

THE GREEK ECONOMY AND THE GREEK UNIVERSITIES

Without effective higher education that includes significant R&D, it is very difficult for Greece to achieve economic development and social progress at rates that will accelerate her convergence with the other European Union partners.

The picture at Greek universities is very disappointing. Universities in Greece do not have the necessary autonomy. They hardly conduct any R%D. They have no continuous “dialogue” between universities and society. The universities produce graduates without the education / training required to work for the country’s progress. Graduates are not absorbed by the labor market while the country is losing ground in both educational level and competitiveness, holding down its growth rates and undermining convergence with the other EU countries. The universities should continuously search for the trends and requirements in society and economic life with a view to their graduates’ integration.

Progress and development should not only be measured by whether Greece has, for instance, more roads or cars than in the 1970’s, but also by its present situation in relation to other countries. Greece’s position on this comparison is not at all flattering, but what is worse is the inability of the system to adapt and keep abreast with present requirements.

Greece in the European Union Context -the situation of R&D, higher education, and economic productivity should not be approached outside of the framework of the EU, which increasingly influences the patterns of education and research in all the member states.

Any reform of the existing situation in Greece demands a careful and critical look at the broader socio-economic situation at the national level. The state structure, and particularly the way in which the state interacts with the private sector, form the national framework in which any reforms will fail or succeed.

An examination of higher education in Greece reveals an uneven and unproductive relation to the national and global economies. The university system is characterized by a high degree of 'peripheralization' in relation to the global system of higher education. This is closely related to the development of the Greek economy as peripheral, in relation to the global and European markets.

The present international educational equation has certain institutional and intellectual 'centers' that give direction, provide models, produce research, and in general function as pinnacles of the academic system. At the opposite end of the spectrum are universities that are 'peripheral' in the sense that they produce little that is original, and are generally not at the frontiers of knowledge. Because the world knowledge system is structured according to such centers, then the gravitation of research towards these centers is of little surprise. "The brain drain" illustrates a more complex form of internal misbalancing. Professional emigration is basically a consequence of the reproduction of the technical apparatus of advanced nations in underdeveloped ones. Implanted institutions come to function in accordance with the needs and requirements of the advanced nations rather than those in the receiving ones.

In modernizing countries, education often focuses on establishing a proper competence with 'modern' forms, which becomes a 'paper competence', i.e. focusing only on creating paper qualification. That is- the diploma which is the passport to a "secure" job in an ever expanding state bureaucracy, a passport to status and income. In the case of Greece the dependent economy which is initially characterized by the industrial development of decades past raises a demand for local 'mimicry' of foreign structures, in both production and education. In this case in Greece engineers are primarily qualified for the simple application and maintenance of the products of foreign technology, rather than original development.

The higher education system in Greece continues to be characterized by, importantly, the inability of the economy to absorb graduates. A more relevant part of the policy should therefore include not only the number of positions available, but the fit of the education with such positions. Unemployment of graduates has severely worsened in recent years. It exceeds 40% graduates currently and it is not only due to the present economic crisis but also due to the imbalance referred to previously.

What has been made clear up to now is that the percentage of graduates with qualifications that can raise economic productivity (industrial or agricultural) is very low. The public sector in Greece is primarily staffed by the graduates of the massive schools of economic and social sciences without any further specialization. In such a situation, the state becomes the

primary-absorption point for over-educated but under-specialized graduates and becomes a Welfare State.

The challenges faced by Greece in the development of the Information Society include:

Negative infrastructure conditions; Dysfunctional state apparatuses; Telecommunications - slow growth in a liberalized framework; Relative lack of skills necessary in today's markets; Lack of incentives and opportunities for retraining and continuous learning; Traditional basis of many economic forms; Low absorption and low absorption rate for new technologies; Insufficient research and investment in new service technologies, and so on.

Some brief recommendations on the assumption that universities will become autonomous:

First: Very briefly, create a Board of Trustees with a defined four or five year tenure. The Trustees should not be members of the internal university community. They should be selected by a committee of no more than seven professors, the president, and a elected student representative. Each trustee could be nominated by other trustees, professors, administrators, or community leaders and voted by the faculty and approved by the Board. The seven professors should be selected by the faculty senate through a vote.

The President should be selected from five finalists that a committee composed by seven professors, one student, and after a specialized consulting firm has conducted a world-wide search to find qualified candidates from which the best five are submitted, after a detail evaluation, to the Board to vote / select for the best one in their judgment. The president is a non-voting member of the Board. A chairman is elected by the voting board members (**Details of how the above takes place is beyond the space allotted for this article**).

Second: At the design phase of needed actions / policies it must ensured that the specific characteristics and needs pertaining to Greece's economic and social progress be given top consideration. These include the already severely marginal position of R&D in the national arena, and also the marginal position of existing Greek R&D in the European context.

Third: Government departments, higher education establishments, and the private sector should follow closely the developments as they unfold in order to be ready to submit proposals and implement the required actions.

Fourth: The new plans-policies should offer the opportunity to redraw the rules and alter the conditions that govern the limited R&D efforts that take place in Greece. The framework is defined (generally) by archaic legislation, and traditional patronage relationships between the higher education and research institutions, the state and the private sector has managed to stop significant R&D development in Greece. The redrafting of the new framework should allow participation of all sectors and industries. This in turn could contribute in the emergence of successful new technology businesses, an increase in employment and the lifting of the majority of the Greek regions from the lowest ranks in economic performance.

Fifth: In view of the EU R&D enlargement process Greece should seek to facilitate this expansion in the south-east European wider region. Appropriate handling of the issue could result in the transformation of Greece to a major regional centre rather than a marginal entity on Education and R&D. Thus, Greek efforts should offer trans-ethnic, trans-cultural; trans-national avenues of involvement in in Education and R&D. This may require to make the English language an operational part of the Universities.

Sixth: in parallel Greece must make changes in Labor Relations Laws, Contract Law, and establish a politically Independent Judiciary. Also the country needs to institute an effective tax law and infrastructure and start giving emphasis on competence and not only on the politically connected persons regardless of their abilities. Reduce the size of the state economy relative to the private, and give incentives to attract, preferably private, investments, and promote Entrepreneurship to exploit, commercially speaking, the R&D results. At minimum these are the needed changes before investments can be seriously considered for Greece that will have long term economic effect and not for a quick profit and then getting out!

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