisers", who would collaborate with teachers and support them scientifically and pedagogically,
- ❖ new subjects, curricula and text-books were introduced, and
- ❖ the participation of the local authorities and representatives of social organizations was introduced in several educational committees, at school as well as regional and national levels, for the first time in the educational history of Greece. However, in effect, these bodies had a recommendatory character and their role in decision making was limited, since all the important decisions continued to be taken by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH).

The reforming measures of PASOK aimed at an increase in effectiveness of school's functions: the regulations that had proven feeble or inapplicable were modified and measures that would assure the release of existing tensions were introduced (Andreou and Papakonstantinou, 1994); the changes on the level of the administration aimed at the neutralization of conflicts and at achieving the compliance of the teachers and their smooth assimilation in the state education policy (Andreou and Papakonstantinou, 1990).

The changes in the examinations system were particularly important. The abolition of the lyceum entrance examinations - based on a logic of "social justice" - removed the examination obstacles to all lycea types. Attending the TEIs became henceforth a "free choice", a fact that contributed partly to their declassification as schools for the "failures". Still, the percentage of pupils in post compulsory education attending public and private TEIs and TESs remained low: 27% in the school year 1984-1985 (NSSG, 1994: 25), raised to 32,8% in 1989-1990 it still was one of the lowest among OECD countries (OECD, 1993: 48-49). At the same time, the modifications of the examinations systems facilitated the access to the third grade of the *lyceum* and intensified the demand for tertiary education (see Noutsos, 1986: 64).

A3. The 1992 reform

The late eighties were marked at international level by the hegemony of neoliberal forces, the regression of socialdemocratic parties in Western Europe, as well as the collapse of the Eastern European regimes.

In Greece, during the second phase of PASOK's governing (1985-1989), and particularly since 1986, regressions in its income policy were observed and the rate of social expenditure was slowed down. The difficulties in pursuing both objectives at once, the economic development and the redistribution of income in favour of the lower classes, disrupted the social consensus of the previous period. The expectations of the social classes and strata that had predominantly supported PASOK were not satisfied, the promises to the "have nots" were not kept, so a progressive loss of the governing party's power was observed in the local authority and trade union elections and, additionally, there was an increase of strikes against the government's economic policies. Under these conditions, PASOK could not win the 1989 elections.

The 1989 - 1990 period was a politically unstable one for Greece, due to the disability of the political parties to form a self-reliant government. After the 1989 general election there had been two short-lived coalition governments and in 1990 New Democracy came to office for three years.

The new government attempted a reformation of the educational system in neoliberal-neoconservative directions, aiming at its adjustment to the needs of the market, the expansion of privatizations and the revision of the democratic elements of the bourgeois reform that had been completed by PASOK. It is possible to trace in New Democracy's education policy important similarities to the neoliberal-neoconservative policies implemented in other countries, though differences, due to the idiosyncratic characteristics of the Greek educational system, can be observed as well.

Thus, measures such as the "open enrollment", the local management of schools and the "opting out", which were applied in the case of England (see Simon, 1988; Chitty and Simon [eds], 1993), could not be implemented in the highly centralized Greek educational system; on the other hand, a "National Curriculum" had been established in Greece almost since the 19th century, as well as strict state control over the instructive methods, the examinations system and the content of school text books.

The program of New Democracy included privatizations in tertiary education², rigid state control over teachers and pupils (who were considered "responsible" for the education crisis), strengthening of the selective-distributive function of the school (introduction of written examinations at the fifth and sixth grades of the *demotiko* and all the grades of the *gymnasium* and *lyceum*, aiming at the reduction of the number of lyceum graduates and candidates for tertiary education), re-introduction of teaching of ancient Greek in the *gymnasium* (as a "back to basics" measure) and the introduction of Vocational Training Units, aiming at the provision of training needed for a flexible labour force and the strengthening of a distinct dual educational structure (see Noutsos, 1990: 113).

Despite the strong reactions of Teachers' Unions, pupils and Opposition parties against the implementation of this policy, which resulted in the resignation of the minister of

Education, certain changes were advanced by the 1992 reform, pertaining especially to the technical-vocational sector:

- ❖ the "post lyceum preparatory centers" were abolished,
- ❖ the in-service training of teachers was reorganized and a legislative framework for their assessment was introduced, and
- ❖ the Organization for Vocational Education and Training (OEEK) as well as public and private Vocational Training Institutes (IEK) were founded. IEKs constituted a new post-secondary educational level, that was not part of the formal educational system³. Their establishment was part of the general neoliberal reorganization of vocational education (low tuition fees were legislated for the public IEKs, too) and had two main objectives: a) the formation of a sufficient and flexible labour force through the provision of training of shorter duration and lower cost than before and b) the expansion of privatizations in the technical - vocational sector, based on the perception that competition between private and public IEKs would raise the quality of the provided training. OEEK's and IEKs' financing absorbed European Union's funds, that otherwise would have been used for the public technical- vocational secondary education sector, causing that way the latter's further downgrading.

Despite the new tendencies in the education policy mentioned above, the basic characteristics of the educational system were not being disputed: the structure of compulsory education, as well as the dual system in upper secondary education (consisting of the three main *lycea* types) and the tertiary education entrance examinations system remained essentially the same as before.

A4. The reforms from 1976 to 1992. Comparisons and comments

A comparison of the policies and reforms of 1976 with those of the 1982-1985 period shows important similarities in their respective theoretical frameworks, both of which were characterized by the "human capital" theory, liberal democratic ideas for "equal opportunities" in education, the free provision of education and the guarantee of certain minimum educational standards (see Andreou, 2002). Effectively, with the implementation of these policies, the bourgeois educational reform in Greece was completed.

However, differences in the education policy implemented during the two periods can also be located: in 1976 the bourgeois modernization and the reorganization of the parliamentary legitimacy were promoted by New Democracy, while the PASOK's reform constituted a version of socialdemocratic policy for the bourgeois modernization, with important elements of democratization (changes in the administration of education, abolition of the lyceum entrance examinations, reformation of the curricula, introduction of the Integrated Lyceum). PASOK's government tried to manage the problems of the strong demand for tertiary education and of the pupils' unequal distribution between general and technical-vocational sectors differently to New Democracy: it abolished the lyceum entrance examinations, it established a new tertiary education entrance examinations system that could lead either to universities or TEIs (trying that way to upgrade the status of the latter) and gave an incentive to the pupils of TELs to enter TEIs without examinations; it tried to "persuade" pupils to "choose" to enroll in the TELs and TEIs rather than "forcing" them to do so by intensifying examinations. Thus the education policy of PASOK did not lay stress on the strengthening of the repressive-distributive function of the school apparatus (without of course disregarding

its distributive role), but mainly on its legitimizing function and the broadening of pupils' consent (Milios, 1984; Papakonstantinou, 1991).

The reform of New Democracy in 1992 (the most important element of which was the introduction of a new post-secondary education level), while it did not dispute the basic characteristics of the educational system - as these had been shaped after 1976 - it set the bases for the education policy that has been implemented since 1997.

B. The "new" education policy and the 1997 reform

In the 1993 general election PASOK returned to government and seemed it would abolish some of the New Democracy regulations; at that post-election period the governing party could not adopt neoliberal-neoconservative policies, because this could cause serious tensions within it. However, the impact of the important changes at socioeconomic and ideological levels had been internalized by PASOK and this resulted in the contradictory character of its policy (and specifically its education policy).

Thus, the new government, contrary to its pre-election pledges, maintained and strengthened OEEK and IEKs and did not re-introduce the "post lyceum preparatory centers". PASOK declared the implementation of a single lyceum type, while a few months later it proceeded with the introduction of the "national certificate system", according to which there would be changes in the structure and curricula of the General Lyceum, "core" and "selective" subjects would be introduced and tertiary education entrance examinations system would be modified (pupils would have to take examinations at national level in the second and third grades of all lycea types). Despite the long-term preparation and the planning, the implementation of the "national certificate system" was cancelled by PASOK itself, after its victory in the 1996 general election and a new education policy was promoted through the 1997 reform.

This policy has been formulated through a complex and contradictory process, under the new conditions, marked by the most important changes at international and national levels since the late 1980s, as well as by the significant transformations in the physiognomy and policies of PASOK that had been in government for almost fifteen years now.

B1. PASOK's changes and transformations from mid-1980s to 1997

During PASOK's second period of governing (1985-1989), changes were noticed in its theory, politics and practice, especially in the economic field, where the "1985 economy stabilization program" was implemented and austerity measures for the working people were applied. PASOK's commitment of the early 1980s to the "socialization" of certain sectors of economy was gradually substituted in practice by "de-nationalizations" and later by privatizations. The initial position against the country's participation in the European Union was abandoned and the radical rhetoric about "political Change" and "self-management" was substituted by a rhetoric about "modernization" and "competitiveness" (see Grollios and Kaskaris, 2003).

This shift in PASOK's policies towards neoliberal directions was accelerated by important political and ideological changes, the hegemony of neoliberalism at international level, as well as the socioeconomic rearrangements triggered by

"globalization" (heightening of international competition, development of new technologies, changes in the structure of enterprises and in the form of labour relations, need for flexible labour provided with new skills and pre-vocational training and able to carry out various jobs). The effects of these changes were also mirrored in the relations of power within the party of PASOK and they became manifest in the neoliberal orientations of its policies under the new leadership elected in the 1996 party's congress.

The participation of Greece in the Economic and Monetary Unification of Europe (and the subsequent upgrading of the country's international position) was declared as a "national objective", for the achievement of which the economic development and the enhancement of the economy's competitiveness were necessary; thus austerity policies were implemented and the government decisively confronted labour and social demands, as in the case of the two-month strike (spring of 1997) of secondary education teachers, who demanded salary rises, which was met by tough government strategy and resulted in the defeat of the Secondary Education Teacher's Union.

During the 1986-1996 decade PASOK eliminated the features that characterized it as a "left" socialdemocratic populist party (see Elefantis, 1991) and, after 1996, the new leadership gradually relocated the party's position in the political spectrum from the "Left" to the "Center-Left"⁴; it seems PASOK has been seeking since 1996 to move beyond the "old" dualism of Left and Right and to create an alternative solution to conventional socialdemocracy and neoliberalism, adopting policies that constitute a Greek version of the "Third Way" politics (see Giddens, 1998), similar to the "state-led way" model (Giddens, 2000: 21). In this "Third Way" version, the ideal of a state-steered economic system is not totally abandoned, while at the same time the government is comfortable with markets and the role of the private sector is strengthened in the "new mixed economy".

B2. The 1997 reform

After its victory in the 1996 general election, PASOK – with a new leadership - would now implement a new education policy, adapt the school apparatus to the new conditions and try to resolve its internal crisis. The main problems that the educational system faced - mainly because of its structure in the upper secondary level - concerned:

- ❖ its distributive function, namely the excessive social demand for tertiary education (and especially universities) and the imbalance in the numbers of pupils between the general and technical-vocational sectors, and
- ❖ the content of the provided knowledge; under the new conditions, "general education" has been of great importance for a more flexible labour force, provided with general knowledge and receptive to intensive training depending each time on "economy's needs". "Overspecialization" is no more wanted. The formulation of flexible labour and the entailed training and retraining must be based on knowledge of a different kind; "a broad knowledge base" is needed and "[t]he central question now is how to move towards greater flexibility in education and training systems" (European Commission, 1995: 23).

The regulations of the "national certificate" system were considered by the new PASOK government as insufficient and a new policy was promoted through the 1997 reform, the major components of which were the following:

- ❖ The *Unified Lyceum* - which is essentially a general lyceum of academic orientation and not a version of the comprehensive upper secondary school (Georgiadis, 2001) - was instituted and all the preexisting types of *lycea* were abolished³; new subjects and curricula were introduced,
- ❖ the examinations system was intensified by multiplying the subjects examined for entry in tertiary education and by introducing examinations at a national level in the second and third grades of the Unified Lyceum,
- ❖ the *Technical Vocational Schools* (TEEs) were introduced and TELs and TESs were abolished. TEEs are in effect a kind of downgraded TELs, since they are classified by the new legislative frame as "post-compulsory education" schools and not as "upper secondary" schools (*lycea*) as TELs were. They are divided into two independent courses of study ("cycles"), of a duration of two and one year respectively. The regulation that had given the TELs' graduates the chance to claim their entrance in the TEIs on the basis of their school achievement was abolished and TEE second cycle's graduates may sit examinations at a national level to enter TEIs,
- ❖ examinations were instituted for the hiring of teachers in compulsory and upper secondary education. At the same time, the multi-levelled assessment of teachers was introduced and the role of school advisers essentially changed to that of inspectors; thus an authoritative frame of control over teachers was instituted,
- ❖ the administrative structure of compulsory and upper secondary education was modified and new "regional directorates" were introduced, and
- ❖ the operation of kindergartens and *demotika* was established on an all-day basis (to be gradually implemented) and "second chance schools" were set up for young people older than 18, who had not completed their compulsory education.

These regulations were accompanied by a series of measures that led to the redefinition of tertiary education; these involved the configuration of a large variety of types and directions of studies, the establishment of many new academic departments (often without epistemological documentation of the definition of their cognitive subject), the transformation of TEIs into universities and, as a result, the creation of university faculties of different standards, based on the duration of study in each faculty and on whether they have the right to develop post-graduate departments and courses (see Assembly of the Greek Universities Rectors, 1992). Thus, the fragmentation of the cognitive subjects and their adaptation to the real or speculated needs of the production process constitute a most basic direction of the education policy for the secondary, as well as for the tertiary educational levels.

Through the aforementioned regulations the achievement of the following desirable objectives is sought:

- ❖ the new curricula, the intensification of the tertiary education entrance examinations, the institution of the new lyceum type and the abolition of Technical-Vocational and Integrated Lycea (the structure and curricula of which were oriented to a provision of a more "specialized" knowledge) satisfy the requirement for the provision of fragmented, "general" knowledge and skills that are essential as a basis for future training and re-training and applicable to a wide spectrum of prospective tasks in changing working conditions. Thus, the relation between education and the production process

- is enhanced, through flexible structures, based on the logic of "life long education",
- ❖ the new examinations system directs the "least able" pupils to the TEEs, either right after they complete the compulsory education in gymnasium (through self-exclusion from lyceum studies) or after they fail the lyceum second grade's examinations (see Kalomiris and Kotsifakis, 2001). Thus the selective and rejecting functions of the lyceum are intensified, the number of pupils of the new lyceum is reduced and a redistribution of the pupils between Unified Lyceum and TEE takes place. Between school years 1998-1999 and 2001-2002 the percentage of pupils who attended TEEs in the total of pupils in post compulsory schools raised from 24,4% to 35,9% (see DIPEE - YPEPTH) and the number of pupils in Unified Lycea was reduced by 18,4%; thus the number of lyceum graduates tends to be equal with the number of entrants in tertiary education, therefore whoever manages to graduate from the lyceum may enter a University or TEI department. This way the problem of the excessive social demand for tertiary education is also solved. Simultaneously, the examinations - because of their "national level", "objective" and "meritocratic" characteristics - contribute to the legitimation of the school's selective function and promote the ideology of "natural inclination", and
 - ❖ the introduction of the TEEs and their classification in the "post-compulsory" level, with the entailed reduction of possibilities for their graduates to enter tertiary education schools and the essential downgrading of their professional rights, satisfies two main objectives: the dissociation of degrees and diplomas from professional uses and the appropriate preparation of the pupils for their future social roles.

In this policy, implemented after 1997, the basic demands of the welfare state (such as "equity and social justice" in education and "free provision of education for all") have been substituted by demands for education of high standards adjusted to the needs of the market; education and knowledge are subordinated to these needs and are considered the key to a competitive economy.

It is therefore obvious that the "new" education policy constitutes a break with the policies of the 1976-1992 period, and moves to the direction of a total reformation of the Greek educational system.

In the general election of March 2004 New Democracy came to office. Although no changes have been promoted in education during the first three months of New Democracy's governing, it seems that the basic principles of PASOK's education policy will be retained and developed. According to New Democracy's program, the main foci of the new government are the strengthening of assessment in all educational levels and of schools' accountability, the promotion of privatizations and the enhancement of the links between education and market (see New Democracy, 2003).

C. The "new" Greek education policy in a wider context.

From 1976 to the early 1990s the state education policy in Greece had been characterized by a "time lag" compared to the policies in other Western European countries; certain measures that had been implemented in the latter were introduced in Greece years or even decades later. From the middle 1970s to the early 1980s there had been in Greece

an attempt for the establishment of a dual educational system and the development of its technical sector while in other counties the reorientation of schooling towards a "comprehensive" organization had already taken place; in the mid 1980s a version of the upper secondary comprehensive school was introduced (and the matter was of priority in the educational agenda until the early 1990s), during the period when the comprehensives were being disputed in other countries (see Ball [ed], 1984; Leschinsky and Mayer [eds], 1990; Benn and Chitty, 1996). These "paradoxes" in the education policy can be attributed to the particularities of the Greek social formation and the conditions under which the educational system in Greece was created and developed (see Tsoukalas, 1977; Dimaras 1981, 1990; Frangoudakis, 1987).

Under the new conditions of the 1990s ("globalization" and its effects, full membership of Greece in the European Union) and the ensuing changes, Greek education policy since 1997 follows the directives of the European Union (see European Commission, 1995; KEE, 2004: 15) and seems to be keeping up with the policies implemented in other countries. Thus, it can be placed in the wider context of the education policies - and relevant reforms - that have been implemented in complex combinations in several countries (such as the USA, England and Wales, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand) from the late 1980s onwards, aiming at the restructuring of state schooling; although there are differences in the origins of these policies and in their political complexion, the redefinition of the relations between the school, the state and the market in "post-welfare", "Third Way" directions is central to all of them (Whitty et al., 1998; Tomlinson, 2001).

Comparing the main aspects of the "new" Greek education policy with the ones of the "restructuring" policies, certain common characteristics can be found, as well as others that are absent or have not yet been advanced to an important degree.

Similarly to other countries, in Greek education, elements of neoconservative and neoliberal policy coexist and "continue to vie with each other, as well as with the residue of traditional social-democratic approaches to educational reform" (Whitty, 2002: 85). Thus, in the case of the 1997 reform, the neoliberal orientation can be found, for example, in the new structure of post compulsory education and the examinations system aiming at an educational system that responds efficiently to the needs of the labour market, while elements of the neoconservative policy can be traced in the introduction of an authoritative frame of state control over teachers' work and in the enhancement of the state's ability to regulate schools' performance and to control what is learnt; at the same time, the "all-day" and the "second chance" schools were included in the new legislative frame, as elements of the welfare state measures that had been promoted by PASOK in the old days. The tension between the neoliberal and the neoconservative forces (see Whitty et al., 1998; Apple, 2001) - often expressed in the Greek context by, on the one hand, "modernization" and the "European dimension" in education and, on the other hand, by the "ethnocentric" and "christian orthodox" orientation - is in some cases evident in the curriculum and especially in that of humanities (see Bartzidis and Hontolidou, 2002).

The introduction of "regional directorates" and departments of "scientific and pedagogical guidance" for primary and secondary education aims at the strengthening of "the decentralization procedures" in the name of "flexibility, effectiveness and productivity of the education apparatus" (Law n.2986/2002). In practice this new form of administration does not lead to a school autonomy, since no changes have been made

at local or school levels, as they have in other countries (see Levacic, 1995, for England and Wales; Hjorth, 1996, for Sweden); it's actually a "top-down" organizational form that enhances central control, since it is the minister of Education who finally controls the "decentralized" services and selects the regional directors.

Although this peculiar "decentralization" does not give any financial or managerial privileges to the principals of school units (as in educational systems of other countries), their role as agents of control is strengthened by the new legislative frame and the role of the teachers in decision making at school level is undermined (see Law n.2986/2002). At the same time, along with the radical changes in the way of teachers' hiring and their assessment, part-time, temporary and less expensive staff is preferred for hiring. These changes lead to an aggravation of the teachers' labour relations and a downgrading of their unions, following the tendencies that have been observed in other countries (see Poupeau, 2003; Whitty, 2002: 69-76).

In privatization processes important particularities can be traced in comparison with what takes place in other countries. In primary and secondary education, the direct involvement of the private or voluntary sector is not being promoted, and neither are "quasi-markets" (see Le Grand and Bartlett [eds], 1993; Levacic, 1995) introduced. Privatizations are, however, promoted in the technical-vocational and training sector, where, apart from the private IEKs, many private sector providers have been activated - in most cases profiting from European Union funds - organizing all kinds of vocational training programs (Milios, 1994).

In the tertiary education tuition fees have been imposed in the postgraduate departments and the connection of business and education is explicit (mainly in the Technical Universities and other AEIs through research programs sponsored by the European Union), while the tendency for strengthening the role of private business in the educational operation is obvious also in the lower levels: private sector providers are involved in the teachers' training programs and in the production and provision of instructive material.

Recently, two months after the 2004 elections, the privatization processes in tertiary education seem to be accelerated: in May 2004 a decision was taken by the European Union Council of Ministers for Competitiveness, according to which the "degrees" provided by the private "Centers of Free Studies" - functioning in Greece as branches of foreign private universities - should be considered as equivalent to the degrees of Greek state universities. At the same time the president of PASOK proposed the introduction of the "voucher scheme" in the tertiary education.

The central determination of the primary and secondary education curricula still remains a basic characteristic of the Greek educational system; the content of what is taught and how it is assessed is regulated by the government. At the same time the new assessment and selection systems lead to the marginalization of the lyceum subjects that are not examined at a national level and provide the mechanisms to regulate competition and attest for competence (see Broadfoot, 1996). The focus in assessment, especially in the examinations-oriented lyceum, determines the educational process and narrows the scopes of education; the new policy seeks to create new "effective" schools - according to the private sector's characteristics - that will deliver enough high quality products (Tomlinson, 2001:85).

The permeation of "business values" has not still been advanced to a large extent in the curricula and it is mainly promoted through projects that are still at an initial phase (e.g. the "pupils' entrepreneurship project" in which almost 100 gymnasia, lycea and TEEs participated during the school year 2003-2004).

Concerning the community involvement in educational issues and the parental choice there have been no changes. Some of the committees and representative bodies introduced by PASOK through the reform of the 1982-1985 period still exist retaining their recommendatory character. The municipalities allocate state funds to schools - as they did before the 1997 reform - while parental choice substantially does not yet exist in Greece: parents who want their children to attend public schools have to enroll them in "neighbourhood schools".

According to recent researches (see Kalomiris and Kotsifakis 2002; Georgiadis, 2002) the new policy implemented in Greece after 1997 has exacerbated the social inequalities in education - as has also been noticed for other countries (see Walford 1992; Ball 1997; Whitty et al. 1998; Apple 2001) - and has established the most differentiated educational system in Greece since the 1970s. Six years after the 1997 reform the drop-out rates have been raised, especially in TEEs, in which the great majority of the pupils comes from lower classes: in 1999 25,7% of those who had been promoted from the first grade of public TEEs did not enroll in the second grade and in 2002 the figure was 24,2% (DIPEE - YPEPTH).

Although the "new" education policy in Greece up to now seems to have a partial success, its final assessment cannot be done yet, because it is the relations of power at the economic, political and ideological levels that finally determine its success or failure. As it has been noticed (Apple, 2001: 60-62; Poupeau, 2003) the neoliberal - neoconservative forces are not uncontested and the implementation of their policies sometimes meets with strong opposition. Thus, even if the relations of power currently seem to favour the achievement of this education policy's aims, its results will depend precisely on the maintenance or the change of these relations and their condensation within the education apparatus, which constitutes an "objective terrain of contradictions" and not the unhindered realization of the dominant class' ideology, but "a topic and a terrain of class conflicts" (Althusser, 1977: 120).

Notes

¹ The ideal of Greek-Christianity was based on a combination of aspects of ancient Greek civilization and Greek Orthodox Christianity; its nucleus was the uniqueness and the homogeneity of the "Greek-Orthodox nation" through its history. The term "Greek-Christianity" was used for the first time in 1951, in post civil war conditions.

² According to article 16 of the Greek Constitution, tertiary education is free and the responsibility of the State. Also, private tertiary education is prohibited; thus, no private universities can be established without a revision of the Constitution.

³ See Hunter (1984) and Dale (1989), for a similar critique on the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in England.

⁴ The use of the term "center-left" instead of "left" or "social-democratic" is a characteristic of the Third Way rhetorics (see Callinicos, 2001: 1).

⁵ For a detailed description of the Greek educational system after the 1997 reform, see Eurydice (2002).

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