**Greek Education Reform: resistance and despair**

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Since 2010 Greece has been in social and political turmoil. The draconian austerity measures imposed under the bailout agreement with the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank (referred to in Greece as ‘the Troika’) have led to an increase in the unemployment rate to 27.6%, with youth unemployment at 64.9% (Hellenic Statistical Authority, May 2013). There have also been drastic reductions in salaries for state employees, from teachers to manual workers. The anger and despair of the Greek population, not only at the austerity measures but also at the political system as a whole, has been expressed through general strikes, mass rallies, and street clashes. The forms of political representation and political loyalties formed in the post-Junta (post-1974) period have come under severe question. The depth of the political crisis is clearly evident in huge losses in support for the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and for the Centre-Right New Democracy (ND) party, the rise of the Left and the coalition party SYRIZA, and the emergence of the extreme-Right Golden Dawn party as a political force. The political crisis reached its peak in the election results of 2012, when the mainstream parties struggled to finally form a PASOK-ND coalition government.

**Education in the Crisis**

Within this context, the ‘modernisation’ of the Greek education system is seen by some as central to solving the current crisis. Early on, Anna Diamantopoulou, Minister of Education (PASOK) made this point clear:

‘The multifaceted and multi-layered crisis that we experience can become the catalyst for change of our enduring problems. I am deeply convinced that the time has come. The Prime Minister [George Papandreou] has put education as the dominant priority of the national plan for the regeneration of the country. We change education, we change Greece: to change our educational system, to change attitudes, to change Greece’ (Diamantopoulou 2011a).

With the full entry of Greece into the European Union (in 1981), along with a gradual shift on the part of successive PASOK and ND Greek governments in the direction of neoliberalism, the discourse of ‘modernisation’ has increasingly been linked with ideas about the marketisation of education and with efforts to make the Greek education system more ‘effective’ by introducing structures and forms of accountability similar to those that operate within capitalist organizations, and indeed within other Western countries.

The Greek Higher Education System has been the first sector to experience the introduction of aggressive neoliberal reforms. These have been creeping in since 2005 – mainly, though not exclusively, as a result of the so-called Bologna process[[1]](#endnote-1). In 2011, two thirds of the Greek Parliament voted in favour of the Framework Act for Higher Education. This Act challenges the high degree of autonomy traditionally enjoyed by Greek universities, by introducing changes to their management, to the structure of degrees and courses, to funding, and to accreditation and quality control. Celebrating this, Diamandopoulou wrote in her Twitter account: ‘history has been written today […]’. (Diamantopoulou 2011b). To understand the nature of this ‘historic moment’, we need to take into account the fact that, only a few days earlier, an OECD report on the state of Greek Education had insisted that Greece must take action ‘in order to address the unsustainable cost-structure of the system and the inefficiencies that are inherent in an outdated, ineffective centralised education structure’ (OECD 2011: 4). The report also stressed that one of the major problems in implementing reforms in education was the limited capacity of the Government to steer the system: ‘Real change can only be achieved through persistent, consistent implementation year after year, with careful attention to capacity building’ (ibid.). It was, then, in response to OECD demands that ‘history was made’.

**Blocking ‘reform’ in HE**

Previous attempts to introduce similar neo-liberal reforms in higher education, especially in 2006-2007, were opposed by two massive waves of university occupations and strikes by lecturers. In June 2006, just before the summer exams and holidays, two-thirds of university departments were occupied by students and continuous demonstrations disrupted the centres of Athens and Thessaloniki. The New Democracy Government was forced to postpone the parliamentary debate about the proposed ‘reform’ until the following November. *Times Higher Education* reported:

‘Greek Universities are at a standstill as lecturers and students protest against a government plan to revise the constitution and end the state monopoly in university education. They also opposed abolition of the university sanctuary and the strict period of studies. Students blocked reform attempts in 1991, 1992, 1995, 1998, and 2002’ (June 16, 2006).

The second wave of similar protests which started at the beginning of the new academic year in 2006 was accompanied by a series of school building occupations by secondary school students, and coincided with strikes of primary and secondary school teachers over pay. Fearing that a wider social movement was developing against the government, the parliamentary debate on reform was rescheduled initially from November to January 2007. It finally came to parliament in 2011.

Partly as a result of resistance, this ‘reform’ of the higher education sector has not been fully implemented yet. Greece is perhaps one of the few European countries still resisting compliance with neo-liberal European Union policies. The distinctive features of the Greek education system, resulting from its socio-cultural context, have continued to play a crucial role in shaping the ways in which it has responded to pressures for such reform. Given this, it is worth exploring the context of the resistance to these changes, the reasons behind recurrent attempts of successive governments to implement them, and their current state of implementation.

**Socio-cultural features of the Greek Education system.**

After the establishment of the modern Greek state in the 1830s, educational and political *clientelism* became one of the core mechanisms through which governments were able to establish and sustain their power, and this came to infuse the broader structure of society (see Mavrogordatos 1997; Bratsis 2010). Continuing into the 20th century, the exchange of goods or services for political support helped to strengthen party loyalties and the power of the party in Government. Given that capitalism in Greece developed without industrialisation but with a strong merchant/transport sector, and in a rather slow fashion in comparison with much of Europe, the political party in power served as the main mechanism for the accumulation and distribution of wealth by offering well-paid jobs in the public sector (see Tsoukalas 1981; Mouzelis 1987). In this context, it has been pointed out that the salary bill for government officials in the 1880s was greater than the yearly profits of the largest capitalist enterprise in Greece at that time (Tsoukalas 1981). Recruitment to public sector posts was on the basis of academic qualifications, and this gave the education system central importance. Until the early 1960s, fees were charged for attendance at state secondary schools and Higher Education Institutions, and this system therefore mostly privileged the ruling classes. Attrition from secondary education remained high during that time (around 50 percent, see Frangoudakis 1981). The growth of the construction and manufacturing sector in the 1960s, the influx of peasants into the large cities, and the erosion of local economies created the need for a more skilled and diversified labour force. As a result, state education provision expanded and the number of students who graduated from higher education started to rise (3.1% in 1971, see Kassotakis 1981). In post-1974 Greece university qualifications became the main mechanism for social mobility. Students from working-class backgrounds were often able to find a permanent post in the public sector or a relatively secure job in the still small private sector, if they possessed a university degree. It is not surprising, therefore, that the university became the most important institution for the satisfaction of ‘social expectations’ and a core institution in the Greek society (see TPTG 2008).

A constitutionally-determined ‘free education for all’ at all levels was one of the achievements of the student movement and the short-lived liberal government of 1964. Along with it came a centrally controlled school system aimed at safeguarding equality of opportunity in education, and these have been the two important mechanisms for maintaining the legitimacy of the post-1974 State. Here, ‘equality’ is interpreted as equal input (common schools, common curriculum, and so on): ‘an equality achieved by educational rather than social measures’ (Persianis: 1978 55). It is significant, in this context, that, until the present day, the formulation and implementation of legislation, the administration of financial support to all sectors of school education, the approval of primary and secondary school curricula and textbooks, the appointment of teaching staff, and the coordination and evaluation of regional educational services have all been controlled by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (GMERA). There are state-prescribed textbooks for each school subject, appropriate to each year group, which are distributed free to all pupils. This is often considered to be one of the most positive features of the system because it enables all pupils who attend school to have ‘equal’ and ‘free’ access to the same learning materials (see Spinthourakis 2004).

There has been a strong bias towards the humanities in the Greek school curriculum, with religion continuing to influence its structure and content. This bias is not unrelated to the perceived need at the time of the establishment of the modern Greek state to build and maintain a national identity by drawing on the ancient ‘glorious past’ and on the Orthodox Church, which played a key role in maintaining the Greek language during the years of the Ottoman occupation. There is an important sense then in which the majority of schools in Greece are faith schools, but only one faith is represented: that of the Orthodox Church (see Traianou, 2009)[[2]](#endnote-2). It is also necessary to emphasise that the project of developing a national identity was initially aimed at differentiating Greeks from both their Balkan and their Turkish neighbours, and this part of ‘cultural politics’ remains a central feature of the current education system. During the years that followed the end of the civil war (1949-1974) – which were characterised by political instability, corruption and restriction of political rights – the emphasis on the development of the Greek-Christian identity through education was used as a state control mechanism for the reinforcement of conservative political ideologies. This kind of state control was of course particularly evident during the years of the military dictatorship (1967-1974).

**The early PASOK years**

An attempt to break away from past attitudes and democratize the education system was made in the early 1980s, during the first period when PASOK was in power. Behind PASOK’s promise to expand education provision were progressive social forces (including the student movement during the years of the dictatorship) which for at least fifty years had been making demands for educational reform based on the principle of equality of opportunity. In the 1960s and 1970s the notion ‘free education for all’ had a tremendous popular impact, lending support to the idea that knowledge is the key to social power (see Frangoudakis 1981). In general, PASOK promoted welfare policies and introduced progressive institutional changes not only in education but also in health care, and in industry through promoting trade unions. An important aim of PASOK’s political agenda was to increase the number of students in compulsory, post-compulsory education and higher education. For this reason, it established the *Integrated Lykeio* (a kind of upper secondary comprehensive school), and modified the school curriculum, the content of textbooks, and the entry examination system to upper secondary and tertiary education. It upgraded the status of technical-vocational schools and introduced 3-year technological higher education institutions (TEI) for those students who wished to obtain a vocational higher degree. It institutionalized the broad participation of parents and representatives of the local community in the so-called ‘local committees’, whose main aim was to facilitate the operation of the school and to improve the communication between schools and local authorities.

‘A TEI in every village, a University for every city and 15% of GNP for education’ was the slogan of Andreas Papandreou, the Prime Minister during the ‘high period’ of PASOK reform (1981-1990). In order to widen participation in higher education, PASOK established new university departments, and new technological institutions throughout Greece, this leading to a dramatic increase in the number of students, from 26.7% in 1993 to 58% in 2005, (GMNERA 2005). PASOK’s policies were also successful in increasing the number of students studying at secondary level and in vocational schools, though the majority of secondary school students continue to opt for the upper general secondary school with the aim of continuing on to university.

Despite the reforms, there remained problems of several kinds. There are still not enough university places to accommodate all candidates. Partly as a result of this, a large number of secondary school graduates continue their studies abroad. Moreover, despite these changes, the Greek education system retained its highly competitive and academic nature. Entry to Universities is structured through the national Higher Education entrance examination, where secondary schools students are assessed in a number of subjects relevant to their choice of discipline which are heavily burdened with content knowledge.

While PASOK preserved the centrally controlled character of school education, it gave to higher education an unprecedented degree of autonomy. It introduced a democratic system of extensive participation of students and members of academic staff in the administration of higher education institutions (Parliamentary Act No 1268/1982 amended thereafter). For example, Rectors, Vice-Rectors and Heads of Department were appointed by an electoral body in which the votes of the student representatives from the youth sections of the political parties were given almost equal weighting to those of academic staff (40%, see Gouvias 2012). The wide participation of students was also present in decisions made by the Departmental General Assembly and the Senate, which controlled, among other things, the content and structure of studies. In addition, the University space was acknowledged as a place for the free exchange of ideas and democratic dialogue, and was protected from intervention by the police (‘Academic Sanctuary’). Many commentators interpreted this autonomy and democratisation of higher education as a direct product of the struggles of the student movement, especially during the years of the military dictatorship (1967-1974) and indeed afterwards: universities were the site for significant levels of leftist radicalism post-1974 (see Sotiris, 2013: 2011). However, autonomy did not extend to financial matters: budget allocation remained the responsibility of the state (Ministries of Education and of National Economy), with the spending of each department being controlled by an independent auditory mechanism, subordinated to the Ministry of Justice.

**Towards 2000**

From 1974 to 1986, the number of people employed in the public sector doubled; by the 1990s the number of public employees was estimated to be in excess of 700,000 (Charalambidis et al 2004). However, the increase in public employment waned thereafter, and unemployment rates started to rise, especially among university graduates, including graduates from teacher education courses. Until 1997, university graduates who wished to become school teachers were appointed automatically through a directory of employment, a system which appeared impermeable to clientelism. Over the period of university expansion, however, the number of graduates began to exceed the number of positions to be filled each year, creating a waiting list, which led to long gaps for some between graduation and employment in schools, in some cases up to fourteen or fifteen years. This changed with the 1997 Education Act, which introduced a points system for the hiring of school teachers so that it became competitive: appointment depended (and still depends) on the number of a teacher’s postgraduate qualifications (e.g. MA, PhD,) and the results obtained in national examinations concerned with subject knowledge, pedagogy, and lesson planning. This change in the appointment of teachers seems to signal the beginning of an era where ‘lifelong training’ and ‘precarity’ would be legitimized through an ideology of meritocracy (see also TPTG 2008). The introduction of the examination system reduced the relative value of the simple possession of a degree in favour of an individualized record of performance.

Many unemployed teachers found jobs in the so-called *frontistiria* - private preparatory schools, designed especially for those students who plan to take the national higher education entrance examination. These schools operate in parallel with state schools. They offer supplementary schooling, usually in the evening, especially but not exclusively, for those students who aim to secure place in ‘elite’ schools (such as Medicine, Law, Modern Greek Language) or ‘elite’ universities (e.g. University of Athens and the University of Thessaloniki). The need for the *frontistiria* relates to the vast amount of content that students have to cover in preparation for the University entrance examination and the insufficient time available to teachers to prepare them. The continuing existence of this highly organized private education sector (*parapaideia*) raises important questions about equality of opportunity. How to tackle it has been a perennial topic of negotiations among teachers’ unions and Ministers of Education, with the former asking for a reform of the examination system and an increase in the spending on education so that more teachers are employed in order to offer the necessary support to the students.

Alongside the stabilising of private provision, clientelism continued to operate in multifaceted ways, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, creating new networks or maintaining existing ones. The fact that, post-1974, the Greek political scene has been dominated by two political parties (PASOK and ND) helped to strengthen this. The election of Rectors was sometimes turned into a corrupt game of internal politics between the candidates and the student representatives of the political parties. Decisions to establish new higher education institutions were often driven more by local interests than national planning. In addition, the number of places in higher education offered was used by both PASOK and ND as a means to attract voters (Pshacharopoulos 2003), though in order to avoid a fiscal crisis, state expenditure on education as a proportion of the GNP remained at low levels (between 3.5 and 4 percent) so that expansion was underfunded. In 1996, reflecting on the inability of his political party to challenge the central mechanism through which it sustained its power over the years, George Papandreou, Minister of Education, wrote: ‘… PASOK has shown itself to be incapable of cutting the Gordian knot between the centralisation, the clientelistic relationships and bureaucracy… instead of changing these foundations of governance we used them. And these absorbed us and weakened us’ (Papandreou 2004, pp. 18-19).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the 1990s witnessed a general demand to reform educational provision. Critics pointed to a number of well-established problems: under-resourced schools; an over-burdened curriculum; a secondary school system which functioned primarily as a preparatory level for higher education; the continuation of the key role of over-crowded private schools and private preparatory schools that prepared candidates for tertiary exams; the increasing numbers of students delaying university graduation; and the high level of unemployment among those who did graduate. Concerns were also expressed about the overall quality of higher education provision, the frequency of student demonstrations, the gratis provision of university textbooks and incidents of abuse of university sanctuary by some students and members of the public.

**From clientelism to neo-liberalism**

Unlike many other countries, where the deep change in social policy from ‘welfare’ to ‘markets and choice’ was put on the political agenda by pressure groups belonging to the political right (see Jones 2002), in Greece this shift was associated with the adoption of a neo-liberal orientation by the socialist party. After the 1996 elections the shift in PASOK’s policies in a neo-liberal direction was exemplified by the Government’s open support for the gradual privatization of Greece’s large public sector and its decision to enter the Economic and Monetary Union of Europe (in 2001). It soon began to introduce measures in accord with European policies in an attempt to reduce the national debt and inflation, and to ‘accelerate modernization and the rate of economic growth’ (PASOK, 2000 political manifesto). This emphasis on ‘modernisation’ was perceived by many Greeks as promising a better political, as well as economic, future by securing and bolstering the position of the Greek nation within the European Union. The ‘neo-liberal turn’ was approved by the electorate twice (in 1996 and 2000), thereby giving PASOK a mandate to promote it further.

Thus, since 1996 Greece has experienced a gradual ‘retreat’ by the state from its obligation to finance and support education alongside a continuing flow of education policies aimed at making compulsory and higher education more effective and more accountable in economic terms. When ND came into office after the 2004 general election, it not only retained some of the basic principles of PASOK education policy but stressed even further the need to improve links between education and the market, by enhancing student outcomes in employment skills and competencies, promoting privatization, and strengthening assessment and accountability procedures at all educational levels (ND manifesto, 2003). European Union policies, especially the Bologna process (1999) and the Lisbon strategy (2000), have played a crucial role in this project. Around the same time, a few research-intensive technological universities which had been successful at making links with the industry using European research funding, began to call openly for a more entrepreneurial university. Of particular political importance in this context has been the campaign since the 1990s for the amendment of Article 16 of the Greek constitution, which explicitly states that higher education provision is the sole responsibility of the state. Amending the article is a precondition of the full establishment of private universities. (There has been tremendous resistance to those proposed changes from the majority of Rectors and, of course, from the student movement).

The right to ‘free education for all’, one of the most important positive features of the Greek education system, has also been a crucial mechanism for maintaining the legitimacy of the post 1974-state. Partly because of this, both PASOK and ND governments have been very reluctant to push forward too far their privatization agenda, fearing that any challenge to the electorate’s belief in their children’s entitlement to free education could jeopardize re-election. It can be argued, then, that delay in the implementation of neo-liberal education policies is the result, at least in part, of a concern with preserving party interests rather than commitment to a common goal for education.

**The ‘modernisation’ of compulsory and post-compulsory education**

The new rhetoric of the ‘market school’ has particularly influenced a sector of the system – a variety of state and private secondary and post-secondary institutions of technical, vocational, continuing and distance education provision. When European funding became available to be spent on Greek state schools and universities, the government took this as an opportunity, primarily, to link the management and operation of vocational institutions to the needs of the market. (‘Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training’, 2000-2006). Using a reformed management structure, the Greek state maintains the overall monitoring of these institutions and is responsible for the certification/accreditation of their degrees. However, the supervisory role lies with national bodies that include representatives of employers’ associations, teachers, parents, political parties, and so on. Employer representatives (e.g. the Association of the Greek Industrialists, ΣEB) are encouraged to make explicit proposals to government about the curriculum of this new market school.

In the compulsory education sector the emergent policy preferences of the 1996 socialist government were reflected in the 1997 Education Act (modified in 2001). This Act introduced the ‘Unified Curriculum Framework’, in primary (*Dimotiko*) and secondary education (*Gymnasio*). This defined the content that has to be covered during the compulsory years of schooling; in much the same way as does the National Curriculum in England and Wales. Most importantly, for the first time in the history of the Greek education system this framework included guidelines for pedagogy and assessment. Progressive ideologies about learning, teaching and assessment were linked with the achievement of ‘objectivity’ and ‘reliability’ in teachers’ judgments about pupils’ progress (see Paragoueli-Vouliouris, 1999: 6). Concepts such as ‘goals’, ‘objectives’ and ‘target setting’ were introduced as important pedagogical tools for the effective delivery of the curriculum, and emphasis was placed on the development of pupils’ ‘creativity’ and ‘critical thinking’.

For the government, these changes were presented as a ‘paradigm shift’ in Greek education: a necessary response to the need for ‘modernisation’ (Hellenic Pedagogic Institute 2009). For the teaching profession, the Government’s rhetoric signaled a gradual loss of teachers’ control over the teaching process in favour of control by external indicators. However, very little of the content of this legislation has been implemented in practice yet. This is because the Greek bureaucratic system is largely dependent on the political party in Government and in this sense it is much weaker than other bureaucratic systems, such as the British one. Moreover, there is a regular turnover of Ministers of Education, and a tendency for each new minister to amend the work of her or his predecessors, partly as a response to pressures from protesters but also because education goals are often dictated by loyalty networks. As George Papandreou, then Minister of Education, commented: ‘One of the major obstacles to the success of educational reform in Greece has been the discontinuity brought about because of political changes, including changes of Ministers of Education even within the same government’ (Papandreou, 1996). As a result, the implementation of laws is, generally speaking, a very slow process.

**Intensification**

Since 1997, however, there has been a tendency for school education to become more intensive. In 2001, revised school textbooks for both teachers and students were introduced to schools (these were modified in 2006). The new textbooks were characterised by an increase in the amount of subject knowledge to be covered, and thereby made greater academic demands (Koustourakis 2007). This change in content was accompanied by a further increase in the number of subjects taken in the school-leaving exams (at the end of the *Gymnasio* and *General Lykeio*) for entry to University. By contrast, the school leaving exams for entry to vocational institutions (Vocational Lykeio, and other vocational schools) remained easier.

By strengthening even further central control over what is to be taught and how, the Government deepened the separation of high-achieving students from average- or low-achieving ones, channeling the latter into vocational education and producing in this way an even more diversified labour force. For many commentators, the secondary school students’ resistance against the privatization of higher education in 2006-2007 was also an expression of their accumulated discontent with the intensification of studies and the experience of precarious and devalued labour. As Greece was entering recession in 2008, and youth unemployment levels were rising (24.3 per cent in September 2008), the killing by the police of a fifteen-year-old student, Alexis Grigoropoulos, on 6 December 2008, prompted a new wave of social unrest (Karamichas 2008).

**Education reform in the years of the ‘TROIKA’**

The neo-liberal agenda has been taking shape for some time in Greece, albeit implemented only in part. However, in the conditions of the current economic crisis neo-liberal change is being accelerated. The depth of the difficulties experienced by young people on the labour market is being used by politicians to justify further education reform, even though the changes proposed are unlikely to stem the growth of a precariat (Standing 2011, see also Innes in this volume). This is particularly evident in the Government’s latest proposed reforms of the education system, those relating to the post-compulsory sector (*Geniko* and Vocational *Lykeio*), which went through Parliament at the end of August 2013. An important aspect of the ‘Pupil first – the new School’ is the introduction of an optional fourth year apprenticeship route in the vocational *Lykeio* (EΠΑΛ), which aims to strengthen further the links between the school and the local labour market (<http://www.minedu.gov.gr/neo-sxoleio-main.html>, accessed 24 August 2013). From 2013-14, EΠΑΛ students will have the option either to graduate and take the entrance exam for higher technological institutions or to obtain a diploma by doing what is, in effect, unpaid work for a year in local businesses. Commenting on these changes, Konstantinos Arvanitopoulos, Minister of Education in the Coalition Government, said:

‘I believe that the proposal for the new school reinforces the secondary and post-secondary free education provision. The reformed General *Lykeio*, and the innovative four year Vocational *Lykeio*, opens routes for education which will lead to the acquisition of academic knowledge and vocational rehabilitation’ (interview to *Sunday Ethnos*, 25.08.2013).

Another important element of the 2013 Act is a revised examination system for entry to Universities, which allows the end-of-year examination results for each of the three years of the General *Lykeio* to count towards entry into higher education. Although this system appears meritocratic, the danger is that it will heighten the demands for *parapaideia*, making further financial demands on families that are currently struggling to survive on severely reduced salaries. Teachers and the teachers’ unions have argued that this new system will only increase educational inequalities by encouraging students, especially those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, to opt for the apprenticeship route, hoping that in this way they may be able to find employment. In doing so, they will forego the chance of going on to higher education.

In a recent interview about the proposed new school, the president of OΛME (Greek Federation of Secondary State School Teachers) Themis Kotsifakis made this point clear:

‘The proposal for the new *Lykeio* is based on the so-called “tripled” educational model, it encourages the separation of students into three categories… The proposed new *Lykeio* is examination results-driven and as a result it will drive down the quality of teaching with the potential for teaching to be focused exclusively on the preparation of students for examinations, it will raise the demands for *parapaideia* and will increase the number of students who leave school” ([www.alfavita.gr/arthron/na-](http://www.alfavita.gr/arthron/na-)συγκροτήσουμε-ενιαίο-μέτωπο-υπεράσπiσης-της-δημόσιας-εκπαίδευσης accessed August 19, 2013).

**Teachers**

Other planned changes relate to the evaluation of teachers’ work. As in many other parts of Europe, since the late 1990s secondary school teachers have been criticised for declining results in the school-leaving examinations (Gouvias 1998). In 2002, the PASOK government passed an Act for the evaluation of teachers’ work; an essentially neo-liberal attempt to measure the effectiveness of teachers and schools. The Act included the publication of a detailed manual of responsibilities (*Kathikontologio,* in Greek*)* for each institutional role within the education sector, such as the regional administrative director, school advisors, and schoolteachers. Whereas in the 1980s, school advisors operated in an advisory role, with the new Act they became responsible for working collaboratively with the headteacher and the regional administrative director to detect weak practice and ensure that it was improved. Soon after the proposals became law, a discussion paper was circulated which described the competencies that should be demonstrated and the obligations that must be met by teachers and schools (GMNERA, 2002a; 2002b). This paper challenged the principle of tenure – something teachers possessed by virtue of their status as public servants - by pointing out what could be done if they were found to be not ‘up to standard’: they could be asked to attend regular professional development courses to improve their performance, be temporarily suspended from their teaching duties and be assigned administrative roles, or be made redundant on the grounds of ‘teaching incompetence’ and ‘administrative inefficiency’ (GMNERA, 2002b: 16). While these moves have been postponed, so that there is no evaluation of teachers’ work at present, the idea has not been abandoned. It presages a further shift in the definition of the teacher’s role: making them accountable for their work according to competencies and standards. The assessment of teachers’ work, and of their professional development, is high on the present government’s agenda, especially in relation to the education and appointment of new teachers. With the 2010 Act, the appointment of new teachers will be followed by a two-year probationary period under the supervision of a “mentor”. At the end of that period they will be assessed in terms of teaching competency, and if they are successful will become permanent; otherwise they could be transferred to other public services. Emphasis is also increasingly being placed on the professional development of in-service teachers.

Interlinked with these changes in regulation and management, there have been since 2010 rapid and violent changes in the working conditions of teacher, including tenure. These changes are the result of emergency measures passed for the treatment of the economic crisis (Parliamentary Act 3833/2010), and include reduction of salaries (currently up to thirty per cent) and levels of recruitment across the whole of the public sector. For example, by the end of December 2013, 25000 civil servants are to be placed on a reduced salary pending redeployment or redundancy. Over the past three years, teachers’ salaries, too, have been cut back up, by to thirty per cent, and a number of schools, mainly secondary though more recently primary and nursery, have been merged or closed. At the same time, the Government has increased class sizes (up to 30 pupils), has ‘frozen’ the appointment of new teachers and closed a number of local primary and secondary education authorities in order to ‘release’ teachers and relocate them in schools where there is a perceived shortage of teaching staff.

Perhaps the most dramatic of these changes took place in the summer 2013, when the Government announced that from the 2013-14 school year subjects such as music and the arts would not be taught in the second and third year of the *Gymnasio*; it also reduced the weekly teaching hours of other subjects such as modern Greek. The overall aim of these changes is to create a ‘reserve pool’ of teachers who can be reallocated to other schools (both secondary and primary) or to administrative posts. Starting in the school year 2013-14, teachers with a ‘light’ workload in their present schools could be asked to ‘deliver’ teaching in up to four schools.

Anxiety and the fear of redundancy are the predominant feelings among the majority of secondary school teachers who went on strike. This is despite reassuring words from the Minister of Education: ‘There are not going to be redundancies, no teacher will be left without a job’ (Konstantinos Arvanitopoulos, interview in *Sunday Ethnos* 25.08.2013). As in other European countries like France, the *proletarianisation* of teachers has been intensified. Teachers are gradually losing their status, autonomy, and sense of purpose (see Guy Dreux, in this volume).

**The Entrepreneurial University**

As we have seen, since 2005, reform has radically reshaped the Higher Education Sector (see, for example, the Parliamentary Acts of 2005, 2010, 2011, and 2012). While the Greek state continues to assume a regulatory role in terms of ‘structures’ and ‘legal frameworks’, there has been a dramatic withdrawal from its obligations to provide financial support to HE, and as a consequence from its role in safeguarding constitutionally free HE provision. These changes amount to a redefinition of academic ‘autonomy’ in a neo-liberal way. Equally significant in this process is the Government’s retreat from the principle of democratic participation by shifting decision-making from the members of academic communities, including student representatives, to ‘outside experts’.

With the new Act, a top-down management model is introduced. The ‘University Council’ will consist of professors elected within the institution and ‘outside experts’ (i.e. academics from other HE institutions in Greece and abroad and/or representatives of professional associations and local businesses). This aims to enhance ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’ and ‘effectiveness’ as well as claiming to deal with nepotism. The Council will be responsible for drawing up a strategic plan for the development of the institution in local, national and international terms, and for its financial viability. Meanwhile, Senates have become much smaller, with reduced power, being responsible primarily for drawing up the learning, teaching, research and quality-assurance strategies of the institution. Student representation has been reduced to one student instead of one student representative per department. Other changes in the management of the Universities include the merging of departments into schools, so that the power of decision-making over courses, the structure of degrees and allocation of funding is shifted upwards, from Department Assemblies to the Head of School. This will enable Heads of School to introduce much more flexible courses, and/or to close courses down more easily.

Much of the emphasis in the new Act, however, has been on the funding system. Universities are now asked to generate as much income as possible through external funding, tuition for postgraduate studies, sponsorships, donations and market-oriented research. More significantly, for the first time, state funding is clearly linked to performance. In this, the Hellenic National Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQAA) will take over many of the functions of the Ministry of Education, being given new responsibilities, including allocating funding, according to a list of indicators of ‘quality’ such as the number of graduates per year, the number of students who graduate within the time limits for their courses, the amount of research funding attracted by each School, the number of doctorates awarded, and so on. The setting up of quality assurance processes has, of course, increasingly dominated the European agenda of intergovernmental cooperation, and similar funding systems have recently appeared in many EU countries such as Germany and Finland (see Gouvias, 2012, 2007).

Despite earlier assurances – ‘there can be no privatisation; there can be no fees for undergraduate courses’ (Yannos Mitsos, adviser to Minister of Education, Anna Diamantopoulou, 2011) – it is clear that the direction of travel is towards the imposition of student fees. For funding purposes, the Act has adopted a minimum three-year degree type for undergraduate studies (180 ECTs). Rectors and students have warned that these changes, as well as the introduction of sponsorship from commercial enterprises, will pave the way for the introduction of tuition fees, initially for those students who will go into a fourth or fifth year. Alongside these changes in the types of degree, and the fear of privatisation in the still-public HE sector, another important element of recent legislation is the stress on ‘individual differences’ and ‘needs’. Higher Education Institutions are now asked to set up Life-Long Learning programmes which will be offered at School level, aiming to attract students from a ‘wider social strata and age groups’ (GMNERA, 2010 in Gouvias 2012: 296). The emphasis in the Government’s rhetoric here is on ‘the flexibility of the content and the mobility of student/learners, so that the skills acquired will meet the demands of the market economy’ (ibid.). A simplistic version of human capital theory underpins this agenda. Individuals are induced to invest ‘in their future well-being by accumulating credits, learning units and so on in order to survive in a world of economic uncertainty’ (Gouvias 2012: 300). It also signals a change in the character of the ‘student’, from being a member of a collective group to a ‘customer’ who caters for his/her own needs. Academic knowledge is devalued and growing precariousness of future employment is likely to lead students to gather as many qualifications as possible.

As mentioned earlier, the state has not succeeded yet in changing Article 16 of the Greek Constitution. However, drawing on European Union legislation on labour mobility and qualification recognition (see directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications), the 2005 Parliamentary Act allows the recognition of degrees by private institutions which act as franchises of foreign universities, the argument being that graduates from such colleges should have the same job opportunities as the ones available to those from Greek public universities. In November 2012, the Troika demanded that the Greek Government fully legitimise not only undergraduate degrees but also postgraduate qualifications (MAs and PhDs) offered by such colleges, the only restriction being that holders of such qualifications will not be allowed to gain posts in public Higher Education Institutions (see Sotiris, 2013). This will inevitably introduce competition between state and private higher education institutions.

Finally, several aspects of the 2011 Act aim at disciplining political activity within universities and among students. ‘Academic Sanctuary’ has been redefined and linked with Article 15 (1) of the ‘Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union’ on the protection of the ‘right to work’. From now on, strikes of academic and non-academic staff, and student occupations, which are seen to violate the right of University employees to enter the workplace, can be repressed by the police without the consent of university senates. Under the new legislation, not only will students find it more difficult to protest but demonstrations will be subject to police intervention.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the 2011 Act (and that of 2012) has generated stormy reactions from rectors and students. In 2011 Yannis Mylopoulos, Rector of Greece’s largest university, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and one of the most outspoken opponents of the proposed ‘reform’, warned in a letter to Diamantopoulou that the measures could not take effect without the cooperation of institutions, and that there would be strikes disrupting universities once the academic year began. Indeed, at the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year more than 80 schools and departments were reported to be under occupation by students, in order to put pressure on the Government to withdraw the legislation. The senate committees of the occupied institutions postponed the examination period in an act of solidarity with the students. 700 academics with international reputations signed a statement expressing their support, asking for withdrawal of the law and for a dialogue with the academic community to bring about legislation to preserve the self-government of universities, adequate finances for higher education and respect for European tradition.

While in the 2011-12 academic year elections for the new University Councils were blocked by academics and students, in the following year the Government finally managed to hold them by introducing an electronic voting system. However, the economic pressures the country is now facing could help spur universities to adopt the changes as a means of survival. Over the past three years, state funding for HE has been reduced by up to 70 percent; academic salaries have been cut by 20-30 percent and more than 700 elected academics are waiting for their appointment, which may take up to five years. New appointments have been frozen until 2016, and there are further Government plans to reduce the number of non-academic staff who work in universities, as part of the demands made by the Troika to reduce the number of civil service employees.

Finally, as with schools, the restructuring of HE is taking place in a rushed way. ‘Plan Athena’ is the recent Government plan for the ‘spatial restructuring’ of Greek higher education, which involves the merging or closing of departments and technological educational institutions. At present students are uncertain about their future and the value of their degrees and plan further protests for the 2013-14 academic year.

**The uncertain present and the unpredictable future**

The wave of ‘reforms’ is endless, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Some of these are the product of years of political hesitation on the part of the two main political parties, and resistance from students, teachers and academics. Many of the latest ‘reforms’, though, have been prompted by the Troika and the OECD, as a result of the current economic crisis. Generally speaking, they have been announced in the summer when schools are closed, in order to minimise organised resistance. As I write this, the new school and academic year is about to begin: there is concern on all sides about what it will bring. In 1981, Anna Frangoudakis, Professor of Sociology at the University of Athens, commented on the direction of the education reforms proposed by the progressive social forces of the 1960s and 1970s. She wrote: ‘Greek society is disconcerting. Nothing seems to happen the way one predicts’ (1981: 7). Her words seem even more true today: it is uncertain what will happen next, not least because of the rise of new political parties, SYRIZA on the Left, and Golden Dawn on the far-Right.

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1. The Bologna process refers to a series of agreements between European countries designed to ensure comparability in the standards and quality in Higher Education in order to increase its international competitiveness. This task links with the target set by the European Council in 2000 (Lisbon Strategy) to make the European Union the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. A small number of state Muslim schools exist for the minority population of Northern Thrace. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)