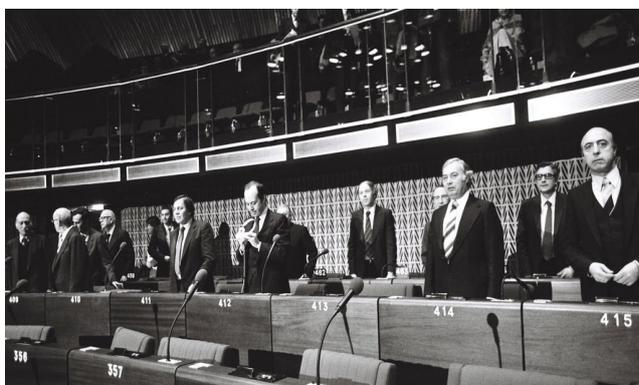


The European Parliament and Greece's accession to the European Community

SUMMARY

Enlargement of the European Communities (EC) to the south represented one of the most profound changes in European politics of the 1980s. It dramatically altered political, economic and social structures not only in the EC and the then Member States, but also in the three accession countries: Greece, Portugal and Spain. This year marks the 40th anniversary of Greece's accession to the European Communities (now Union). Greece became the tenth EC Member State in 1981, following its transformation from an authoritarian to a democratic system of government. Importantly, Greece's EC accession was connected with the consolidation of the country's emerging democratic system, starting with the transitional government under Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis from July 1974 on. Although in the mid-1970s it was not formally involved in deciding on EC membership, the European Parliament saw itself politically obliged to discuss the major guidelines of EC accession and to assert the need for democratic conditions in Greece.

Against this background, this Briefing looks at the democratisation process in Greece and the country's EC accession from the perspective of the European Parliament. First, it demonstrates that the Parliament demanded the fulfilment of fundamental democratic criteria before accepting any rapprochement between Greece and the Community. Resting on the basic understanding of democracy, the core demand was the holding of free and fair parliamentary elections. Second, it shows that, following the establishment of democratic structures, the European Parliament quickly developed relations with Greece, for example with the Greek Parliament in the form of a joint parliamentary committee. These relations served to support the accession process by discussing and preparing the baselines of EC enlargement.



The European Parliament welcoming 24 Greek Members, in Strasbourg in January 1981.

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Observing the Greek political situation

The liberation of Greece from authoritarian rule was closely linked to the movement towards European integration. Political change in the southern European country inevitably raised the question of its membership of the European Communities (EC). However, full integration into the EC was linked to successful democratisation. Although there was no explicit clause regarding democracy in the EC's Treaty framework concerning the accession of new countries at the time, the Community was consistent in its policy of accepting only constitutional democracies as new members.¹ Therefore, EC accession implied an implicit vote for a democratic governance system.

The EC's Member States emphasised their preference for conditions of democratic stability in Greece. From the very beginning of the Greek democratisation process in early 1974, the EC assessed the question of integrating the country positively. In fact, the EC's position on regime transition in Greece was determined by a political motive – securing the newly emerging democratic polity in southern Europe.² Crucially, the integration of Greece was the first time that a country with a recent transition from an authoritarian to a democratic system was permitted to join the Community.

The European Parliament saw itself as a careful observer of the Greek democratisation process and, with a view to EC accession, paid close attention to the country's compliance with democratic principles during the change of political system. The Copenhagen criteria of today's European Union – a set of rules requiring that an applicant country possesses the institutions to preserve democratic governance and defining whether a country is eligible to join the Union – were not yet in place. Therefore, Members of the European Parliament understood their position on the democratisation process in Greece, and their assessment of the political direction in the country, as a very important decision in the Parliament's history. For that reason, the Parliament developed a wide range of parliamentary activities to address the mid-1970s political developments in Greece, leading to the country's EC accession in 1981.

Based on historical documents from the Historical Archives of the European Parliament, including plenary debates, resolutions, minutes from the then Political Affairs Committee, and working documents, the aim of this briefing is to reconstruct and analyse the Parliament's activities during the democratisation process in Greece and the country's EC accession. Focusing on the period of great change in the political system and the political transition that followed, it will demonstrate how the European Parliament helped contribute to the success of the democratisation process in Greece, and to shape the Community's position on the country's accession at an early stage.

Freezing the association agreement

On 21 April 1967, a group of army colonels led by Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos took control of Greek affairs and established an authoritarian regime in the form of a military junta. Characterised by right-wing policies, restrictions on civil liberties and the imprisonment and torture of political opponents, the establishment of the military junta indicated a political direction heading towards the creation of a 'third Europe', alongside those of the west and east. This 'third Europe' consisted of right-wing authoritarian ruled countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain, which were outside both the Soviet bloc and the democratically determined integrated Europe, in the form of the EC. For the EC, the political significance of a 'third Europe' was demonstrated by the geographical location of these countries. Located on the southern side of western Europe, between the rest of Europe and the African world, they functioned for the EC as a geographical gateway to a politically and economically highly important region. In other words, their key position could either facilitate or hinder the EC Member States' political and economic links with countries in Africa and the Middle East.

Against this background, the Greek military junta confronted the EC with a dilemma. Either the EC had to accept and integrate Greece under the military junta, renouncing its own political values such

as democracy, the respect of human rights and the rule of law. Or alternatively, the EC could have isolated the Greek military junta, in which case it would have encouraged development of a 'third Europe'.

The European Parliament's attitude towards the Greek military junta was indicative of this dilemma. The Parliament reacted to the political situation in Greece by adopting a resolution on 11 May 1967, which called for a quick return to democratic principles.³ Nonetheless, while Parliament's resolution on the one hand clearly rejects integration of Greece under the military junta in the EC, on the other, it leaves the door open to the possibility of future integration, thereby avoiding the risk of creating a third Europe.

In addition, the EC's dilemma over the Greek military junta is revealed in its reaction to dealing with the existing Association Agreement with Greece. As one of the EC's first agreements of association with a third country, the Greek Association Agreement was signed in 1961 and came into force in 1963. In contrast with agreements concluded at the time with Turkey and the newly independent African countries, the Greek Association Agreement expressly provided for the country's eventual full EC membership.⁴

Having no formal say in association agreements at the time, the European Parliament tried to exert influence on the European Commission's decision on the association agreement's continuation. In the plenary session of 8 May 1967, for example, Willem Schuijt, a Dutch Christian Democrat Member and Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the EC-Greece Association, called on the Commission to freeze the association agreement.⁵ Schuijt justified the demand by referring to the political content of the agreement, which was not only an economic agreement but equally intended to prepare Greece's EC accession.

Moreover, in its resolution on the Greek political situation of 11 May 1967, the European Parliament announced that meetings of the EC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee were suspended until democratic structures were restored in Greece.⁶ Taking the European Parliament's initiative into account, the Commission reacted in September 1967. Those parts of the association agreement that contained specific obligations, in particular in areas of trade and customs duties, were kept active. However, in areas concerning further negotiations and not specific legal conditions, such as negotiations on the harmonisation of agricultural policies and on a new financial protocol, progress was halted until Greece returned to democracy.⁷

From the military junta to parliamentary democracy

To divert attention from its internal problems, the Greek military initiated a *coup d'état* against the Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios, on 15 July 1974. When Turkish troops landed in Cyprus on 20 July 1974, in reaction to the *coup d'état*, the tense situation between Greece and Turkey – already been exacerbated by conflict over Aegean Sea oil deposits in the spring of that year, came under even greater strain. The events in Cyprus shook the Greek nation and brought to light the poor state of the military junta. To Greek President Phaedon Gizikis, an army general who had replaced Papadopoulos as head of state in November 1973, the restoration of democracy seemed the only way to prevent a national catastrophe. As a compromise between politicians on the conservative right and moderate generals around Gizikis, a new civilian transitional government under Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis was sworn in on 24 July 1974, tasked with democratising the political system.⁸

The European Parliament reacted quickly to the political developments in Greece. In its meeting on 31 July 1974, the Political Affairs Committee appointed German Socialist Member Peter Corterier, as rapporteur on the Greek situation.⁹ The Committee held a first detailed debate on the situation in the eastern Mediterranean, focusing on Greece, on 4 September 1974. The debate's purpose was, inter alia, to consider and adopt a motion for a resolution on the implications of the new political situation in Greece for the association agreement. The motion for a resolution came about as a result of an official visit to Greece by the Parliament's President, Dutch Liberal Democrat Member

Cornelis Berkhouwer, at the invitation of the new Greek civil government in August 1974.¹⁰ During the 4 September 1974 meeting, Berkhouwer reported to the Political Affairs Committee that, apart from recent events in Greece, the central concerns in talks with the Greek government were the thawing of the association agreement and the resumption of parliamentary contacts.

Following Berkhouwer's report, the Political Affairs Committee discussed the conditions that Greece would have to fulfil to entirely unfreeze the association agreement. These conditions were finally included in the Committee's motion for a resolution on the association between the EC and Greece:

- *considering that the criteria which should govern the re-establishment of the Association between the European Community and Greece are primarily political in nature;*
- *Considers that the positive attitude concerning an early return to parliamentary democracy already shown by the Greek Government justifies the immediate 'defreezing' of the economic and commercial aspects of the Association, under conditions to be arranged by the Council of Association;*
- *Considers that pending the appointment of a new Greek parliamentary delegation following elections, exploratory talks should be held, in the near future, between a Delegation of the European Parliament and a Delegation of the former Greek Parliament;*
- *Considers therefore that the following should be the criteria to be fulfilled by the Greek Government before the Association can be resumed in full:*
 - *the holding of free parliamentary elections;*
 - *the full restoration of the rule of law and human rights¹¹*

The Political Affairs Committee unanimously adopted the motion for a resolution.¹²

The first plenary debate in the European Parliament on the Greek situation after the fall of the military junta took place on 26 September 1974.¹³ This debate was of particular importance, coming at a crucial moment when Greek citizens could learn of the European Parliament's views on the political situation in Greece through a free press. For the Parliament and the entire EC, it was a unique opportunity to contribute to Greece's democratisation. Speakers from the Parliament's political groups therefore underlined the possibility to assist in the development of the fledgling Greek democracy.

On behalf of the Political Affairs Committee, Corterier, as rapporteur on the situation in Greece, explained the Committee's motion for a resolution.¹⁴ Corterier noted that the resolution's primary aim was to signal that Greece's political home was with the EC. Nevertheless, he emphasised that for Greece to have a real possibility to obtain permanent EC membership, continuation of the country's democratisation process was indispensable.

In his explanatory statement, Corterier concentrated mainly on the question of revitalising Greece's relations with the EC by means of the association agreement. From the outset, the aim was not to pursue a technocratic revitalisation of the association agreement. In this vein, Corterier reported that parliamentary links between the European Parliament and the Greek Parliament should be re-established in the form of preparatory talks between delegations of both houses, even prior to free parliamentary elections in Greece, as a core condition for unfreezing the association agreement. In addition to former members of the EC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee, political personalities from the new Greek civil government were already available as interlocutors. Corterier noted that the Political Affairs Committee's intention was to invite delegations from Greece to visit the European Parliament in the early stages of the democratisation process, to learn about their ideas on the country's future development.

As early as September 1974, the Political Affairs Committee received information that the first free parliamentary elections after the end of the authoritarian system were to take place in Greece in November of that year. For that reason, Corterier announced in plenary session that the Political Affairs Committee was planning to send a delegation to Greece. The aim was to support and observe the first free parliamentary elections and to encourage Greek public opinion on the country's

relationship with Western Europe and the EC. Nonetheless, Corterier repeated that the condition, set out in the Political Affairs Committee's motion for a resolution for the re-establishment of the association, was the holding of free parliamentary elections. This condition satisfied, according to Corterier, the European Parliament should have no objections to reactivating the work on resuming the association agreement.

The Political Affairs Committee's view was that the European Parliament's position on the new Greek political situation was clearly a continuation of the attitude that Parliament had already taken towards the country in previous years. There was a clear signal from the Political Affairs Committee that renewed rapprochement between Greece and the EC should only be allowed following free parliamentary elections, as the most crucial step towards stabilising the country's emerging democratic system.

Restabilising the association agreement

Greece's full EC membership was not yet on the European Parliament's agenda. Nevertheless, in September 1974, a majority of members were already clearly in favour of a speedy accession. Full use of the association agreement should contribute to the stabilisation of the new political structures in Greece and thus gradually bring Greece closer to EC accession. However, all political groups linked the reactivation of the association agreement to the condition formulated by the Political Affairs Committee's motion for a resolution of 4 September: the holding of free parliamentary elections.

During the plenary debate on the Corterier report on the EC-Greece Association Agreement held on 26 September 1974, the political groups' spokesperson announced the groups' agreement in favour of adopting the motion for a resolution tabled by the Political Affairs Committee.¹⁵ Slightly differing from the Political Affairs Committee's motion, the text of the final resolution stated: 'The European Parliament ... therefore considers that the association can be fully resumed after free parliamentary elections have been held'.¹⁶ In addition, the resolution offered the prospect of full EC membership, given further political developments towards a democratic system. The resolution was not only forwarded to the EC Council of Ministers and European Commission, but also to the Greek Government.

Although trust was expressed in the Greek transitional government under Karamanlis, the political groups did not accept the transitional government, as it had not received its governmental mandate according to democratic ideals. For example, during the September 1974 plenary debate, Dutch Socialist Member Cornelius Laban stressed that the Karamanlis government had not yet received a real political mandate because it was itself appointed by generals of the former military junta and therefore could not be held accountable by the electorate in a democratic manner.¹⁷ For that reason, the Socialist Group, for example, concluded that the European Parliament should not close its eyes to the persisting risks that could interfere with genuine restoration of a stable democratic system in Greece.

Indeed the Greek transitional government's reasons for holding parliamentary elections only four months after the military junta's collapse were, *inter alia*, the need for a democratically elected government to facilitate the unfreezing of relations with the EC and the full restoration of the association agreement.¹⁸ The European Parliament took great interest in the Greek parliamentary election and the new political forces that were to become the protagonists of the democratisation process following the elections. All political groups recognised the early freedom to form political parties as a very positive step towards the reintroduction of democratic practices. This included the legalisation of the formerly banned Communist Party in particular.¹⁹

After the November 1974 Greek elections, the EC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee, under the chairmanship of Ioannis Pasmazoglou, heading the Greek parliamentary delegation, and the Belgian Liberal Member Paul De Clercq, heading the European Parliament delegation, met in Athens from 25 to 27 June 1975.²⁰ As the first Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting after many years of

disruption, it was naturally of special significance. Moreover, only a few days earlier, on 12 June 1975, the Greek Government had applied for Greece's EC accession on the occasion of the Association Council held in Athens.²¹ In addition, the EU-Greece Association Agreement was about to re-enter into force in July 1975. Pasmazoglou stressed the need to establish close political cooperation between Greece and the EC as soon as possible, to secure the new Greek democratic system. De Clercq underlined that, with the parliamentary elections of 17 November 1974, the return to democracy in Greece had become an irrefutable fact. For these reasons, the Committee adopted various recommendations to the EC and the Greek Government, which included that political consultations between the EC and Greece should be quickly expanded, particularly following Greece's application for EC membership.

Likewise, in a European Parliament plenary debate on 12 November 1975 concerning the recommendations adopted by the EC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee, all political groups emphasised the successful progress of Greek democratisation.²² The fact that Greece had managed to establish a democratic system within the short period of a couple of months was seen by the European Parliament as a proof of Greece's determination to establish stable democratic conditions as quickly as possible and to press ahead with the country's future accession to the EC.²³ The example of Greece had provided evidence to the Parliament 'that the fall of a dictatorship need not be accompanied by disorder and disorganisation, but that it can instead lead to the establishment of a democratic regime with solid parliamentary functions'.²⁴

The European Parliament pronounced that Greece had consistently taken the most important steps towards democratic politics in its domestic policy. These included the appointment of the transitional government after the military junta's fall, the first free parliamentary elections in November 1974, and the referendum held in December 1974, in which the Greek population voted for a republic and against the return of the monarchy.²⁵ Accordingly, in its response to the recommendations of the EC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee, the Political Affairs Committee described the political forces elected after the November parliamentary elections as actors who accepted the democratic rules and structure of political democracy.²⁶ Therefore, at its plenary meeting on 12 November 1975, the European Parliament adopted a resolution that stated: 'The European Parliament, ... believes, in view of the new political situation and the new outlook for the development of relations between the two sides, that permanent arrangements for closer and fuller political consultation should be established between Greece and the Community'.²⁷

Towards EC accession in 1981

Once Greece submitted its application for EC membership in mid-June 1975, the European Parliament continued to follow the accession process closely. Moreover, it aimed to pressure the Council and the European Commission to deal with Greece's accession application quickly. For example, the EC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee's recommendations from its meeting at the end of June 1975 entailed a demand addressed to the Council and the European Commission to speed up all the procedures laid down for the accession of Greece to the EC. In addition, these recommendations requested that the Commission proceed as soon as possible with the drafting of its opinion on Greece's accession.²⁸ The Commission's favourable statement was adopted in January 1976 and the formal accession negotiations at deputy and ministerial levels began one year later, in July 1976.²⁹

While not involved in the formal accession negotiations, the European Parliament continued to make use of its parliamentary instruments to influence the outcome. It did so in particular by debating and publishing its reports and resolutions at key points in the accession deliberations and negotiations. For instance, as the negotiations entered their final round in early 1979, the European Parliament held a major debate on the prospects of enlargement of the Community on 17 January 1979. In the meantime, Portugal (28 March 1977) and Spain (28 July 1977), had also submitted their membership applications after their transition from dictatorial to democratic governance. The debate was based on the report drawn up on behalf of the Political Affairs

Committee by French Liberal Member Jean-François Pintat, on the political and institutional aspects of including all three southern European countries in EC enlargement.³⁰ Pintat's report emphasised that EC enlargement was about democracy in Europe above all, and would assist in securing the new democratic systems in Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the ensuing plenary debate, Members agreed that adherence to democratic principles had to be highlighted in the acts of accession. Accordingly, the resolution adopted following the debate stated 'that the observance and defence of democratic principles form one of the essential cornerstones of [the] Community'.³¹

The European Commission opinion on Greece's application for accession of 23 May 1979 included a similar statement, that: 'the principles of pluralist democracy [...] form a part of common heritage of the peoples of the States brought together in the European Communities and are therefore essential elements of membership'.³² The Council, however, rejected the idea of incorporating a formal commitment to democratic principles in the acts of accession. The Council concluded that the Declaration on Democracy, adopted at the Council meeting in April 1978 and declaring democracy as an essential element of EC membership,³³ was sufficient in itself, as part of the *acquis* to which new Member States would have to subscribe.³⁴ The EC-Greece Accession Treaty was signed by the Heads of State and Government at the end of May 1979 and entered into force in January 1981. On this historic occasion, the European Parliament welcomed the first 24 Greek Members to its chamber in Strasbourg.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ On the accession of new countries, the Rome Treaties merely state that its terms are to be negotiated between the Member States and the applicant countries; for example Article 237 [EEC Treaty](#).
- ² See, for example, Marianne Kneuer, Die Demokratieförderung der EG bei der Transformation Südeuropas: Lehren für Ostmitteleuropa?, in: *WeltTrends*, 30 (2001), pp.111-131, here p.115.
- ³ *Entschließung zur Lage in Griechenland und betreffend die Assoziation EWG/Griechenland*, 11 May 1967, Historical Archives of the European Parliament (HAEP).
- ⁴ [Accord](#) relative aux mesures à prendre et aux procédures à suivre l'application de l'accord créant une association entre la Communauté économique européenne et la Grèce (9 juillet 1961).
- ⁵ *Europäisches Parlament, Verhandlungen, Ausführliche Sitzungsberichte, Nr. 91, Sitzung vom 8. Bis 11. Mai 1967*, p.15.
- ⁶ *Entschließung zur Lage in Griechenland und betreffend die Assoziation EWG/Griechenland*, 11 May 1967, HAEP.
- ⁷ Van Coufoudakis, The European Economic Community and the 'Freezing' of the Greek Association 1967-1974, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 16 (1977), pp.114-131, here p.118.
- ⁸ For a general account of the Greek democratisation process see, for example, Nikiforos Diamandouros, Regime Change and the Prospects for Democracy in Greece, 1974-1983, in: Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Southern Europe*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp.138-164.
- ⁹ Political Affairs Committee, Minutes of the meeting of 30 and 31 July 1974, HAEP.
- ¹⁰ Political Affairs Committee, Minutes of the meeting of 4 and 5 September 1974, HAEP.
- ¹¹ Report drawn up on behalf of the Political Affairs Committee on the association between the EEC and Greece, rapporteur Mr P. Corterier, 13 September 1974, Document 237/74, HAEP.
- ¹² Political Affairs Committee, Minutes of the meeting of 4 and 5 September 1974, HAEP.
- ¹³ Debates of the European Parliament, No 181, Session Report of Proceedings from 24 to 26 September 1974, pp.145-163.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.145-148.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.145-163.
- ¹⁶ Resolution on the association between the EEC and Greece, 26 September 1974, HAEP.
- ¹⁷ Debates of the European Parliament, No 181, Session Report of Proceedings from 24 to 26 September 1974, statement by Dutch Socialist Member Cornelius Laban, p.150.
- ¹⁸ Richard Clogg, *Griechenlands Aussichten nach den Wahlen, Europa-Archiv*, Berichte, 1975, pp.7-14.
- ¹⁹ Debates of the European Parliament, No 181, Session Report of Proceedings from 24 to 26 September 1974, pp.145-163.
- ²⁰ EEC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee, IX Session, Minutes of the Meeting, 25-27 June 1975, Greek Parliament, Athens, PE 41.490, HAEP.

- ²¹ See, for example, Antonio Varsori, The EEC and Greece's Application to join the Community, 1959-1976, Johnny Laursen (ed.), *The Institutions and Dynamics of the European Community, 1973-83*, Nomos, 2014, pp.202-220, here p.219.
- ²² Debates of the European Parliament, No 196, Session Report of Proceedings from 10 to 14 November 1975, pp.116-132.
- ²³ Ibid, for example statement by Italian Christian Democrat Member Giovanni Boana, p.121-123.
- ²⁴ Ibid, statement by French Socialist Member Pierre Giraud, p.121.
- ²⁵ Ibid, for example statement by French Liberal Member Paul De Clercq, pp.123-124.
- ²⁶ European Parliament, Working Document 337/75, HAEP.
- ²⁷ Resolution on the recommendations of the EEC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee adopted in Athens on 27 June 1975, 12 November 1975, HAEP.
- ²⁸ EEC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee, IX Session, Minutes of the Meeting, 25-27 June 1975. Greek Parliament, Athens, PE 41.490, HAEP.
- ²⁹ For a full picture of the formal accession negotiations see Eirini Karamouzi, *Greece, the EEC and the Cold War, 1974-1979*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- ³⁰ Report drawn up on behalf of the Political Affairs Committee on the prospects of enlargement of the Community, Part I: Political and institutional aspects, rapporteur Jean-François Pintat, 6 December 1978, Document 479/78, HAEP.
- ³¹ Resolution on the prospects of enlargement of the Community, Part One: political and institutional aspects, 17 January 1979, HAEP.
- ³² Commission [opinion](#) of 23 May 1979 on the application for accession to the European Communities by the Hellenic Republic.
- ³³ [Final text](#) – European Council, 20 April 1978, Copenhagen, 7-8 April 1978, Conclusion of the Presidency.
- ³⁴ Emma De Angelis and Eirini Karamouzi, Enlargement and the EC's evolving democratic identity, in: Haakon A. Ikonou, Aurélie Andry and Rebekka Byberg (eds), *European Enlargement across Rounds and Beyond Borders*, Routledge, 2017, pp.143-165, here p.154.

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