

Changes in Attitudes of State Towards Orthodox Church: Greek Case after Eurozone Crisis in Alexis Tsipras Era

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Abstract : Religion has always an effect on the policies of states. In the case of religion having a central role in defining identity, especially when becoming an independent state, the bond between religious authority and state cannot easily be broken. As independence of Greece from the Ottoman Empire was acquired at the same time with the creation of its own church under the name of the Church of Greece by declaring its independence from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul, the new church became an important part of Greek national identity. As the Church has the ability to influence Greeks, its rituals, public appearances, and practices are used to provide support to the state. Although there sometimes have been controversies between church and state, it has always been a fact that church is an integral part of the state, which is proved by that paying the salaries of priest by state payroll and them being naturally civil servants. European Union membership, on the other hand, has a changing impact on this relationship. This impact started to be more visible in 2000 when then government decided to exclude the religion section from identity cards. Church's reaction was to gather people around recalling their religious identity and followed by redefining the content of nationality, which aspired nationalist fronts. After 2015 when leftist coalition Syriza and its self-described atheist leader came to power, the situation for nationalists and Church became more tangling in addition to the economic crisis started in 2010 and evolved into the Eurozone crisis by affecting not only Greece but also other members. Although the church did not have direct confrontations with the government, the fact that Tsipras refused to take the oath on Bible created tensions because it was not acceptable for a state whose Constitution starts 'in the name of the Holy, Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity'. Moreover, austerity measures to overcome the economic crisis, which affected the everyday life of citizens in terms of both prices and salaries, did not harm the church's economic situation much. Considering church being the second biggest landowner after state and paying no taxes, the fact that church was exempt from austerity measures showed to the government the necessity to find a way to make church contribute to solution for the crisis. In 2018, when the government agreed with the head of the church on cutting off the priests from government payroll automatically meaning to end priests' civil servant status, it created tensions both for church and in society. As a result of the elections held in July 2019, Tsipras could not have the chance to apply the decision as he left the office. In light of these, this study aims to analyze the position of the church in the economic crisis and its effects on Tsipras term. In order to sufficiently understand this, it is to look at the historical changing points of Church's influence in Greek's eyes.

Keywords : Eurozone crisis, Greece, Orthodox Church, Tsipras

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