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Interest Groups in Disjointed Corporatism: Social Dialogue in Greece and European ‘Competitive Corporatism’

KOSTAS A. LAVDAS

ABSTRACT *The article explores the strategic and political parameters influencing the ways in which the main economic interest groups become involved in policy in contemporary Greece. The fact that social dialogue in Greece remains an exercise with a limited scope has been largely due to the fact that there is a difficult match between Greece’s ‘disjointed corporatism’ and the EU’s emerging ‘competitive corporatism’. A number of European trade unions have agreed to a new ‘competitive bargain’, which is asymmetrical but which gives them the opportunity to get involved in ‘competitive corporatism’. Greek responses to this trend have been inconclusive: while there are clearly pockets within union leaderships which would welcome the opportunity to approve the basic liberalising goals in exchange for guarantees for established workers and participation in the political framing of their implementation, the structural features of the Greek interest intermediation system work against such a possibility. Whether this leads to an evolving ‘segmented pluralism’ or another form remains to be seen – the extent of the synchronicity of developments with other EU states will depend in part on the outcome of this transition. In previous decades, the country’s transition from asymmetric state corporatism to disjointed corporatism went through the contours of an embracing strategy of Europeanisation. It is an open question whether an equivalent strategy for the twenty-first century will be able to restructure the socio-political scene.*

Introduction

Mapping the archipelagos of Greek interests is a demanding exercise, made even more difficult by the paucity of theoretical schemes accounting for the combinations of different types of interest constellations, combinations such as the ones found in the Greek case. The ambivalence of organisational forms, coupled with a dialectic of historical continuity and discontinuity, present serious difficulties and dilemmas for the observer. Admittedly, this

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article has a much narrower focus. It aims to make sense of the strategic and political parameters influencing the ways in which the main economic interest groups become involved in policy in contemporary Greece.

A significant question regarding group involvement in policy – in a polity marked with historical experiences of corporatism and union politicisation – has been the extent to which the *system* of interest intermediation affects the roles different interests come to play and the weight they possess. Interpreting Greece as a case of disjointed corporatism, I will argue, leads us to recognise the importance of inherited institutional and power asymmetries, coupled with new features acquired in the course of the Third Republic. The fact that social dialogue in Greece remains an exercise with a limited scope, I will argue further, is largely due to the fact that there is a difficult match between Greece's disjointed corporatism and the EU's emerging 'competitive corporatism'.

It should be noted from the outset that, in the past, Greek political culture did not provide a fertile ground for positive perceptions of interests and associations. Interest groups have historically been considered to be particularistic and, in the light of this view, largely disruptive factors. The development of a more positive approach was a slow process. It involved not just the adoption of more 'Europeanised' views on associability, but also various modes of domestic politicisation. In the 1980s, as wider sectors of Greek society became re-politicised during the early years of the PASOK (Pan Hellenic Socialist Movement – Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα) governments, larger numbers of people were drawn into active roles within the political system – a process described as 'populist' by some observers. With the openly hostile perception of particular forms of interest, the cognitive influence of Greek political culture on citizens and pundits alike has come full circle (branded 'syntechnies'¹ by the latter) (see Lavdas 2004). In fact, confused views on political culture often lead to approaches that conflate operational modalities vis-à-vis particular institutional configurations and political-social contents.² As Hardgrave and Kochanek (1986: 153) note with respect to extra-European political development, 'although the new entrants into politics may often operate in a traditional mode, the political issues are by no means traditional'. Weiner (1965: 241), in his classic study of India's 'two political cultures', reminds us that 'there is nothing traditional about demands for more schools, roads, wells, fertilisers, and jobs'.

Interests and Institutions in Political Modernisation

The study of relations between interest groups, political institutions and public policy has been neglected in scholarly debates on Greek politics and, to a lesser extent, South European politics in general. Although there is little published in terms of comparative studies of South European interest groups,³ the systems of interest intermediation in the southern member

states of the EU have been presented in the literature as being excessively politicised and marked by clientelism. There is little doubt that the historical evolution of clientelism from the individual (patron–client) to the collective level, involving party machines and their control over the allocation of public resources, has strengthened the parties' role and influence in policy (Graziano 1973). As Spourdalakis (1998: 210) notes, with reference to Greece under PASOK, clientelistic relations lost their personalised character, but resurfaced through the party structure and activity. An important aspect of politicisation has been associated with the implications of party politics for interest representation: it has been suggested that parties have colonised interest groups. LaPalombara (1964) attributed the 'weakness of the Italian civil society' largely to party interactions with and interference in interest politics. The literature on Greek politics confirmed this concern with the 'weakness' of civil society and the dominant role of parties, although the earlier approaches underlined in particular the weight of state structures. In this context, state domination of interest politics was seen as a precondition for the later colonisation of interests by established parties (Mouzelis 1978). State institutions, political parties and clientelism have pre-empted the space for independent activity by interest groups.

Plausible as they may seem, these observations sometimes result in misleading generalisations. Such generalisations are encouraged by approaches which focus primarily on state structures and emphasise the state dependency of other actors. The shortcomings of such analyses can be demonstrated, briefly, with reference to four main areas.

First, most sociological studies of the Greek case tend to downplay the actual empirical influence exercised by the working class movement (Koukoules 1983: 115, 183) and organised business interests (Lavdas 1997: 53–6). Although the impact of state structures and clientelistic practices cannot be denied, empirical evidence suggests that developments have usually been decided through interactive processes. In particular, business interests have been better organised, more independent from state institutions and much more influential than has been presented in the literature. The labour unions' dependency on the state and the internal factionalisation along party lines of the peak labour confederations often led analysts into more general conclusions on associability (Mouzelis 1990: 99). In fact, there have been considerable asymmetries in this regard: the patterns of development of organised business interests have allowed a degree of relative autonomy from party influences and state control.

Second, some of the problems which certain analyses of the Greek case considered to be peculiar to the country's working class movement can in fact be explained by considering the differences in the logic of collective action prevailing in workers' and in employers' groups (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). Employers generally possess a clearer view of their interests, depend less on their associations and usually have fewer

problems of coordination and collective action. Workers depend more heavily on unions because, unlike firms, they have no individual power in the market. Yet they encounter greater problems of coordination and collective action, because they are members of larger groups and it is therefore much more difficult for them to avoid 'free riding'. It is often the case that the sphere of politics provides solutions to such coordination problems, albeit solutions at a price.

Third, Greece since 1974 has been relatively high on the list of strike-prone countries. Irrespective of the different ways in which we may interpret this, it does indicate that unions have been significant factors in their own right. Some strike waves have been associated with resistance against particular measures aiming to reform the public sector; others may be linked to party-political strategies and their implications within the main unions. All of them, however, suggest a significant potential for conflict within Greek interest politics. This was crucial in the 1970s and 1980s and has been decreasing since the mid-1990s.

Finally, there is a gap in the literature on Greece when it comes to the role played by evolving policy networks, which provide links between diverse actors, issues and policy goals. It is crucial that such policy networks become increasingly differentiated from traditional clientelistic links. In such policy networks, interests in Greece as in all EU member states play an ever-increasing role.

The Emergence of Interest Politics

In the Greek case, social groups and various forms of interest politics emerged gradually in the process of political modernisation after the 1860s. Although the most influential groups belonged to the sphere of economic activities, other forms of interests and collective identities also acquired organisational, political or ideological weight at various points in Greek history (Lavdas 1997: 66–86). In the first two decades of the twentieth century, political development in Greece favoured a gradual awakening of civil society, especially after the political change which was set in motion with the coup in 1909. It was in this context that associations such as the Federation of Greek Industrialists (Σύνδεσμος Ελλήνων Βιομηχάνων, SEV) were established. A number of other interests and collective activities also acquired organisational forms, albeit usually forms which were weak and sometimes provisional. The first group involved with the promotion of environmental issues and the protection of natural life was established in 1904, while similar groups followed especially after the 1920s (Spanou 1995). Yet the widespread and consistent development of environmental groups and issues had to wait until the 1970s. Various women's groups had been forming since the late nineteenth century. Some of them were particularly active, but lacked continuity and the capacity to form comprehensive organisations. Women were given the vote in 1952, the culmination of a long

struggle for equal rights. A new wave of pluralism has been evident since 1974, with the emergence of a multitude of formal and informal groups, some of which exemplify decreasing levels of party-political influences: women's groups, parents' groups, groups which address post-materialist concerns, and so on, not to mention the women's movement, the Greens and others, as well as a number of voluntary groups (consumer associations, groups which give help to drug users, and so on). This was coupled with growing awareness of the pluralist and multicultural forms of social coexistence, in view of considerable immigration coming from the Balkans and East European nations (Lavdas 1999).

Labour

The first labour unions were groups aiming to coordinate protest and strike activities. They emerged first in the shipbuilding industry in 1879. Other unions followed between 1879 and the 1910s in various sectors and a number of locations. Up to the first decade of the twentieth century there were strong elements of the syndicalist tradition, whereby unions often combined workers as well as managers within a single structure. The syndicalist tradition was outlawed by the Liberal Venizelist government in 1914 and became obsolete, in contrast to the situation in Spain and Portugal, where the Iberian tradition of the *sindicalismo vertical* persisted until a later stage.

The establishment of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (Γενική Συνομοσπονδία Εργατών Ελλάδος, GSEE) in 1918 owed much to the activities of the Liberals, who subsequently tried to control the organisation. Securing such control proved difficult, however, especially in view of the increasing influence among workers of the Socialist Labour Party (Σοσιαλιστικό Εργατικό Κόμμα, SEK; the future Communist Party). The end of the First World War, the strengthening of the communists and the poignancy of the 'social question' resulted in the inability of governments to control and channel labour activities. Hence a number of repressive measures became increasingly significant after 1920. These evolved in parallel with measures aiming to placate and co-opt union leaderships. The Labour Home (Εργατική Εστία), established in 1931, became a central institution in the networks which sustained union dependency on state finance.⁴ The authoritarian regime of 1936 tried a new mix of coercion and co-optation in its dealings with the unions. Later, in the post-war years, political development led to the growth of state–union interactions. As a result, unions – and associations more generally – gained in prominence, a trend manifested also in membership figures, which remained relatively high throughout the post-war decades. Average union density in Greece is just under 30% of employees, which is roughly comparable to figures for a number of EU member states (such as the Netherlands, Portugal and the

UK) and higher than some (France, Spain) (Lecher 1994). However, unionisation in the private sector in Greece is much lower than suggested by this average figure.

Less than 50% of the Greek labour force comprises employees. This, and the relatively high percentage of self-employed, constitutes the framework within which we can assess strengths and weaknesses of unions. The latter are organised in Greece mainly on the basis of occupation or occupational category. In the 1990s, legislation has attempted to encourage the development of sectoral unions, but it has generally been rather unsuccessful in bringing about significant change in this direction (Kravaritou 1994).

Unions operate at three levels, with systematic links existing only between the second and the third. First, there are approximately 7,000 primary-level units.⁵ About half of them concern individual enterprises, the rest are local branches. Most of them operate independently of any links with the higher levels. This leads to considerable fragmentation. The persistence of a highly fragmented primary level indicates that the basic structure of the union representation has remained almost unchanged since the 1910s. Two major implications follow. The first is that fragmentation obviously makes the organisation of collective action particularly difficult. Second, at the same time fragmentation encourages the development of various particularistic links between individual unions and political/governmental forces, operating in parallel with the agreements and the links at the peak level and aiming to secure particularistic benefits (Koukoulos 1983; 1985; Mavrogordatos 1988; Kioukias 1994). At the second level there are more than 100 federations and labour centres. Finally, at the third level, there are confederations: peak associations such as GSEE.⁶

Business

Greek business presents a striking organisational and strategic contrast to Greek labour: it retained much of its organisational autonomy from the state and developed considerable capabilities vis-à-vis political institutions. The first organised groups were the Commercial Association of Athens (Εμπορικός Σύνδεσμος Αθηνών, ESA), established in 1902, and SEV, later renamed Federation of Greek Industries (Σύνδεσμος Ελληνικών Βιομηχανιών), established in 1907. Both organisations were concerned with representing both aspects of the relationships of their members with the social and economic environment: as entrepreneurs and as employers. Various informal groups had been forming in the nineteenth century, especially in Patras after 1869 and in Athens and Piraeus a little later, but ESA and SEV were the first formal groups established in the capital. SEV gradually evolved as a peak employers' association, though not all

important regional groups became members. Unlike pure peak business associations, such as Italy's Confindustria, SEV (like the UK's CBI) is a mixed structure, with both associations and individual firms as members. Even today, SEV ranks high on membership density in comparative South European perspective when it comes to sectoral associations, but much lower when it comes to regional associations and to the direct membership of firms (Schmitter 1995; Lavdas 1997; Lanza and Lavdas 2000). Its central position and role as a peak association was consolidated in the years after 1949. There were also from an early stage the Chambers of Commerce and Industry: the first were established by Royal Decree in 1836. But it had always been clear that, unlike the associations, the Chambers constituted a state institution rather than a structure of interest representation.

In the post-war period, quasi-authoritarian Greek regime forms – culminating in the dictatorship of 1967–74 – offered interest groups little room for independent growth. More important from the perspective of the present analysis is the fact that the governments of the 1950s and early 1960s aimed to pursue a policy of selective modernisation. This involved building a strong executive and managing a series of shifts within a pattern of political continuity (Charalambis 1985: 222–25; 1989: 208–11). In the 1950s GSEE and SEV acquired considerable status as partners in attempts at corporatist decision-making processes, although the extent to which these organisations could in fact perform articulation of interests and social preferences differed considerably between them and between periods. The state intervened heavily in GSEE, both legally and politically, while the SEV was able to retain a much greater degree of institutional autonomy (Lavdas 1997: 66–86, 116–26).

Enter the Third Republic

The organisational presence of diverse social interests has undoubtedly increased in significance since 1974. At the same time, Greek unions and associations present us with a remarkable combination of continuity and change. A degree of institutional continuity with the structures and the processes which were dominant before 1967 is evident in the years after 1974. For example, in sharp contrast to the experience of Spain (after 1976), neither new associations nor extensive new legislation were introduced in Greece in the years immediately following 1974. But there has been substantial change as well. We can distinguish three main turning points (Lanza and Lavdas 2000). The first is the regime change itself and the establishment of the Third Republic in 1974–75. Because the authoritarian regime was short-lived, its impact was accordingly limited. If the interest group system was able to survive the regime transition in 1974 with relatively little change, that was because, as regards the particular system,

the restoration of democratic institutions emphasised elements of continuity with the period *before* the imposition of the dictatorship in 1967. The second major turning point in this process was the party alternation in government in 1981 (when PASOK formed its first government), which contributed to the redefinition of the roles of interest groups, providing challenges which acted as powerful stimuli for business associability. The years after 1981 witnessed efforts by SEV to increase its authority while distancing itself from particular party lines. The change in relations between party politics, business associability and policy-making is a continuing process. Finally, the third point came with EC/EU membership and the pressures of Europeanisation, which, coupled with the implications of the growing internationalisation of the economy, caused important shifts in domestic interest politics (Lavdas 1996; 1997; 2001). The public sector began to contract after 1990, yet technocratic reform coalitions remained weak and fragile (Featherstone *et al.* 2001: 474–76). As in other EU member states, national particularities and EU-level agreements become interlinked in the process of policy convergence and adaptation. But because in the Greek case institutional change was limited in the 1970s, changes after accession to the EC in 1981, and in particular after crucial EU-level developments after 1986 (Single European Act, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice), had to be far-ranging.

Organised business interests remain structured predominantly along sectoral lines: industry, banking, shipping, and so on. As a consequence, employers never possessed a distinct, comprehensive peak association. However, SEV has in effect been playing that role at least since 1955 and, on a number of occasions, from the early decades of the century. In banking, the relevant association (Ενωση Ελληνικών Τραπεζών – EET, established in 1928) has traditionally been dominated by the large banks in which the state had some participation. This has been changing since the 1980s, because of the combined effects of bank privatisation and greater participation by foreign banks.

Other business associations at a sectoral level, like the Union of Ship-owners (Ενωση Ελλήνων Εφοπλιστών, EEE, founded in Piraeus in 1916), which represents one of the largest merchant fleets of the world, evolved in close cooperation with state institutions but also managed to retain a degree of institutional autonomy which was absent on the side of the trade unions. EEE not only commands one of the largest merchant fleets in the world, but it also consists of members who can easily move their ships to other national flags (flags of convenience). As a result, their power vis-à-vis the state has always been considerable. Yet the merchant marine possessed until recently all the features of an example of sectoral statist corporatism (monopolistic representation, tradition of repressive measures towards the workers in the sector, close links with the relevant ministries). In fact, the statist variant of corporatism has been present in sectors, like shipping, where the state's capacities vis-à-vis the business interests have been particularly weak. The

fact that state corporatism has been present in a sector marked by capital mobility indicates that this form of coercive interest intermediation and policy-making was associated with business power and labour weakness rather than state domination of interest politics in general (Lavdas 1997: 77–80, 245–47).

The Strategy of Europeanisation

The process of agenda setting and the extent of bargaining power and its utilisation are indispensable for the analysis of policy (Bennett and Sharpe 1986: 209–41). Agenda setting (why and how some issues and not others are on the agenda) and the extent of bargaining power (the potential power available to each actor and its translation into actual power) are crucial, however, not only in explaining the making of policy, but also in accounting for crucial strategic choices. Such choices are decided through the appropriate structuring of the social and political agenda, brought about by particular constellations of strategic actors.

In the Greek case, the European choice, first in the 1960s and then after 1974, emerged in the form of a strategy which grouped a number of actors around a set of modernising objectives, while structuring the field of debate in particular (pro-European) terms. A series of efforts, aiming to anchor Greece's political economy in the evolving European institutional framework, constituted a European strategy, pursued by a number of political and economic forces. Strategies are understood to be relatively coherent fields of debate concentrating upon links between tactical steps and long-term objectives (Gamble 1990: xxiv) about the organisational evolution of a political system and its patterns of policy, support and legitimacy. It has been shown that the European choice and the strategy of Europeanisation became significant forces in interaction with the major phases in political development of Greece's political system since the early 1960s (Lavdas 1997).

Interest groups became involved with the strategy of Europeanisation in different ways and through different phases. In a nutshell, while some interests (notably business, for all its divisions)⁷ became part of the modernising strategy and helped – in an interactive mode – shape its particular features, others (notably labour) remained largely outside the confines of the strategic constellation of the modernising actors.⁸

The strategy of Europeanisation worked at two levels. The first one concerned the structuring of a viable policy coalition to pursue the choice for Europe. At the second level, in Greece as in many other member states, EC/EU membership and European macro-economic policies provided an external discipline for internal austerity measures, measures the states either failed to impose or did not want to be seen domestically to impose on their own initiative.

From Asymmetric State Corporatism to Disjointed Corporatism

As argued, the fact that state corporatism has been present in a sector marked by capital mobility (shipping) indicates that this form of coercive interest intermediation was associated with business power and labour weakness, rather than state domination of interest politics in general. This implies that, in the Greek case, state corporatism has been inherently asymmetric and left differential marks on business and labour. In any event, after the regime change in 1974, the attempt to read the Greek case through the prism of state corporatism has become untenable. In terms of Schmitter's (1974: 93–94) acclaimed formulation, it appears particularly difficult to classify today's Greece as a state corporatist case, despite some arguments to the contrary (Mavrogordatos 1988; 2001: 35). As Gravaris (2002: 99–101) has shown, the 'state corporatist' reading of the Greek case has been based on extrapolations from partial and largely selective analysis of particular interest constellations.

To account for the changing position of organised interests in the political system, we need to examine the interactions between the development of interest intermediation, the policy-making patterns and the changing features of the political system. I have argued elsewhere (Lavdas 1996, 1997; 2001; 2004; Lanza and Lavdas 2000) that Greek patterns of interest intermediation and policy-making can best be described as a case of 'disjointed corporatism' whose fragmented functioning bears the marks of the asymmetric statist–corporatist past. The concept of disjointed corporatism draws on Schmitter's (1974) seminal contribution, but departs from the idea of a dichotomy between the state/authoritarian and societal/liberal varieties of corporatism. In this sense, Greece may serve as a concept-generating case (see Lijphart 1971: 682–93), in that the absence of concertationist traditions combined with fragmentation in interest intermediation and political regime discontinuities result, after 1974, in a corporatist (tripartite-based) system, which can be described as being neither authoritarian corporatist nor liberal corporatist in Schmitter's sense. Its fragmentation constrained the liberal elements in the economic system while at the same time finding it difficult to broker social pacts and intersectoral agreements beyond wage negotiation.⁹ While inherited state corporatist elements have occasionally been present at the sectoral level, the prevailing institutional culture at system level cannot be characterised as state corporatist. In fact, as we have seen, sectoral state corporatism has been stronger in sectors (such as shipping) in which business power vis-à-vis the state has been more pronounced.

But when we turn to the systemic level we realise that various pluralist elements evolved in Greek interest intermediation after the 1940s and, despite an interruption in 1967–74, were strengthened from the mid-1970s. Some of these concern the existence of associational activity, which evolved in relative autonomy from state domination and party

colonisation. The organisation of business interests evolved in such a way. Other elements characterise the structures of interest intermediation and the forms of associational linkages. Crucially, in contrast with developments in the Iberian world, in which the syndicalist tradition was reinforced by the state, Greek modernising liberals broke with the syndicalist mode of interest organisation at an early stage (1914). While in the Iberian cases state corporatism was the established system of interest intermediation for a prolonged period, regime discontinuities in Greece resulted in a complex amalgam of sectoral interest intermediation patterns and the gradual emergence of a disjointed corporatist culture prevailing at system level, gradually transformed since 1974 and particularly after 1990 with the introduction of liberalising measures in collective bargaining.

Stalled Social Dialogue

At the same time, the difficulty with engaging in collective decision-making and social pacts beyond wage negotiation throughout the 1970s and 1980s suggests that, as the contributions in Scholten (1987) indicate, the existence of interest confederations does not suffice for concertation to emerge in policy-making. The problems in achieving agreement in policy have been linked in a reciprocal manner to the prevailing confrontational style at the political party level. The two civil conflicts of the twentieth century (1916–17, 1944–49) and the lack of a culture of elite accommodation and of conciliatory party leaderships deprived Greek political development of a critical background factor for the consolidation of long-term societal corporatist arrangements capable of negotiating social pacts.¹⁰ On the other hand, in contrast to Italy, the lack of a dominant party with strong internal factions weakened the possibility of extensive factionalisation developing within business associations and, given that the processes of regime change in the mid-1970s did not disturb the structures of interest intermediation, the new democratic regime inherited business associations that had variable influence over policy but were not prone to extensive internal factionalisation. By contrast, trade unions suffered from political factionalisation, which was particularly strong within the trade union confederation (GSEE).

The coordinates of disjointed corporatism were formed as a result of interactions between the asymmetries of Greek statism and the challenges emanating from the changing domestic, European and international environments. The legacy of patchy, politicised protectionism and the lack of any consistent policy of import-substituting industrialisation meant that the policy capacities of the post-war Greek state vis-à-vis business interests remained fairly weak and underdeveloped. The relatively secure position of SEV as a leading business interest organisation in the 1950s and 1960s

meant that the association, in the years *before* the coup of 1967, had gained various and asymmetric positions in the political system and became accustomed to using certain channels, networks and veto points. Such historical experiences leave behind institutional power acquisitions, and they also help shape an association's ideology. By 1967, SEV had acquired various influential resources in the Greek political system, and its ideology was one of relative autonomy from the state and the parties.

After the regime change in 1974, processes of democratisation pushed labour costs up while organised business interests faced a hostile political environment and a drop in public support and legitimacy, owing to perceived identification with the authoritarian regime. Public perception of business interests in the years after 1974 indicates a persistent view of such groups as collaborators with the authoritarian regime. In addition, the first democratic governments after 1974 pursued a programme of nationalisations which, although modest in comparison to the experience of Portugal during the same period, provoked tensions in relations between state and business interests. The economic environment in which the new democratic regime had to grow and adapt was not particularly conducive to popular policies. After decades of relatively high growth and low inflation, the oil crisis of 1973–74 introduced a period of serious disturbances, some of which proved lasting and revealed structural, underlying problems in the Greek economy. In the 1980s the rate of growth of the GNP fell to 1.6%, and was only able to climb again to substantially higher levels in the late 1990s (when it managed to overtake the EU average). Tensions in government–business relations became even more pronounced when PASOK came to power in 1981.¹¹ Attempts by the first PASOK government to bypass and suppress business opposition (Mavrogordatos 1988) remained for the most part weak and uncoordinated. On the other hand, efforts by the government to pass an economic stabilisation package including various austerity measures were welcomed by SEV but led to an internal crisis within the GSEE in 1985–86 (see Koukoulos and Tzannetakos 1986).

For the most part, industrial relations developed along modern European dimensions mainly after the regime change in 1974. Before the dictatorship of 1967–74 there was in place a mixed regime of labour relations, which included considerable corporatist elements. In 1955, Law 3239 established a corporatist system of national-level bargaining for wages. National-level agreements signed between GSEE and the SEV were sanctioned by the state. Disagreements between the social partners were settled through compulsory arbitration.

Important changes regarding the role of interests in the social dialogue have been taking place since 1974 on both the socio-political and the legal-institutional front. The Constitution of 1975 marks an important shift in a number of ways: for example, by guaranteeing the right to form unions and the right to strike. The Constitution protects the right to form associations as well as the right not to be involved in collective activity.

Institutional changes culminated in Law 1876/1990 on free collective bargaining with new dispute settlement procedures. The new framework favours voluntary settlement and provides for the possibility of successive stages of conciliation, mediation and voluntary arbitration (Kravaritou 1994: 16). More generally, the new institutional framework on industrial relations since 1990 has introduced an approach which corresponds to the prevailing processes of Europeanisation: adaptation to the EU framework and extension and deepening of the opportunities and challenges associated with EU membership.

The 1990s consolidated the roles of both GSEE and SEV in a new context, which moves in the direction of less state intervention and free collective bargaining. The gradually declining role of state intervention in the interest group system accompanied developments towards a system of free collective bargaining and voluntary procedures of dispute settlement. In comparative perspective, Greece in the early twenty-first century belongs to the category of EU members (including also Italy, Portugal and the Netherlands) in which a trend towards more decentralised wage setting remains within the framework of wage coordination at the central level. Central-level bargaining continues to play a key role in setting the general coordination framework for bargaining at sectoral, firm or territorial level (Samek 2000: 50–51).

In Greece, the concept of a 'social dialogue' was used in a broad sense for decades, denoting a variety of institutionalised as well as non-institutionalised procedures (Aranitou and Yannakourou 2004: 257–62). A process of social dialogue in the narrow sense, corresponding to EU-level developments, began in earnest in the late 1990s, and governments have since committed themselves to discussing with social partners before legislating on social policies. The problem remains, however, that substantive negotiations of any consequence (as distinct from exploratory overtures) extend to issues beyond pay only with great difficulty. A second problem concerns the occasions when the process broke down, as a result of strong centrifugal forces emanating from the unions or SEV. While GSEE has been prone to abandoning the process when the wage negotiations did not move in its direction, SEV has tended to react to attempts to broaden the scope of the bargaining process.

In other words, attempts at tripartite policy consultation and policy-making are affected not just by the politics of disjointed corporatism but by the particular historical-ideological legacies as well. Perhaps the most persistent influence on economic policy in Greece has been the inherited asymmetry in the social content of disjointed corporatism.¹² This implies the reproduction of a pattern of power relations relying on a weak and asymmetrically penetrated state apparatus. In this sense, the politics of stalled social dialogue reflect the combined difficulties of building less porous political institutions and extending the Europeanising strategy to further areas.

Towards 'Competitive Corporatism'?

The role of the EU in promoting a social dialogue in Greece falls into two categories. First, European-level developments projected a certain model for domestic processes. Indeed, at EU level the 'social partners' (κοινωνικοί εταίροι): the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, UNICE; the European Trade Union Confederation, ETUC; and the European Centre for Public Enterprise, CEEP) participated in a 'social dialogue' (κοινωνικό διάλογο) with the Commission from the mid-1980s and became key players in European social policy. In today's form, the process (first tried in 1994) begins when the Commission announces that it intends to act in a particular social area, and asks the social partners to negotiate as a substitute for legislation.¹³

Second, the EU has an impact through wider Europeanisation processes. A host of shifts and transformations is now approached with the concept of Europeanisation.¹⁴ From the perspective of domestic actors, Europeanisation represents opportunities as well as constraints. The most obvious development in this context concerns the Europeanisation of interest group strategies: the fact that interests increasingly turn to Brussels-level lobbying, the evolving significance of transnational economic linkages and the domestic conditions which enable or constrain such strategies. But there are other aspects as well, some of which are crucial even if perhaps less conspicuous. They relate to European policy impact and the roles of European policies and institutions as mediating variables or as catalysts for development in areas such as regulatory change, liberalisation and the introduction of new forms of public involvement in liberalised economic processes (e.g. regulatory agencies, national competition authorities, increased autonomy of central banks). Most of the shifts in public-private boundaries are the combined outcome of domestic conditions and wider challenges and policy adjustments that need to be placed in the EU and EMU context.¹⁵ Accordingly, these aspects involve processes of relative policy convergence (policy contents and goals may also extend to policy instruments and policy styles). Still other aspects refer to the regional dimension.¹⁶

Both ways of affecting social dialogue in Greece boil down to the salience (or lack thereof) for the Greek context of European developments in tripartite policy consultation. As Streeck has observed, in contrast to the tripartite arrangements of the 1960s and the 1970s, in today's Europe material rewards for workers and institutional gains for labour are 'tied to the acceptance of a joint commitment with employers to success in competitive markets' (Streeck 1998: 15). The emerging institutional practices of a 'competitive corporatism' (Rhodes 1998) are aimed at improving the competitiveness of firms, institutions and regulations. This is a national process as much as it is a European-

level process: exchange of experiences, learning and transfer account for some of the explanation. Most of it has to do with the similar circumstances experienced by national policy-makers and interest groups throughout Europe's political systems, against a background of weak and fragile EU-level social policy arrangements. It appears that most European trade unions have agreed to a new 'competitive bargain', which is asymmetrical but which gives them the opportunity to get involved in negotiations about 'the concrete realisation and political framing' of the economic policy goals (Bieling 2001: 107). Greek responses to this trend have been inconclusive: while there are clearly pockets within union leaderships which would welcome the opportunity to approve the basic liberalising goals in exchange for guarantees for established workers and participation in the political framing of their implementation, the structural features of the Greek interest intermediation system work against such a possibility.

Epilogue: A Strategy out of Disjointed Corporatism?

New institutionalists – some of their varieties, at least – thought that there was a link between a benevolent politics, a cohesive society with infrastructural provision and economic success. It is unfortunate that developments in the 1990s indicate that this is not necessarily the case: US firms launched a successful comeback amidst social inequality, institutional indifference and infrastructural decay, being able to compensate in part for the lack in supportive social relations through generating in-house their equivalent (with social engineering technologies like corporate culture building and human resource management) (Crouch and Streeck 1997: 9).¹⁷ It would have been interesting, and a source of optimism, if the lack of a match between Greek disjointed corporatism and the emerging European 'competitive corporatism' was due to the existence of elements and possibilities showing a viable alternative direction. But that does not seem to be the case, in the area of political economy at least.¹⁸ The limited nature of the social dialogue in Greece implies the reproduction of a pattern of power relations which relied on a specific system of relations between political institutions and interest groups: a system marked by weak state capacities and asymmetrical penetration of state structures by various interests. The politics of stalled social dialogue reflect the combined difficulties in building less porous political institutions and extending the Europeanising strategy to further areas.

The Greek system of interest intermediation, with its combination of asymmetrically statist historical legacies, comprehensive but internally fragmented interest structures, resistance to extending negotiations in the direction of social pacts, and party-political influences, has been a case of 'disjointed corporatism' (Lavdas 1997). Whether this leads to an evolving

'segmented pluralism' (Lanza and Lavdas 2000) or another form remains to be seen – the extent of the synchronicity of developments with other EU states will depend in part on the outcome of this transition. In previous decades, the transition from asymmetric state corporatism to disjointed corporatism went through the contours of an embracing strategy of Europeanisation. It is an open question whether an equivalent strategy for the twenty-first century will be able to restructure the socio-political scene.

Notes

1. Meaning, literally, 'guilds' – a pejorative signifier in public discourse, aiming to convey the supposedly closed, protected and inward-looking nature of interest organisations.
2. On Greek political culture see Demertzis (1994; 1997), Charalambis and Demertzis (1993) and Lavdas (2000).
3. See Schmitter (1995), Lanza and Lavdas (2000) and the relevant sections in Sapelli (1995).
4. The Labour Home operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and is responsible for the management of funds generated from the contributions of employers and employees.
5. Fragmentation in the system of interest groups assumes two forms. First, there is the great number of primary-level unions (c. 7000) and the weak links between the primary level and the higher levels. Second, there is also considerable fragmentation along party-political lines. Although this fragmentation in most cases does not express itself at the level of peak associations, even within a single organisational structure (such as the GSEE) there exist powerful political factions (PASKE, DAKE, ESAK-S, AEM), which represent the views of the respective political parties within the association. In Greece and more generally in Southern Europe, interest fragmentation goes hand in hand with strong party influences within unions (Schmitter 1995). But the organisational forms of interest representation at the peak level have remained unitary in the Greek case.
6. On the organisation of other economic and professional interests see Lavdas (1997; 2001; 2004), Kioukias (1994) and Tsinisizelis (1996).
7. It is often the case that the process through which members of business groups form their views on their self-interest is an interactive process and depends on particular political and associational conditions (Vogel 1978). In Greece, the prevalence of politicised linkages between economic actors and governmental institutions influenced business groups towards a state-oriented and often particularistic mentality. In turn, this mentality became an obstacle to further associational development. Since 1974, the influence of the issue of EC/EU membership (and prospective membership) became an important stimulus in (a) transforming certain policy aspects of the environment of business activity, while also (b) encouraging the organisational development of more professionalised practices for the mediation of business interests (Lavdas 1996; 1997).
8. On the differences between strategies and tactics in the analysis of interest groups see Baumgartner and Leech (1998: 162–63). On the more inclusive concept of social strategy see Gamble (1990).
9. The institutional continuities with the system before 1967 and the very slow evolution of legal and institutional forms, create difficulties for the analytical approach to the Greek case from a comparative perspective. Be that as it may, in terms of behavioural and actual political capacities, the combination of extensive but weak state structures, the legacy of asymmetric state corporatism, comprehensive but internally fragmented interest structures and party-political influences would lead to the characterisation of the Greek case as one of

- 'disjointed corporatism' (Lavdas 1997) possibly leading to 'segmented pluralism' (Lanza and Lavdas 2000).
10. It is crucial to distinguish between (a) the utilisation of certain consociational practices and (b) the operation of a consociational system characterised by comprehensive institutionalised rules, which aim to promote effective decision-making through compromise politics. Such a system may create the conditions for societal corporatist arrangements, although the development and sustainability of the latter will depend also on the organisational properties and strategies of interests (that is, a consociational system provides a facilitating background for societal corporatism, but the latter is not simply a dimension of consociationalism: it presupposes features that are specific to interest politics and policy). On the links between consociational traditions and successful societal corporatism and concertation in policy-making see Scholten (1987).
 11. Long-established clientelistic relationships have been transforming themselves, moving in the direction of a form of clientelism in which the roles of political parties and of party-state relationships become decisive (Charalambis 1989). Preferential relationships developing in this way within the political system tend to favour mutual public-private transformations in the direction of a closed, segmented and oligopolistic pluralism. An interesting comparative example is provided by the relationships between politics and associations which existed in Italy before 1992 (Lanza and Lavdas 2000). In Greece, the party alternation in government in 1981 was not only a crucial test for the consolidation of democracy but also a crucial factor in putting pressure on interest groups, making them search for a more detached position in the political system. Of course, such 'positive' influences have been objective rather than intentional on the part of the PASOK governments in the 1980s: in government, PASOK continued the practice of state interference in the internal affairs of GSEE (Spourdalakis 1988: 246-49) resulting in an internal crisis within the GSEE. For analysis of the PASOK phenomenon see Spourdalakis (1988; 1998) Gravaris (1998) and the contributions in Clogg (1993).
 12. As mentioned, Greek business presented a striking organisational and strategic contrast to Greek labour: it retained much of its organisational autonomy from the state and was able to develop considerable capabilities vis-à-vis political institutions. Aspects of this asymmetry and its implications can be found in a number of policy areas, from shipping and transport to industrial relations and social policy (see, *inter alia*, Vernardakis and Mavris 1991; Stamatis 1995; Lavdas 1997; Gravaris 1998; 2002).
 13. If the social partners reach agreement, the Council of Ministers can give the ensuing text the force of law. If they are unable to reach agreement, the Council may proceed with legislation of its own (the 'negotiate or we will legislate' threat).
 14. On the Europeanisation of domestic actors, institutions and policies see, *inter alia*, Ladrech (1994); Rometsch and Wessels (1996); Lavdas (1997); Featherstone (1998); Cram (2001).
 15. On Greek banking deregulation and adjustment to EMU see Pagoulatos (2003).
 16. In the 1980s in particular, the influence of European processes was combined with domestic attempts at decentralisation and regional reform put forward by the PASOK governments. The major beneficiaries of these reforms, apart from the interest groups, which were mentioned above, have been the localities themselves and their political, administrative and technocratic personnel (Kioukias 1994: 202-3). In this process, regional and local authorities also acquire ever-greater degrees of autonomy and ability to act as interest groups in the wider European policy arenas.
 17. To the extent, that is, that their success required social relations other than pure markets, on the one hand, and hierarchies, on the other (Crouch and Streeck 1997: 8-9). For a roughly equivalent critique coming from a different methodological direction and aiming directly at the 'social capital' variety of institutionalism see Van Deth (2000).
 18. For a more optimistic assessment of peculiarities and possibilities in the area of Greece's political culture see Lavdas (2000).

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