

# POLITICS, POLICIES AND PRACTICE OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN GREECE: A REVIEW

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## **1. Introduction**

Since the re-establishment of Greece as a modern nation, the elimination of regional and prefectural inequalities, has been regularly preached by the government, asked for by the opposition party and recommended by many people with varying objectives and political philosophies. Since the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 and in particular since the entrance of Greece to the European Union (E.U.) in 1981, which as with other member states has been urging the government to reduce regional disparities within the country, Greece has not gone a single year without the government attempting to reform the system and the opposition criticising it, the main argument being the overwhelming role of Athens. Inside the community very few countries, with the exception of the neighbouring Mediterranean France and possibly Italy, have experienced so much reform associated with so little change. Consequently and despite the regularity and persistence of this concern and the popularity of the issue, regional convergence still remains invisible.

## **2. The administrative system**

The Greek society, influenced by an extremely turbuluous historical evolution<sup>1</sup> just described, affected from its own peculiarities and conditions and determined by a highly complex decision making process, confronts a government system that is characterised by the following<sup>2</sup>:

### **2.1. Centralised system**

The Greek System is a highly centralised and strictly hierarchical system, where all initiatives are coming from the top, which is fully occupied by the central government. At the base of the system, the local authorities have only a secondary role, namely to do the things that the central government refuses to do, but insists on determining how to be done. Guidance is also a function of the centre towards the middle level of the organisational pyramid, the prefecture, whose administrator acts simply as agent of the central government. Thus, it is of no surprise that 93% of the budget is controlled by the various ministries in Athens, which employ the same number of employees as all of the 6.039 communities (cities, towns and villages) of the country.

## **2.2. Ill-structured system**

The organisational structure of the Greek system differs significantly from what someone might expect from a really decentralised system. In fact, the structural view of a decentralised system should reflect the interplay of two factors, namely autonomy and administrative hierarchy. That is, every echelon of authority should possess the independent presence of the following necessary functions<sup>3</sup>:

- **Political:** giving them the ability to make the appropriate and relevant decisions.
- **Administrative:** permitting them to govern independently.
- **Economic:** providing them with the funds and the independence to spend them.
- **Infrastructure:** allowing them the self-reliance to carry out all of the previous functions.

Moreover, within a clearly defined hierarchy, the provision of services and the dispensation of each function is exhausted, to the possible degree, at the lower level, so that the hierarchy is determined from the bottom up and autonomy is achieved.

Unfortunately, the organisational structure of the Greek system, displays none of the above characteristics, for as we have mentioned the hierarchy is determined from the top, while the lower decision making tiers only possess limited political, independent but not sufficient administrative and inadequate economic functions as well as absolutely insufficient infrastructure<sup>4</sup>.

## **2.3. Pseudo-decentralised administration**

The result of all the unending system reforms, is that a pseudo-decentralised administrative structure (regional and local authorities exist, but do not have any power or autonomy) has been created that mainly masks some of the deficiencies of centralisation and provides needed excuses to the politicians for their failure to provide a truly decentralised system, where political, economic and administrative functions can be exercised by the prefectural and local authorities.

## **2.4. Unadjusted lower levels**

Greece, by contrast to northern European countries, has not been able to adjust the lower levels of the system (prefectures and communities) that are ill-adapted to the present day requirements of urban and regional development. The Greek prefecture map has not been altered for the last 120 years. Thus, the prefecture of Attica which approximately has 40% of the Greek population and is allocated 30% of the total amount spend by all prefectures, has the same status with Euritania with less than 0,4% of the population and 0,3% of the allocated funds. Moreover, the local political administrative system seems fossilised in the form it had in the pre-World War I period, despite the urgency of reforms and the fact that decentralisation, a policy option of all Greek parties when in opposition, was always forgotten when coming to power.

Summarising, the Greek government system is epitomised by a strong central government, controlling and dominating all regional and local affairs (political, economic and administrative) and depriving subordinate political units of any influence over fiscal, social or any other policies affecting their areas.

## **3. The political system**

The political system of Greece, is something of a paradox. On the one hand, its task is to manage an extraordinary dynamic society, which throws up a constant stream of

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new demands and opportunities. On the other hand, the organisation of the political system itself, such as the governmental bureaucracy, are such as to generate an extreme orientation toward caution. Another way to put this, is to say that the political system in Greece strives to maintain the security of its key institutions and personnel as it responds to outside stimuli. Changes in the system applied by the various political parties in power, vary widely in the strategies that they utilise to pursue such security, and in the priority that they accord it, relative to other key objectives. The result, and the main objectives, however, remain the same and unchanged through time.

Moreover, the system is characterised by fragmented authority and minimal ideological coherence. It affords numerous opportunities for veto and/or delay during the life of any program and subsequently during the implementation of any policy. In such a system, therefore, a great many people must agree before any policy initiative can be adopted and effectively implemented. Thus, political timidity is the individual norm and weak leadership is the institutional norm.

### **3.1. The decision-making process**

As a result, in Greece and with respect to regional development, the political system strives to accommodate new political demands with minimal disturbance to existing policies, institutional arrangements and individual behaviour patterns. At the same time, it is accustomed to dealing with rapidly evolving conditions and voter priorities. In short, it has certain political maintenance requirements of a conservative nature, but it is oriented as well toward dealing with the radical nature of modern reality. These characteristics result in piecemeal, but constant and relatively adaptive policy accretion. If they impair the clarity and consistency of policy outcomes, they tend also to maximise their broad acceptability. Additionally, they render the system unusually open to innovative ideas that can be injected into the ongoing stream of activities without substantially disrupting entrenched public programs, private economic interests and personal life-styles. In short, the system does not treat apparent tensions among policy objectives as inescapable sources of conflict; rather it seeks by political means to blur the tensions and by technical means to find ingenious new means of reconciling the objectives.

It follows therefore, that other things being equal, change strategies and policies for regional development will vary in political acceptability in accord with the degree to which they inconvenience institutions and powerful politicians-administrators. To this basic proposition we would add as a corollary, that the connection between administrative system and regional disparities is a key desideratum. It matters a great

deal to elected officials to be seen as champions in reforming the government (a very popular issue), rather than eradicating regional disparities (which they avoid), in the same way that powerful institution and individuals preach balanced development, but profit from regional disparities. Yet regional disparities in Greece, with its own peculiarities and conditions, reflect nothing less than the way the administrative and political system operates. Implying in this respect, that in Greece a balanced development can in on way be achieved outside and without the assistance and support of such systems.

Given, therefore, that the problem of regional disparities has been paid lip service by the decision makers, the fact that government improvements (the other side of the same coin) have not been forthcoming, can be of no surprise to anyone. As a result, as long acceptable administrative and political systems can not be achieved, regional disparities will persist. It is in this line of reasoning that the existence of regional and prefectural inequalities in Greece, can be easily illuminated with the empirical evidence presented below.

#### 4. The practice of regional development in Greece

Indeed, it is a well known fact that historically uneven patterns of development have resulted from widely different endowments in infrastructure and in human capital, which are vital prerequisites. Furthermore, there is no doubt that most of the affecting handicaps can be alleviated through new investment both in monetary and manpower terms. In such a framework, human capital, infrastructure and service provision levels, which are identified as the main elements underlying development efforts, as well as regional disparities and policies are examined. More specifically, Gross Regional Product (level of economic activity), Labour Force (human endowment), Public Investment (government's formal intervention) and the Number of Civil Servants that will be hired this year differentiated into the three educational levels (non-formal intervention) are evaluated, for in the case of Greece they best represent the disparities between its thirteen regions (Table 1).

**Table 1: Regional indicators in Greec**

Region	Recruitments			Total	GRP	Labour Force	Public Investments
	Elementary	High	University				
	Education	School Education	Education				
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A.Makedonia - Thraki	4,60	4,39	4,06	4,39	4,94	6,39	5,79
Kentriki Makedonia	8,78	14,71	17,47	12,78	16,75	16,93	11,28
Dytiki Makedonia	2,83	1,94	2,71	2,57	3,31	2,62	5,08
Thessalia	2,20	2,71	4,85	3,09	6,67	6,79	6,81
Ipeiros	2,48	3,35	3,16	2,90	2,58	2,98	5,38
Ionia Nisia	2,55	1,81	2,37	2,31	1,70	2,06	1,89
Dytiki Ellada	3,26	4,26	3,83	3,68	5,72	7,02	5,35
Stereia Ellada	3,12	2,84	5,86	3,84	6,96	5,03	6,52

Peloponnissos	1,63	2,84	4,28	2,70	5,55	6,53	11,50
Attiki	59,63	55,61	37,88	52,34	36,37	34,92	27,64
Voreio Aigaio	2,12	1,03	3,95	2,37	1,40	1,64	2,35
Notio Aigaio	4,25	2,58	2,93	3,45	2,93	2,04	3,75
Kriti	2,55	1,94	6,65	3,58	5,12	5,05	6,67

The figures in table, 1, which are all expressed as the percentage of each region to the total, point out some persistent differentiations. First, there is a significant gap between the prefecture of Attica and secondary the urbanised prefectures (Attiki, Kentriki Makedonia and Dytiki Ellada) and the rest of the country, underlining the dominant role of Athens and the next two biggest cities of Greece (Thessaloniki and Patra). Second, the distribution of every prefecture in each factor (along each column), practically follows the population distribution. Any deviation from the expected (due to their population) value simply reflects idiomatic regional circumstances (different capacities to adapt to the trends and calls of the last decades). Third, there are significant fluctuations in the distribution of every factor for each prefecture (along each row). Especially revealing are the differences between the percentages of the civil servants' recruitments and public investments rates, which reflect the actual and the government's perceived spatial needs and priorities respectively. More specifically, the distribution of public investments (publicly debated and available), representing the direct and public intervention of the government, shows expected values (based on each prefecture's population, economic activities etc.). On the other hand, recruitments, the politicians folly, their main instrument to assure votes and where responsibility can be easily diffused, show considerable deviations favouring again Attiki.

All these indicate that the political decision makers remain actually imprisoned to the notion of the Attica-centric state. To this, if we add the confessed high rates of inter-regional migration from the periphery towards the metropolitan areas of Athens, Thessaloniki and Patra, two major obstacles in any political or socio-economic effort aiming at reducing disparities levels are revealed. Furthermore, if this philosophy of regional planning practice persists, there is no doubt that the Greek regional indicators in the following decades will exhibit no improvement in terms of harmonious cohesion, balanced development and acceptable infrastructure levels and thus regional convergence will still be a fading away target.

### **5. The mediterranean frontier**

Given that Greece is a member of the European Union and the Union's new structural policies recognised in the Maastricht Treaty initialised a new phase, where the elimination of regional disparities and the strengthening of inner regional co-operation and cohesion within each Member State, are outlined as the main objective and an unquestionable prerequisite of every Government's political initiatives; it seems only logical to examine in the next few paragraphs the issue of regional disparities in a broader area and at an international level, that of the Mediterranean Countries of the European Union. This line of reasoning stems from the well established fact that within a community which is gradually moving towards explicit union, wide fluctuations are by

no means acceptable, especially when they refer to countries that have to share common economic and structural characteristics.

In order to detect the varying degrees of convergence or divergence, in an inter-regional perspective, within and between the Mediterranean countries of the European Union, an analogous analysis was performed. It should be noted that although the comparison of regional endowments raises immense methodological issues, we feel confident that the following five factors reflect and affect regional development efforts within every Member State. These factors are: employment rate, number of hospital beds, number of dwellings, the services share and number of doctors.

The analysis was relatively simple, but it was felt that the two calculated indices were particularly effective in describing the existing situation. More specifically, for every region in each Mediterranean country the standard deviation  $S_r$  of the percentages of each region to the country's total was calculated, as a straightforward measure of dispersion. In this framework, values of  $S_r$  near zero in effect represent a uniform distribution of all factors in a given region in accordance with the relevant importance of the region. On the other hand, values significantly different from zero, indicate political decision making processes that preserve and encourage regional differentials. As a second indicator, the standard error  $S_{sr}$  of the  $S_r$ 's of each column was calculated to reflect the regional homogeneity within each Mediterranean Member State and effectively represent a decentralisation index. Again, values of this index near zero reflect the existence of inter-regional uniformity, while larger values verify the absence of regional homogeneity.

**Table 2: Regional indicators in the Mediterranean Countries**

Region	$S_r$	Population	Employment	Hospital Beds	Dwellings	Services Share	Doctors
A.Makedonia - Thraki	0.80	5.59	6.29	5.25	5.25	3.97	4.60
Kentriki Makedonia	3.04	16.88	16.74	15.77	15.77	15.19	8.78
Dytiki Makedonia	0.27	2.86	2.71	2.51	2.51	2.13	2.83
Thessalia	1.85	7.13	6.91	6.53	6.53	5.44	2.20
Ipeiros	0.33	3.31	3.25	3.14	3.14	2.74	2.48
Ionia Nisia	0.30	1.86	2.18	2.16	2.16	1.68	2.55
Dytiki Ellada	1.36	6.83	7.01	6.08	6.08	5.51	3.26
Stereia Ellada	0.99	5.63	4.94	5.25	5.25	3.76	3.12
Peloponnissos	1.93	5.91	5.70	6.58	6.58	4.00	1.63
Attiki	10.13	34.34	35.04	35.47	35.47	46.01	59.63
Voreio Aigaio	0.52	1.94	1.69	2.94	2.94	2.32	2.12
Notio Aigaio	0.72	2.50	2.18	2.99	2.99	3.29	4.25
Kriti	1.15	5.22	5.35	5.33	5.33	3.95	2.55
<b>GREECE</b>			<b><math>S_{sr}=2,63</math></b>				
Galicia	0.93	7.20	8.19	6.37	6.37	5.64	5.97
Asturias	0.13	2.89	2.84	2.89	2.89	2.60	2.99

Region	$S_r$	Population	Employment	Hospital Beds	Dwellings	Services Share	Doctors
Cantabria	0,07	1,35	1,34	1,31	1,31	1,34	1,49
Pais Vasco	0,40	5,46	5,51	4,91	4,91	5,37	5,97
Navarra	0,12	1,34	1,43	1,21	1,21	1,23	1,49
Rioja	0,07	0,67	0,72	0,73	0,73	0,56	0,75
Aragon	0,28	3,11	3,30	3,44	3,44	2,92	3,73
Madrid	1,98	12,52	12,96	11,91	11,91	15,71	16,42
Castilla-Leon	0,55	6,74	6,72	7,53	7,53	6,22	7,46
Castilla-La Mancha	0,74	4,40	4,13	4,89	4,89	3,67	2,99
Extremadura	0,27	2,90	2,36	2,79	2,79	2,78	2,24
Cataluna	1,04	15,42	17,53	16,93	16,93	14,76	16,42
Comunidad Valenciana	0,98	9,72	10,22	11,55	11,55	9,32	9,70
Baleares	0,29	1,75	1,98	2,22	2,22	2,08	1,49
Andalucia	1,42	17,76	14,43	15,57	15,57	18,05	15,67
Murcia	0,14	2,64	2,62	2,51	2,51	2,47	2,24
Ceuta y Melilla	0,16	0,32	0,25	0,24	0,24	0,50	0,00
Canarias	0,77	3,81	3,48	3,01	3,01	4,95	2,99
<b>ESPANA</b>			<b><math>S_{Sr} = 0,53</math></b>				
Norte	3,63	35,02	36,03	29,72	29,72	27,80	n/a
Centro	2,98	17,50	17,75	20,03	20,03	12,74	n/a
Lisboa a Vale do Tejo	4,91	33,53	33,62	34,61	34,61	45,01	n/a
Alentejo	1,11	5,53	4,82	7,28	7,28	5,56	n/a
Algarve	0,55	3,43	3,08	4,13	4,13	4,39	n/a
Azores	0,25	2,41	2,02	2,21	2,21	2,69	n/a
Madeira	0,32	2,57	2,69	2,01	2,01	2,40	n/a
<b>PORTUGAL</b>			<b><math>S_{Sr} = 1,86</math></b>				
Ile-de-France	2,30	18,84	21,64	18,65	n/a	21,92	24,11
Champagne-Ardenne	0,16	2,38	2,26	2,31	n/a	1,98	2,13
Picardie	0,40	3,20	2,89	2,92	n/a	2,79	2,13
Haute-Normandie	0,40	3,07	3,14	2,80	n/a	2,84	2,13
Centre	0,30	4,19	3,96	4,26	n/a	3,76	3,55
Basse-Normandie	0,20	2,46	2,61	2,56	n/a	2,27	2,13
Bourgogne	0,37	2,84	2,52	3,11	n/a	2,62	2,13
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	0,51	6,99	6,09	6,19	n/a	6,62	5,67
Lorraine	0,23	4,06	4,08	3,78	n/a	3,71	3,55
Franche-Comté	0,22	1,94	1,80	1,90	n/a	1,62	1,42
Pays de la Loire	0,52	5,40	5,59	5,20	n/a	4,96	4,26

Region	$S_r$	Population	Employment	Hospital Beds	Dwellings	Services Share	Doctors
Bretagne	0,39	4,94	5,34	4,99	n/a	4,88	4,26
Poitou-Charentes	0,31	2,81	2,45	2,91	n/a	2,47	2,13
Aquitaine	0,15	4,94	4,62	4,95	n/a	4,80	4,96
Midi-Pyrenées	0,31	4,30	4,39	4,30	n/a	4,19	4,96
Limousin	0,14	1,27	1,26	1,15	n/a	1,16	1,42
Auvergne	0,26	2,33	2,19	2,68	n/a	2,01	2,13
Languedoc-Roussillon	0,43	3,75	3,21	4,19	n/a	4,05	4,26
Provence-Alpes- Côte d' Azur	1,15	7,53	6,92	8,22	n/a	8,73	9,93
Corse	0,18	0,44	0,21	0,56	n/a	0,49	0,71
Guadeloupe	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	n/a	0,00	0,00
Martinique	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	n/a	0,00	0,00
Guyane	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	n/a	0,00	0,00
Réunion	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	n/a	0,00	0,00
<b>FRANCE</b>			<b><math>S_{Sr} = 0,46</math></b>				
Piemonte	1,22	7,62	9,82	9,22	9,22	6,60	7,95
Valle d'Aosta	0,14	0,20	0,28	0,36	0,36	0,22	0,00
Liguria	1,56	3,01	0,00	4,14	4,14	3,66	3,41
Lombardia	2,26	15,60	20,67	15,58	15,58	14,13	15,91
Trentino-Alto Adige	0,30	1,55	2,06	1,65	1,65	1,69	1,14
Veneto	1,12	7,68	9,91	7,11	7,11	6,64	6,82
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	0,91	2,10	0,00	2,27	2,27	2,21	2,27
Emila-Romagna	1,01	6,86	9,32	7,39	7,39	6,51	6,82
Toscana	0,70	6,23	7,79	6,34	6,34	6,39	5,68
Umbria	0,18	1,44	1,70	1,35	1,35	1,38	1,14
Marche	0,41	2,50	3,32	2,45	2,45	2,19	2,27
Lazio	1,26	9,06	10,62	8,87	8,87	11,50	11,36
Campania	1,32	9,41	9,71	7,35	7,35	10,02	10,23
Abruzzi	0,15	2,22	2,62	2,28	2,28	2,22	2,27
Molise	0,36	0,59	0,00	0,62	0,62	0,55	1,14
Puglia	2,81	7,12	0,00	6,51	6,51	7,27	6,28
Basilicata	0,04	1,09	1,06	1,05	1,05	1,02	1,14
Calabria	1,52	3,76	0,00	3,76	3,76	3,85	3,41
Sicilia	0,69	9,06	8,15	9,19	9,19	9,75	7,95
Sardegna	0,30	2,90	2,97	2,51	2,51	2,99	2,27
<b>ITALIA</b>			<b><math>S_{Sr} = 0,75</math></b>				



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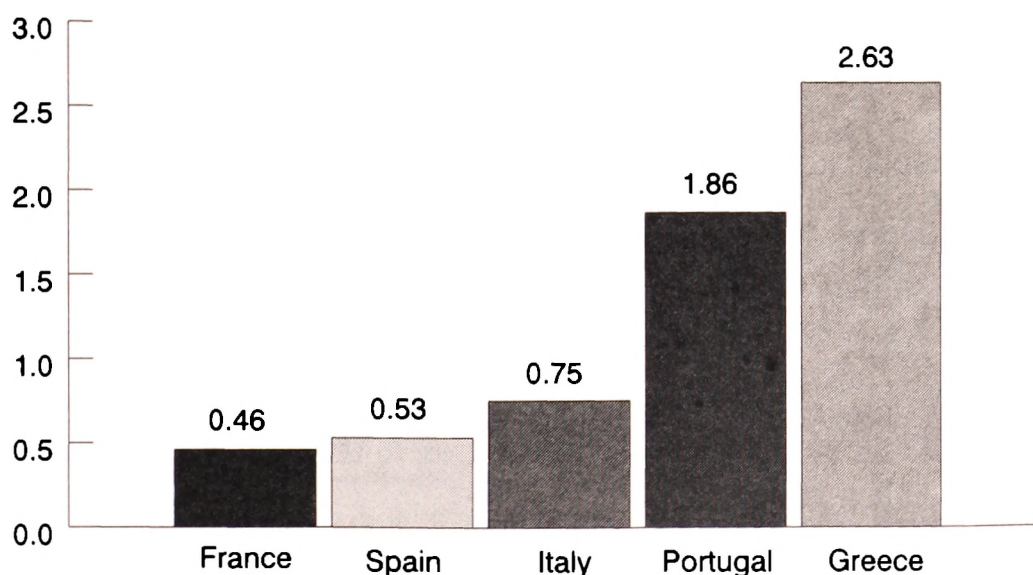
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The results of the analyses are shown in Table 2, while the values of the decentralisation index  $S_{sr}$  are depicted on Fig. 1. The results were expected with the possible exception of Spain. Specifically, a value for France equal to 0,46, the smallest among all the Mediterranean countries, can be explained by the well known fact that France compared to its Mediterranean neighbours tend to have high infrastructure and service provision levels, which become significantly higher and almost uniform when they are standardised for population. As for Spain, the relatively small value of 0,53 might be explained in terms of the rapidly expanding Spanish Market and the massive increases in Foreign Direct Investment over the 1980's. The latter, brought major benefits to the country's national and regional economies and confirmed the fact that Spain is increasingly considered as a favourable candidate for further expenditure on regional incentives. On the other hand, for Greece and Portugal which represent, by far, the worst values of the index, the problem is indeed twofold: To strengthen the weak regions in terms of infrastructure and service provision levels, through the concentration of the available resources to the worst-affected areas and to increase the respective regional expenditures and the emphasis placed on the improvement on inter-regional differences.

**Figure 1: Decentralisation index in the Mediterranean**



## 6. Epilogue

Although the opponents of the decentralisation task range from the ever power-hungry central government politicians, the top civil servants and the local officials satisfied with a system that gives them influence and discharges them from the burden of exercising power, in Greece and in the other Mediterranean Member States, it is the overall political framework within which decisions are made, that the traditional centralised systems were strengthened and intensified.

In this respect, it was of no surprise that the overall status of both the Greek and the rest of the Mediterranean regions are reflected in the results shown earlier. And that despite the fact that the data analysed refer to the 1990's, well after the European Community demanded in 1982 a more decentralised administration and thus elimination of regional disparities. It seems therefore, that this is a process which has yet to run its full course. On that basis, it is possible and plausible to claim, without being contradicted by past and present evidence, that decentralisation a policy option of all Mediterranean countries has yet to be seriously considered by the Southern European politicians. It remains, however, to be seen, whether the problem will be finally resolved through the verification of the old say «where people go, politics follow» and thus the solution will surprisingly emerge from an unavoidable change, whereby people and activities move away from the centre, a change that has already started in Greece, despite or rather in spite of what the politicians do or fail to do.

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