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State and Universities in Greece, 1974-2018 From the Demand for Democratization to the Constellation of Neoliberalism

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide a better understanding of the current developments in higher education in Greece. Towards this direction, it offers a historicized overview of the relation between the state and higher education in Greece over the last forty years by situating it within a broader context, that is, by taking into consideration both students' protests from below and the wider global transformations from above. In order to conceptualize the historicity of these dynamics, we propose a periodization in three temporally discrete, though dialectically interlinked, phases as we set to explain the substantial penetration, through specific policies, of neoliberalism in the Greek university after 2008, a project that until that time had not been successful.



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Introduction

Greece was the country that experienced the most severe damages from the global financial crisis that broke out in 2008. The various governments that have been in power between 2010 and 2018 have enacted twelve rounds of tax increases, spending cuts, and reforms, which, at times, triggered local riots, and nationwide protests. The impact of austerity on education has been harsh and pernicious. Public spending on education in Greece has been reduced by 40 percent, and more than one hundred schools have been closed, as well as some university departments. The context of uncertainty and economic decline has affected all spheres of Greek society. Without a doubt, it has also affected the ways in which young people perceive themselves and their relation to their home country. Many of them – especially those from the underprivileged strata – now have serious doubts about the purpose and usefulness of pursuing higher education, especially in fields that are not structurally connected with the labor market. Hence, many of these individuals either decide not to study at all and resort to seeking a job just in order to survive, or they choose to leave the country to study abroad, in the hopes that this will create better conditions for their future careers. Indicative of the latter is the so-called brain drain phenomenon that is threatening to damage Greece's future as well as its present, with more than 427,000 Greeks immigrating between 2008 and 2018. These are mainly young people (Reportage 2017).

Greece, however, is not the only country where austerity had a disastrous impact on higher education. After all, the crisis was a pan-European, if not a global one. The financial crisis of 2007/2008 prompted several governments across Europe to adopt austerity measures aiming at the reduction of their escalating budget deficits. The resulting cuts in public expenditure, together with the increasing reliance on the privatization of services, have impacted negatively higher education – if not in the same disastrous scale as in Greece – directly through the shrinking of public sector provisions, and indirectly, as a result of the social and political consequences of that shrinking.¹ In eleven countries, the first four years of the crisis brought a more than 10 percent decrease in public funding (Esternmann & Pruvot, 2014). The countries where higher education has been hit hard by European economic restructuring are not limited to Southern Europe, as some might imagine. Greece, however, is just the tip of the iceberg in the current European landscape, where higher education is being reformed according to the neoliberal standards imposed by governments implementing austerity.

This paper aims to provide a better understanding of the current developments in higher education in Greece. Towards this direction, it offers a historicized overview of the relation between the state and higher education in Greece over the last forty years by situating it within a broader context, that is, by taking into consideration both students' protests from below and the wider global transformations from above. In order to conceptualize the historicity of these dynamics, we propose a periodization in three temporally discrete, though dialectically interlinked, phases. The first one, *Metapolitefsi* ("polity" or "regime change"), spans from 1974 to 1990.² During that time, the predominant demand is the democratization of all public institutions, including universities.³ The second period, extending between 1991 and 2008, can be described as the era of a rather incomplete neoliberal modernization of Greek universities. Finally, the third period that began in 2009 and extends to this day, is

¹For a volume focused on this issue, see Nixon (2013).

²For a detailed history of the period and its various sociopolitical aspects, see Sakellariopoulos (2011), Avgeridis, Gazi & Kornetis (2015), Voulgaris (2012).

³For an analysis of how the wider conjunctural changes within Greek society are connected with the ones happening within the Greek university, see Karamanolakis (2015).

marked by the global crisis of over-accumulation. In the Greek context, this takes the form of a public debt crisis and the implementation of draconian austerity measures as an antidote in an attempt to unsuccessfully address this crisis.⁴ In this paper we set to explain the substantial penetration, through specific policies, of neoliberalism in the Greek university after 2008, a project that until that time had not been successful. We contend that, up until 2008, student and mass mobilizations, as well as faculty involvement and organization have left neoliberal educational reforms unfinished. With the advent of Memoranda (Economic Adjustment Programs), the social contract was broken and the elites, bluntly and unapologetically represented by the Memoranda governments since 2008, have been legislating the new neoliberal university with no regard to the social cost. SYRIZA's electoral win solidified the move towards a radical transformation of the university since, not only all social protests from below have been absorbed by parliamentary politics but, in essence, SYRIZA was the only party that could materialize a full-fledge assault on the welfare state and the public good with no resistance—after all, it was voted in power in as a “left-wing” party.

In the following pages we provide a more detailed presentation of these three different moments in the Greek higher education system, and its interconnection with broader socio-political questions, at both national and supranational levels. Unavoidably, this paper will be schematic, but hopefully not simplistic, as it condenses transformations that extend across a forty-year period.

The Post-Junta conjuncture: democratic demands from below (1974-1990)

The first phase of our periodization starts with the fall of the Greek military junta in 1974 and ends with the April 1990 national election when the conservative party “New Democracy” (henceforth ND) assumed office.⁵ The fall of the Greek junta heralded the end of a repressive cycle that began in 1946 when the Civil War broke out. Since the end of the Civil War in 1949 and the defeat of the communists, a peculiar political regime was established that, despite its formal democratic character, it featured a series of social and political exclusions and restrictions on civil rights.⁶ This “*democracy malingering*” as it has been called (Nikolakopoulos, 2000), was abolished on April 21st 1967 by the colonels' military junta.⁷ The Junta's downfall in 1974, therefore, produced a need for liberation disproportionate to its seven-year rule, which took the form of a widespread demand for normalization of the people's lives along Western civic standards and the obliteration of the dividing lines of the previous era. This process triggered an intense radicalization of Greek society, and the demand for the democratization of the state—including its peripheral institutions—emerged as one of the dominant stakes of the time (Voglis 2015).

The Junta regime, having realized the potential impact of student politics on Greek society after the events of 1968, had begun to surveil closely university life, screening both teaching staff and the student body. As the historian of Greek higher education Vangelis Karamanolakis points out: “From the moment [the Junta] usurped power, it appointed in each university a government commissioner who exercised full control. It also proceeded to purge

⁴For the general framework of the economic integration of Greece into the global economy in the era of late capitalism, with a particular emphasis on the period of crisis, see Tsakalotos & Laskos (2013), Fouskas & Dimoulas (2013), and Flassbeck & Lapavistas (2015).

⁵For an account of the transition from dictatorship to democracy in the European South during the 1970, see Chilcote (1990).

⁶For a historical analysis of the democratic regime of this period see Nikolakopoulos (2000).

⁷For an account of the record of the dictatorship of the colonels with an emphasis on the role of United States in its establishment, see Rizas (2010).

academic staff, through dismissals and early retirements, while at the same time creating a very large number of new professorial chairs. In contrast to the previous organizational provisions, instituted in 1932, the dictatorship legislated the direct appointment of academic staff in universities, in cases where many chairs remained vacant or where formal procedures in the faculties themselves faced considerable delays. Nevertheless, the colonels did not proceed to a radical overhaul of tertiary education, retaining the old regime" (Karamanolakis, 2015). This institutional framework and academic personnel remained to a large extent unchanged during the first years of the post-junta period. It was in this context that the democratization of the university became an imperative demand. This demand is evidenced in the post-Junta Constitution of 1975 where education is discussed under "Individual and Social Rights." Article 16 states that "Education constitutes a fundamental mission of the state and its aim is the ethical, intellectual, professional and physical formation of Greeks, the development of their national and religious (sic) consciousness and their shaping into free and responsible citizens" and later, "[a]ll Greek people have the right to free education in all levels in State institutions" (Greek Constitution, Article 16).,

The student movement played a critical role in the radicalization of Greek society. The turning point for the collapse of the military Junta was the November 1973 uprising of students in the Law School and the National Polytechnic School in Athens (Kornetis, 2008). In other words, *Metapolitefsi* was founded on the student movement. Since then, the youth of the left parties, that had just been legalized after a long period of clandestine existence, gradually became politically and culturally dominant within universities, capitalizing on the significant role they had played in the struggle against the military dictatorship and the overall political radicalization (Papadogiannis, 2007).

This is very briefly the context of the post-junta period where the reforms in Greek higher education should be inscribed. The first of these reforms was undertaken by the right-wing government of Konstantinos Karamanlis, four years after the fall of the dictatorship. In 1978 Karamanlis attempted to pass bill 815, which was initially perceived by professors as a threat to their individual and academic status. The bill, while not eliminating the institution of the "chair" (*edra* in Greek), weakened the authority of the chair-holders by grouping them into academic departments and by converting junior academics into employees of the departments rather than of the individual chair-holders. However, this arrangement did not meet with the approval of junior academics, as they were still classified as a separate personnel category instead of being placed in the professorial ladder (Kladis, 2014). Hence, because of the mutually reinforcing dissatisfaction of both concerned parties, and after a notorious 100-day strike of students and junior academics in the spring of 1980, the Karamanlis government was finally forced to withdraw bill 815, and request that the university rectors address the problem. However, the resulting "Plan of the Rectors" failed to obtain consensus among the professors and was not considered by the Parliament because of the impending national elections (Karamanolakis, 2014).

This development can be understood as a rather modest attempt by the Karamanlis government to modernize the university system and to reduce the institutional power of professors by grouping them into departments, on the one hand, and an emerging student movement, supported by junior academic personnel, on the other. In other words, there was an emerging asymmetry between the demands for university democratization from below and the academic policies that were adopted by the political elite. These tensions would be finally resolved in favor of the protestors by the socialist government of P.A.S.O.K, after its landslide victory in the October 1981 national elections, and the enactment of Law 1268/82 "*On the Structure and Operation of the Institutions of Higher Education.*" In his public discourse, advocating the new legal framework, the socialist prime minister Andreas Papandreou related

his higher education reform proposals to the broader objectives he held for the country. For example, the government's program sought to “democratize” some crucial state institutions and promote the idea of self-administration (Nicholls, 2015). Following this reasoning, Law 1268/82 abolished the chair system and placed responsibility for academic and administrative matters on the newly-formed academic departments, which were governed by a collective Departmental Assembly comprising of all faculty members as well as student representatives (Prokou 2010). More specifically, Law 1268 brought about a modernizing aspect with the introduction of a democratic system of university administration which stipulated the extensive participation of both faculty members and students in the elections of rectors, deans and department heads. This remained intact until 1990 and the election of the Mitsotakis government. Law 1268/82 was, admittedly, one of the most progressive laws on Higher Education, especially in terms of participation of the student body in institutional decision-making. However, the most important aspect of Act 1268 was the attempt to secure and implement the basic principles of the *Metapolitefsi's* Constitution concerning higher education. This included the strengthening of academic freedom, the right of all citizens to public and free of tuition fees university education, and the obligation of the state to fund higher education institutions. These principles, codified in article 16 of the Greek Constitution, are still in place, despite the multiple and aggressive attempts to amend it since the 1990s.

The University in the Neoliberal Era (1991-2008)

The second phase of our periodization extends between 1990 and 2008, an era marked by the rise and consolidation of the neoliberal dogma in Greece. The birth of this dogma, which was of course imported, could probably be dated to the moment of PASOK's second consecutive electoral victory over the conservative New Democracy (ND) in 1985. Immediately after the elections, the newly-elected ND leader, Konstantinos Mitsotakis, emphasized that his party could win the next elections only by convincing the electorate that it had transformed from a party of the "traditional" right, with a lot of far-right elements inside it, into a modern European political party with a manifestly neoliberal economic and political agenda. As a result, in June 1987, ND presented a new economic program that not only was in deliberate harmony with the European Community's objectives, but was actually built around them. The party set as its highest priority the country's effective preparation for the Single Market. New Democracy stressed that it wholeheartedly favored the Single Market and considered adaptation to Community requirements and legislation as the only way forward to the modernization of the public sector and the improvement of the national economy. Hence, during its three years in office, from 1990 to 1993, the Mitsotakis government placed *privatizations* at the center of the political agenda (Dimas 2011).

In the political discourse that now developed, Konstantinos Mitsotakis linked the implementation of privatizations to the improvement of several aspects of Greek society. Mitsotakis declared characteristically that “for us the EU is our central national aim and our main pursuit. This is why we will accelerate the privatization process, which I have to confess is a difficult matter, but recently our results are very positive” (Mitsotakis: 22-05-92). The Mitsotakis government launched an ambitious economic programme aiming at a neoliberal fiscal consolidation and privatizations. Its policy proposals included extensive privatizations of public enterprises, a significant degree of market liberalization, and cuts in the subsidies to ailing companies, agricultural cooperatives and pension funds. The Mitsotakis agenda aimed to shift the country's economic paradigm away from PASOK's state interventionist policies of the previous decade. It implemented these reforms by using the

legitimizing discursive motto for the need to change the clientelistic character of the Greek state (Dimas, 2010).

However, the situation did not change, as many had believed at that time, when the socialist party PASOK returned to power again in 1993. In fact, in the mid-1990s, Greece witnessed a second wave of neoliberal modernization led by PASOK and its new leader, Kostas Simitis. The “modernizers” around Simitis believed that reforms in the form of privatizations were needed if Greece was to modernize and to participate as an equal partner in the process of European integration (Tsakalotos 2001).

This political atmosphere had a direct impact on higher education inasmuch as successive governments explicitly sought to reform the universities along neoliberal lines. Between 1990 and 2008 there were two significant attempts in this direction. The first one was undertaken by the Mitsotakis government in 1992, with the introduction of bill 2083/1992, and the second in 2006, again under New Democracy's administration. These efforts represented attempts to eradicate the democratic achievements consolidated by Law 1268/1982. Indeed, in 1992 Giorgos Souflias, the Education Minister in the Mitsotakis government, promoted, as part of a wider neoliberal/neoconservative modernization program, the introduction of evaluation processes, strict provisions against university occupation by students, the centralization of academic administration, the reduction of students' participation in university governance, and the reduction of the duration of studies. More precisely, as Nicholls (2015) notes: "As in the reforms of a decade earlier (meaning Law 1268/82) much of this related to the university governance: the representation of the students on university governing bodies was reduced to 50% of faculty and new systems were introduced for the election of university officials. Several other reforms undercut the privileges previously awarded to university students, including the limiting of the free text programme to low-income students, and time limit placed on the number of years a student had to complete a programme and thus receive a financial aid" (p. 160). However, reactions by the academic staff, the students, and the parliamentary Left eventually turned the most important provisions into dead letter, whereas some others were enacted but with amendments (Makiridis & Staurinadis, 2007). That said, between 1990 and 2006 there was a wave of student mobilizations including massive protests as well as high-school and university occupations to multiple attempts at reforming the university in the neoliberal direction.

Fourteen years later, came a second and more decisive effort to implement neoliberal reforms in Greek higher education. Greece had joined the Bologna Process since its inception in 1999.⁸ Thus, the effort made by New Democracy education minister Marietta Giannakou to change the university system according to neoliberal standards should be inscribed in this wider European context. The proposed change came in the context of a broader set of reactionary reforms that included the abolition of the 8-hour workday, and massive privatizations (including social security). In March 2006, Giannakou announced that during the summer session of the Greek Parliament she would promote a bill concerning tertiary education and pursue a constitutional amendment in order to establish private universities, thus implementing the conditions that were imposed by the Bologna Convention. The draft

⁸The Bologna Process is a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries designed to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher education qualifications. Through the Bologna Accords, the process has created the European Higher Education Area, in particular under the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It is named after the place it was proposed, the University of Bologna, with the signing of the Bologna declaration by Education Ministers from 29 European countries in 1999, forming a part of European integration. For the detailed content of this declaration, see its page on the site of the European Union here http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en.htm

bill was the encapsulation of the neoliberal logic in a nutshell, attempting both to privatize established social services (free and public access to higher education) and to restructure the democratic character of the Greek university in favor of a more hierarchical management system excluding students from the decision-making process. In terms of specific reforms, the bill included articles "towards the abolition of 'University Asylum'⁹, the introduction of a statute of limitations for completing a degree, the permanent expulsion of students that fail to take or pass exams, the abolition of free textbook distribution to students, the restriction of student vote in the university's management institutions, the introduction of the minimum time period per semester, the introduction of a new financial managerial mechanism responsible for the university assets, the introduction of the ECTS credit system, the introduction of a four-year economic planning program by the universities and finally, changes in the way professors are recruited and promoted" (Evangelinidis & Lazaris, 2014).

As a response to these reforms a dynamic wave of student struggle began in early May 2006, and by the end of the month almost all Greek universities were occupied. The Hellenic Federation of University Professors Association (POSDEP), controlled then by the Left (including SYRIZA, which was a small party at that time), joined forces with the student movement. On June 1st, university lecturers launched an indefinite strike opposing the proposals the government put forward as middle-ground solutions. Student protests then started outside the education ministry. Two days later, on June 3rd, students organized sit-ins at nearly 400 university departments and 60 technical colleges nationwide. The week that followed, 20,000 students participated in the largest student march of the last twenty years in the center of Athens. The demonstration was fiercely repressed by the police. That day several thousand students demonstrated in Thessaloniki (the second largest Greek city) as well. On June 9th, 350 of Greece's 456 faculties were under occupation by students, with more than 100,000 students participating in rallies and protests. Another demonstration of several thousand students that took place on June 15th was staged outside the Greek parliament. The demonstrations culminated in a nationwide protest on June 22nd, that was joined by workers from both the public and private sectors. On June 27th, students and political groups demonstrated outside a hotel in Lagonissi where the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) education ministers were holding a two-day conference on higher education. An estimated 2,000 police officers were mobilised to seal off access to the hotel. When 500 people demanded access to the hotel entrance in order to hand in a statement, the police dispersed the demonstration with tear gas. Later that day, police in central Athens also used tear gas to disperse 10,000 students who marched to the Education Ministry. By June 27, students had staged sit-ins at more than 450 faculties. Two days later, students ended the protests for the half-term holidays, but pledged to resume in September (Loudos 2007).

By mid-October of the same year another movement emerged, this time among secondary school students and teachers. Over a thousand secondary schools were occupied in order to oppose education minister Giannakou's intention to limit the number of students gaining access to higher education. PASOK's leadership, while in the opposition at the time, had committed to support New Democracy's constitutional amendment of Article 16 that would allow the establishment of private universities (Sifogiorgakis 2006). PASOK's votes were crucial because constitutional amendments in Greece require support of 180 out of the 300 MPs. But in the face of the uprising of both students and university staff and increasing pressure from below, PASOK's leader George Papandreou brokered a deal to postpone the vote until January 2007. The result of this move was to allow the struggle to continue for

⁹ Since the uprising at the Polytechnic school in 1973, campuses are considered sanctuaries where police intervention is prohibited.

several months. Finally, and as social pressures from below were mounting, on February 2nd 2007, Papandreou announced in the parliament that PASOK was withdrawing its support for the constitutional amendment (Reportage 2007). For the first time in post-junta era a process of constitutional amendment, the highest parliamentary procedure, had been blocked as a result of massive mobilization and the intervention of a social movement. Although the government eventually managed to slightly amend the legal framework, the fact that article 16 remained in place meant that the movement was politically victorious.

Greek Higher Education in the Vise of Austerity

The third phase of our periodization that began in 2010 and lasts until this day is marked by a neoliberal restoration embodied in austerity policies, as stipulated in the Memoranda and implemented by different governments. We are further breaking down this third phase into two periods: the first extends from the signing of the first Memorandum in 2010 until January 2015, and is marked by radical changes in government with the establishment of three different administrations in a four-year period (with Prime Ministers Papandreou, Papadimos, and Samaras). The second period starts with SYRIZA's electoral victory and seizing of power in January 2015 and extends to this day.

An obvious question that comes up immediately is what is the difference between this period and the previous one or, in other words, why do these years constitute an analytically distinct period? The response lies in the fact that, in contrast to the two previous periods, the current efforts for the neoliberalization of the university a) are forced by supra-national entities (OECD, European Commission) and stipulated in the Memoranda with the ECB, EU, IMF and b) they have been successful¹⁰ in that the purported "restructuring" has had catastrophic consequences on the University. Of course, this is not a unique phenomenon since it follows the general trajectory of the majority of public institutions under austerity policies in a country where national sovereignty is lost to the rule of EU and global institutions with the docile consent of national governments. Along these lines Sotiris (2013) has argued that: "to make matters worse, European political elites are acting in complete ignorance of the fact that politics cannot be some form of autopilot of dictating measures out of neoliberal textbooks and of simply attempting to impose consensus regardless of the actual balance of forces. This tactic can only exacerbate a crisis of legitimacy. This postdemocratic and posthegemonic form of neoliberal governance might seem as the best conduit for neoliberal social engineering but in reality it opens the way for social explosion and opens political crisis" (p. 22).

But why did this neoliberal "success" materialized in this particular historical moment? We suggest that this happened because during the last eight years in Greece the social contract between the political elites and the masses has been openly broken and there is no longer any democratic accountability from above.¹¹

Memoranda governments. Greece was the first country-member of the European Monetary Union (EMU) to sign a Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP)

¹⁰For the social impact of the financial crisis see Petropoulos & Tsobanoglou (2014). From an anthropological perspective, on the same issue see Dalakoglou & Agelopoulos (2018). For the cultural impact of austerity see Tziouvas (2017), for the impact of the crisis on the democratic institutions of the European periphery see Morlino & Raniolo (2017) and on how the crisis affected the urban landscape see Eckardt, Sanchez & Sevilla (2015), especially the chapter that focuses on the Greek case.

¹¹ For a more detailed analysis of the incompatibility between democracy and capitalism in the era of the global financial crisis see Macartney (2013) and Streeck (2011).

with the IMF, the European Commission (EC) and the European Central Bank (ECB) in order to secure financial assistance and prevent a total collapse of its economy following the severe international economic crisis. The MEFP (2010) and the more detailed Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality (SEPC) (2010) offered elaborate steps of structural reforms that have affected all public services in Greece. More precisely, on May 1st 2010, the Greek government announced a series of austerity measures. The following day, the Eurozone countries and the IMF agreed to a three-year, €110 billion loan with 5.5% interest, conditional on the implementation of austerity measures. Credit rating agencies immediately downgraded Greek governmental bonds to an even lower junk status. The program was met with anger by the Greek people, leading to protests, riots, and social unrest. On May 5th 2010, a national strike was held in opposition. Nevertheless, the austerity package was approved on June 29th 2011, with 155 out of 300 members of parliament voting in favor (Bilefsky 2010). The first economic adjustment program was followed by a second one, seeking to address the limitations of the first bailout package. The program was approved by the European Council in March 2012. The financial assistance amounted to €240 billion. Its objectives included the restoration "of Greece's credibility among private investors by ensuring fiscal sustainability, as well as by safeguarding the stability of the financial system and boosting growth and competitiveness. To this end, the programme consisted of a comprehensive set of ambitious policies that reinforce each other. These policies mainly concern fiscal adjustment (with the objective of reaching a primary surplus of 1.5% in 2014 and 4.5% of GDP in 2016)" (Vogiatzoglou 2017, p. 102). The result of these policies, though, not only did not contribute to the re-stabilization of the national economy, but they, instead, have led to its almost absolute destruction.

The main side effect of these policies was that Greece's economy shrunk by nearly one-third since 2007, and public debt stood at 175.7% of GDP at the end of 2013, thus becoming unsustainable. Unemployment rates skyrocketed to 28.1% in general, and to 62.1% among the youth (data from December 2013). A 34.6% of people found themselves at the risk of poverty in 2012 (Howden & Baboulias 2015).¹² The Greek welfare state collapsed due to draconian cuts in wages and pensions, massive layoffs and the violation of labor rights including collective bargaining.¹³ Comparing the social impact of the crisis in Greece and Portugal, Thanos Zartaloudis (2014) has observed that:

in both countries the retirement age was increased, a threshold for pensions was introduced and pensioners lost a considerable part of their pension by the abolition of the Christmas, Easter and summer bonus. The latter measure was also applied in all public sector workers, while Portugal went a step further and introduced a special levy to all self-employed people to the same effect. In addition, successive tax hikes were implemented – mainly increases of indirect taxes like VAT – along with increases in property taxes. Welfare benefits became less generous and more conditional, with less protection for the unemployed and considerable cuts in healthcare budgets. Both countries reduced public investment in order to achieve savings in their spending, resulting in the abandonment of a number of public work projects. In order to cut spending and increase revenues, both countries implemented wide-ranging privatization of state corporations and/or ports."

¹²See also the Eurostat statistics in this regard http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion.

¹³For a more detailed account of this issue, see T. Papadopoulos & A. Roumpakis (2012) and Gounari (2016).

Another victim of the austerity measures has been the labor market itself. The labor market has radically transformed after the implementation of the agreements with the EU, which have pushed down labor costs through wage repression. The Troika considered this process of internal devaluation a way to strengthen the external competitiveness of the Greek economy, that was perceived as a rigid economy in which vested interests blocked profitability. The practical outcome of this reasoning—allowed by the change of the previous legal framework on collective bargaining, was the reduction of monthly salaries by 22% (32% for people younger than 25 years old) decided by the New Democracy government at the beginning of 2013 (Kennedy 2016). Last but not least, the human cost of austerity has gained tragic proportions. An increasing number of children were passing out in schools because of malnutrition; there were (and still are) embarrassing shortages in public hospitals where often patients have to buy their own gauze and medication from an outside pharmacy while admitted. People without health insurance with severe illnesses did not have access to treatment. There has been an increasing number of suicides (marking closely to 43% hike) that ranked Greece number one worldwide in suicides between 2008 and 2013. There have been alarming new cases of depression and mental illnesses. A study conducted by the University of Ioannina found that one in five people facing financial problems presents psychopathological symptoms. There has also been a 200% increase in HIV cases. At the same time, significant funding has been cut from psychiatric hospitals, public drug rehabilitation centers and other social and welfare provisions while the system tries to “abort” vulnerable social groups such as HIV-positive women, drug users, and people with mental illness. With a 40% surcharge the government has slapped on heating oil thousands of households have remained cold during the winter (Gounari 2014).

Of course, universities could not be the exception to this overall bleak situation. The Greek higher education system is just one of the sectors experiencing the implementation of aggressive neoliberal reforms. Given the loss of national sovereignty that came with the signing of the Memoranda, policies in every sector have been essentially dictated by the supervising institutions (that is, ECB, the European Commission, and the IMF).

In 2011, two-thirds of the Greek Parliament voted in favor of Framework Act 4009 for Higher Education, a massive neoliberal educational reform, also known as the “Diamantopoulou Law.”¹⁴ This act challenged the high degree of autonomy and self-governance traditionally enjoyed by Greek universities that is constitutionally safeguarded, “by introducing changes to their management, to the structure of degrees and courses, to funding, and to accreditation and quality control” (Traianou 2013, 87-88). Contrary to the idea of a *public* and *free* Higher Education, funded by the state and not by tuition fees, it was proposed, in the name of “autonomy,” that universities seek private funding beyond the state, or introduce tuition fees even at the undergraduate level (until recently, only a few graduate programs required such fees). Equally significant has been the government’s retreat from the ideal of a democratically governed university, signaled “by the shift of decision-making from the members of the academic community, including student representatives, to ‘outside experts’” (Traianou 2013, 105).

With Law 4009/11, an anti-democratic top-down managerial model was introduced. The “University Board” now consisted of professors elected from inside the institution as well as “outside experts” (i.e. academics from other higher education institutions in Greece and abroad and/or representatives of professional associations and local businesses). This allegedly aimed at enhancing “transparency,” “accountability,” and “effectiveness,” as well as to deal with nepotism. The board was responsible for drawing up a strategic plan for the

¹⁴ Borrowing its name from the then-minister of Education, Anna Diamantopoulou.

development of the institution in local, national, and international terms, and for its financial viability. Meanwhile, senates became much smaller, with reduced power, and were primarily responsible for drawing up the institution's learning, teaching, research, and quality assurance strategies. Student representation was reduced to a single person per university instead of one representative per academic department. Moreover, the merging of departments into schools shifted the power of decision-making over courses, the structure of degrees, and the allocation of funding upwards from department assemblies to the head of the school. This would have enabled heads of school to introduce much more flexible courses, and/or to cancel courses more easily (Georgoulas & Voulvouli 2015).

A marked change we can identify in the educational policy initiatives of Memoranda Governments is, on one hand, changes in the administrative model based on the directives of the Bologna Process, and on the other hand, the implementation of severe austerity. The touted "rationalization and modernization" did not come as a necessary reform to improve higher education, but rather as a disciplinary punishment for the "excesses" of the previous years. Consequences from implementing austerity in Greek universities during this first period of the third phase included but were not limited to the following:

Universities' budgets were significantly cut. As a result, it has been very hard to cover the costs for maintenance, equipment procurement, or utility bills. Along the same lines, faculty members' salaries were reduced by 30-40% in real terms while the appointment of over 700 elected faculty members was postponed until 2016.¹⁵ Meanwhile, 500 new positions opened up, but this number is significantly smaller compared with the universities' real needs in teaching staff in order to cover their teaching requirements. Combined with the 70% reduction in adjunct faculty and the increased numbers of pensions, this led to a total reduction of the teaching personnel in higher education institutions by more than 10% making many departments inoperable. Since the bailout agreement included provisions for the overall reduction of public sector jobs, including the administrative staff of the universities, this made day-to-day business even more difficult.

Finally, the overall deterioration of the standards of living has been reflected in the choices of students, who apply for a spot in university departments on the basis of vicinity to their hometown because their parents cannot afford funding their studies abroad. This latter trend was a widespread social practice until the crisis broke out (Sotiris 2013). While this has been on the educational agenda of all previous governments, it was not until 2011 that they were finally legislated.

The Memoranda governments' discourse on public education took shape along the lines of a developing market-driven society and seems to unapologetically espouse a neoliberal dogma that turns education into training and universities into training sites, with the reorganization of curricula on the basis of an instrumentalist approach where students acquire skills and competences to fill necessary positions in the job market but also in the prescribed social stratification; universities are on their way to privatization while more authoritarianism finds its way in; knowledge turns into service or commodity, and students into clients. Law 4009/11 unapologetically opened the door to standardization (in line with the general EU guidelines and practices), the privatization of the Greek public university, and the commodification of knowledge through a series of new policies; the introduction of tuition in what historically has been free and public education for all; and the establishment of an oligarchic management of institutions of higher education with the participation of

¹⁵ In Greece, academic staff is elected by departments, but due to the special status they enjoy as public servants their appointment is ratified by the Ministry of Education.

members outside the academic community that abolished the democratic self-governed character of the institution (Gounari 2012).

The austerity policies of the three Memoranda governments, further, radically changed the political scene. The generalized discontent among people and the various social reactions (expressed in universities by student occupations, for example) benefited SYRIZA, that won the 2015 election and led a government coalition in collaboration with a small right-wing party (ANEL). Since August 2015 and the signing of the Third Memorandum, educational policy has again become part of the negotiation with Greece's creditors who have insisted on following OECD 'toolboxes' and, in general, neoliberal guidelines.

The neoliberal Left turn. SYRIZA came to power in February 2015 campaigning with the slogan "hope is coming." Their electoral message seemed "simple" and was short: "After five years of destruction and fear that led nowhere, it is time for change. With dignity, justice, and democracy, Greece is moving forward, Europe is changing, hope is coming." One of the biggest illusions in this message, that has its roots in "left Europeanism," was the belief that SYRIZA would be able, as a reformist left party (and even this label is debatable), amidst a climate of political and economic blackmail in the EU, to shift the political balance both nationally but also in Europe through negotiations. The July 2015 tour de force on EU's part and SYRIZA's radical shift, palpably demonstrate that hope cannot survive in the context of an undemocratic, authoritarian, and vindictive Europe where policies and reforms are forced upon nations. It also showed that any type of "hope" cannot survive without a massive, well-organized, politically conscious, and goal-driven popular movement; and that change and rupture do not come exclusively through electoral politics and by switching the political management to another party-even if it is a so-called "left" party. Another illusion had to do with SYRIZA leadership's flawed reading of the idea of the state as a battlefield that reflects the balance of class forces in society. Ultimately, SYRIZA failed to move in the direction of clashing with the deep state and, despite austerity, to promote reforms that would ultimately benefit the people. As argued elsewhere, "SYRIZA's trajectory is not simply one of "capitulation to the Troika," but the result of its problematic political approach to the capitalist state" (Souvlis & Fischer 2017). It is, therefore, a mistake to talk about a "betrayal" of the SYRIZA leadership but rather, it is important to stress "the structural weaknesses of the party's overall strategy" in the years proceeding to it seizing of power (Ibid). SYRIZA was unable to develop a strategy of rupture both inside its own party and in the society at large against reactionary forces at home and abroad, even after three years as the opposition party and five tense months of governance. SYRIZA aligned itself politically with the previous neoliberal governments, signed a Third Memorandum and, essentially, is carrying on the austerity attack in an even more violent scale than before. SYRIZA's discourse is literally one of "creative destruction" since they continue the wholesale of the country, implementing violent austerity while maintaining a rhetoric of social sensitivity and paying lip service to the lower strata of society.

From the first months of SYRIZA's government and despite a mainstream progressive rhetoric, the agenda on higher education was nothing more but a continuation of previous policies and the implementation of previously voted changes and measures. The Third Memorandum signed by the SYPIZA government in August 2015, for the first time contains specific stipulations regarding structural changes in higher education, and therefore, does not leave too much room for designing and implementing real and necessary educational reforms. The script is given and the challenge for any Greek government is to rapidly implement these "reforms" towards streamlining (or "rationalizing," as is often called) the educational system. These reforms essentially strengthen the University's connection to the

capitalist economy by devising new ways to serve it. By all accounts, the new dystopian educational vision is one of a cheaper, more productive, flexible university for the few.

In August of 2017, SYRIZA government passed its first bill concerning higher education, now known as Law 4485/2017. In it, the current administration is trying to pay lip service to progressivism by instituting a series of changes. More specifically, Law 4485/17 brings back the University Sanctuary: The University asylum is reinstated and police can now intervene in Greek university campuses only in cases when a felony or a crime against life is committed. The decision about police intervention lies with the Board of University Chancellors. The controversial University Boards are abolished and a tokenistic student participation in Departmental decision-making is legislated. However, this is as far as progressive politics goes. We should also stress upfront that nowhere in the text of the new law does it say that the previous 4009/2011 law is repealed. On the contrary, the majority of articles remain in their original 2011 version, some are silently repealed while others are explicitly repealed and replaced.¹⁶

Law 4485/17 comes at a time when the Greek public university is in shambles after six years of financial hardship: severely underfunded, with minimal operational funding, short in faculty members and administrative staff, and with a demoralized faculty that lost close to 40% of their salaries. The main changes are recorded below:

- Graduate and Doctoral studies: Law 4485/17 makes clear provisions for the implementation of tuition in graduate programs in a University that has been constitutionally free and public. The tuition provision is wrapped in the rhetoric of self-sufficiency of graduate programs. On the basis of family income a 30% of students will be allowed to pursue graduate studies for free. If tuition ensures self-sufficiency, it is possible that those programs that do not attract many students so as to cover their operating costs, will be forced to close. Given the general trend in education globally, as a form of professional training, it is likely that the humanities will mostly suffer as opposed to disciplines that have a better forecast in terms of job market. In addition to the closing down of existing postgraduate programs, this change will pave the way for the creation of new graduate programs in private institutions. The onus is, therefore, on the Universities to find ways to fund their graduate students.
- Supporting research through financial and administrative autonomy and self-sufficiency: Research is now connected with funding. Since state funding is scarce to nonexistent, Universities will inevitably turn to the private sector, hunting for funding and selling, in return, their academic and scientific “product.” We know that these collaborations always come with strings attached, as in increasing profit for the private companies involved. The concept of self-governance in institutions of higher education opens the path for universities to manage their academic and financial activity with more flexibility. At the same time, it absolves the state from the “burden” of funding universities. Self-governance gives the possibility to a University to start commercial activity via its

¹⁶ For a detailed comparison by article between Law 4009/11 and 4485/17, see Karimbali-Tsipsiou (2018)

academic and research products and to establish collaborations and partnerships with the private sector more quickly and easily and with less obstacles that would normally come from supervisory and regulatory mechanisms. Self-governance is, in essence, a kind of de-regulation that facilitates the connection of the university to the vast market outside of it. Higher education is a new and uncharted ground for commercial activity.

- Provisions of the Special Research Accounts of the Institutions (S.R.A.I) that are now independent and not subject to state control, acquiring even their own unique tax identity (VAT). According to Law 4485 (2017) "the purpose of S.R.A.I is the management and allocation of funds from any source 'and intended' for the implementation of research, educational, training, development and (...) scientific, technological and artistic services (...) for the carrying out of tests, measurements, laboratory tests and analyses, consulting, drafting specifications for third parties, planning and implementation of scientific, research, cultural and development programs and other related services for the benefit of the Institution of Higher Education" (p. 1989).
- The institution of two-year college degree programs, in a clear turn to devalue four-year college degrees and to further strengthen the goal of higher education as a site of professional training. At the same time, five-year undergraduate degrees are now converted into Bachelor's plus Master's. This creates a higher education of multiple speeds where graduates carry a different set of qualifications depending on the path they followed and compete accordingly in the job market.
- Upgrade of Technical Schools into institutions of higher education without the necessary additional funding and support needed for them to function as Universities. Essentially, this is an upgrade only on paper, for technical schools with a very high number of students, lack of faculty and staff, and insufficient infrastructure and labs.
- Further merging of Schools and Departments that, among other criteria, do not resonate with the economic and social development needs of the geographical area where they are located. This will lead to massive department closings, pushing students out of higher education if no department of their choice exists in proximity (Bill 4485/2017, p. 1960).

In sum, behind the progressive rhetoric about the return of democracy in higher education, we identify a further devaluing of the University as a free and public institution of higher education, shifting to an Institution of "Higher Training," fully aligned with the demands of Bologna and OECD and meeting the requirements of Greece's supervisory Institutions. This direction became abundantly clear in the Public Dialogue that led to the voting of the new law: Syriza-appointed Professor Antonis Liakos, president of the Committee for National Deliberation on Education stressed rather bluntly that the goal of the new legislation is the "minimization of public funding" so as to cover only general operating costs and salaries. Liakos claimed that those Departments that would not stand evaluation, do

not meet market needs and accreditation requirements, should close down (Alfavita 2016). Along the same lines, Liakos also noted that “The problem of education at all levels is chronic nonage and its dependence on both financial resources and guidance from a centralized mechanism. Therefore, our central goal should be empowerment and adulthood in all fields and all participants. Autonomy, responsibility and accountability are the trips of adulthood and empowerment” (Katsikas, 2016). In a recent exchange in a parliamentary committee working on the founding of a new university, former minister of education and member of the SYRIZA, Nikos Filis referring to provision 19a, openly accused the current minister of education, that the new law is unconstitutional as it opens the door for the legitimization of private universities in Greece (Iefimerida News 2018).

Law 4485/17 holds the door open to standardization (in line with the general EU guidelines and practices), the privatization of the Greek public university, and the commodification of knowledge through a) the reduction of the already small state funding¹⁷ that forces universities to seek alternate sources of money in the private sector and the business world b) the reorganization of curricula on the basis of an instrumentalist approach, so that students gain skills and competences to fill necessary positions in the job market but also in the prescribed social stratification c) the introduction of tuition in what historically has been free and public education for all, and d) a shift of State responsibility to the University, its administrators, faculty and students. Most importantly, the new law signals a marked shift from the university as a public good to the university as a private enterprise, in a general context of privatization and sellout of national resources and public goods.

At this point the question of resistance to the ongoing neoliberalization of the university becomes central. Sadly, after SYRIZA’s ascend to power, the massive movement’s dynamic, anger and disappointment have been absorbed by parliamentary “left” politics, while many academics who, until recently were very vocal, got rewarded with promotions and swiftly gave up on their previous “radical” politics. What happens in higher education is only a symptom or manifestation of a general retreat of social movements that currently stand in a state of paralysis in the face of Memoranda-stipulated policies. It is rather difficult to imagine a democratic, state funded, public and free-to-all university in the context of Memoranda-run politics. Any kind of substantial radical change in the university should be part of a larger social transformation and rupture with the European Union; A rupture that SYRIZA has shied away from undertaking. Any notion of hope in this landscape needs to have a clear political content, needs to relay, among other, on an organized, strong, politically conscious student movement with a perspective into the future not as a reaction to the current sociopolitical reality.

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¹⁷ Public funding for Higher Education for 200-2005 were 1,22% of the GDP which really translates into 4,160 Euros per student compared with the average 7,890 Euros per student in the European Union

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