

Papandreou's education policy

I READ with interest the editorial by John Psaropoulos in the June 30 issue ("Pasok needs ideas; the government needs backbone"). It touches on certain crucial issues of the Greek educational system and its problems.

Although I cannot reply on behalf of Pasok, I would like to make a number of points regarding the current situation, as well as the recent history on the issue. I am doing this not so much as a professor of a Greek university, but mainly as a long associate and advisor of the leader of Pasok, George Papandreou (advisor on educational issues while he was undersecretary of the ministry of culture during the period 1985-1987 and secretary general of the ministry of education, in both instances when he was minister of education, that is 1988-1989 and 1995-1996).

All these years, Papandreou's policy on education has been based on the need to make the Greek educational system comparable to those of the "developed" countries in the OECD. In 1989, he tried to link salary increases for university teachers with scientific productivity. His first act as minister of education in 1994 was to ask the OECD for a comprehensive review of all levels of education in Greece. (That review is still timely, but no one seems interested in paying any attention to it). He also organised a pilot project for the quality assessment by an international team of experts of a department in the Athens Polytechnic and the TEI of Patras. For this, Greece was congratulated by the European Commission.

In the recent dispute, Papandreou has spelled his position very clearly. This is that public universities should be left to run their own business and make four-year plans that would be agreed with the state and be financed by it. This is the main difference from the proposed government reform that, continuing a long tradition in Greece, is based on strong government involvement in the

running of the universities. (As a brief example, one could mention the fact that the proposed law even has a provision on who takes minutes in the meetings of the senate. Let alone a clause that explains how the scientific discipline of the faculty is determined.) Of course, Papandreou advocates nothing new but the well-established practices of higher education in the western world. The basis of his policy is that the Greek educational system should move away from its unorthodox flat uniformity which, in the name of social equality, is at the heart of the problems of the system.

With reference to the revision of article 16 of the constitution, one need say nothing more than that it was Papandreou who was the first politician in 1996, as minister of education, who spoke about lifting the ban on non-state higher education Institutions.

Pasok indeed participated in the dialogue on education reform initiated by the government in the national council of education (ESYP). It continued participating in it even when all the other political parties and the social partners in education (students, primary, secondary and university teachers) walked out of it because of the government practices. Pasok left the dialogue in ESYP only when the government kept introducing new and important laws (eg a law on continuing education), completely ignoring ESYP. Even today, with the present government initiative of reforms in higher education, Pasok is participating in the dialogue when all the other parties in parliament have walked out straight from the start. (One may be reminded here that when Papandreou, as minister of education, initiated a dialogue on a cross-parliamentary committee both in 1989 and in 1996 as well when he established ESYP in 1996, New Democracy never showed up.)

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