Neapolis University

HEPHAESTUS Repository **http://hephaestus.nup.ac.cy**

School of Economic Sciences and Business Articles

1995

Prefectural government in Greece: present situation, problems, perspectives

Athanasopoulos, Constantinos GE.

þÿ š - ½ Ä Á ¿ • À ¹ ¼ Ì Á Æ É Ã · Â œ µ » µ Ä Î ½ ˆ Á µ Å ½ ± Â º ± ¹ ‘ ½ ¬ À Ä Å ¾ · Â

http://hdl.handle.net/11728/7159

Downloaded from HEPHAESTUS Repository, Neapolis University institutional repository

PREFECTURAL GOVERNMENT IN GREECE

Present situation, Problems, Perspectives

By Prof. Const. GE. ATHANASSOPOULOS
Panteion Univ. S., P. Sc., Athens

I would like[1] to assure you that I feel deeply touched because I am honoured to address all of you today a distinguished as well as dangerous audience, bearing specific aims and targets.

Your presence here certainly recalls twenty years old and beautiful memories of brain storming, creative thinking, sucess.

Under such circumstances, I have to present to you some facts on a subject which is significant from every aspect, Prefectural Government.

I apologise a priori to all of you since the subject is large time, is restricted, your sensitivity on it is known and you are relatively well informed on the subject. I therefore tend to start from the whole and proceed to the distinct.

I will thus restrain to a critic review of matters concerning Decentralisation, Regional Government, Prefectural Government and Local Government and further on I will attempt to make some proposals, aiming to improve given structures, taking into account their close mutual dependence.

Since the outcome, up till now, tend to be poor, I eagerly declare, right now, that being a Regionalist. I strongly support new structures in the field of decentralised government, in theory as well as in practice.

As you are all definitely aware, the late greek Constitutions require the application of a decentralised administrative system, supplemented by another one, Local Government, the first degree of which is enforced by our Constitutions (the present one included) while other degrees are to be set by laws.

Under the present Constitution, a series of laws have been established covering Local Government matters, the most important of which are simply mentioned here. I do not hesitate to mention that all these come from the same political party to its honour.

Thus, decentralisation, being a constitutional demand, a quasi political option, a solution, is considered by everyone as the «panacea» for the optimal administrative

1. The text presents the main points of a Lecture by Professor Constantinos GE. ATHANASSOPOULOS at the Date organised by the Institute of Regional Development with main title «Modern Tendencies in Regional Development», in Athens, on March 11th, 1995.

operation. However, it does not always come into effect due to unresolvable real situations as well as the lack of willingness from the part of governments to apply decentralisation either because they fear «political cost», or because they aim to short-term benefits.

A sole element should be additionally mentioned here, reflecting the incosistent current status of the administrative organisation in 1995, that is in a period when there is an increased need for efficient and rational intervention. Among the 17 significant Ministries, one Ministry (Ministry of Agriculture) disposes of Regional, Inter-prefectural and Prefectural Branches, three Ministries (Ministry of Industry, Energy and Technology, Ministry of Health and Social Security and Ministry of Culture) dispose of Inter-prefectural and Prefectural Branches, one Ministry (Ministry of Public Order) disposes of Regional and Prefectural branches, three Ministries (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of National Economy and Ministry of Merchant Marine) dispose of special Regioanal services etc.

Thus, complex networks of administrative jurisdiction bearing no internal function, are used to produce results either «for the State» or «for the citizens» while these results are often inadequate and, in any case, far from optimal.

The State Machine, using counteracting mechanisms, not only shows no evidence of decentralised operation, bur appears trapped and non functional as well.

The above effect is further reinforced if one more element is closely examined, that is the well known Region institution which operates elsewhere, while there has been an attempt to do so in Greece too.

Under such circumstances it was impossible for the situation in the field of Local Government to be any better, due to the continuous successful or unsuccessful application of alternative adjustments and solutions in monitoring «local authority» and «local affairs».

Reference to the legislative affairs in the field of Local Government clearly underlines both the significance of the institution in various levels as well as the difficulties, conveniences, self-centered and political party intentions, fear of political cost, which emerged in all cases of application of innovative or rational solutions, aiming to disentagle from the close entanglement of the Central Administration and the fruitful resolution of «local affairs» and the «local-indigenous-level».

The main Local Government regulations, indicating the dominant spirit, prevailing from the first day of the National Liberation in 1821 until today, are mentioned here, together with some regulations. Those regulations reflect inconsitency, counter-action and conflict among them with the exception of certain cases which were characterized by a short run and detached element, too often aiming to cover the needs of the governing party.

Unfortunately, Prefectural Government (second degree) inherited the fate of Local Government (first degree). Although some serious efforts took place (such as Law ΔΝΖ of 1912 by E. Venizelos), it was not possible until very recently for the country to obtain self government of the second degree (Prefectural Government).

Suggestions

The current situation urges the scientist to abandon his love for the ideal and to transform it into love for the attainable.

«The attainable» is hereby translated into a series of initially «low profile suggestions» but viable ones, under the status of an urgent treatment of «evil».

It is initially necessary to apply the constitutional request of article 101 of the Constitution 1975/1986 for the integration of a «complete» and real decentralisation system.

In addition, improved rates in the production of creative work are needed in eht effort to serve the real, daily administrative needs, under the spirit of the Stae decentralised operation.

Besides, given the assignment of administrative competencies emphasis is hereby given to the rescheduling of Ministries competencies in regional level, the application of uniform and effective administrative mechanisms, as far as this is feasible.

Regarding the Region institution, first introduced in our country in 1987 and currently in force, one could mention the following:

The Region institution was designed in Greece to bear a limited span of activities, as it is evident not only from its legal structure, but from its seven-year operation until today, under seven governments of different orientation as well.

The elimination of inefficiencies and the improvement of the institution call for radical measures, beyond political coherence, and a possible reduction of the number of regions to ten (today there are fourteen of them).

Of course, it is necessary for Local Government to operate well, under article 102 of the Constitution.

To what extent is Local Government in Greece in good operation?

Long periods of «guidance» of local politics by central government, often reaching the level of «surveillance» or «custody», have not allowed the institution to «grow up» into an autonomous, self-consistent one, in a way that it could reform the (heavy) presence of central administration and thus create new balance and control mechanisms, in order to ensure the implementation of alternative suggestions on monitoring authority in a large scale.

A series of courageous measures are needed in order to help the institution emerge from stagnation. Some of these measures are shortly presented hereby.

First of all, it is important to reinforce the first degree of Local Government (municipalities communities) in many ways: independence of decision-making and acting, economic independence and support.

Further on, it is important to reduce permanently the number of over 6000 municipalities and communities. This should be done cautiously and bravely. However, such merging should be treated with extreme sensitivity and attention.

The issue of training the administrative staff of the 6000 municipalities and communities should be dealt efficiently and permanently. The increased needs for administrative work cannot be faced by low-trained and temporarily employed staff. European Community funds, which could have been available, have not been adequately used by Local Government until today.

Beyond political insterests and party oppositions, it is important for the self-government second degree (Prefectural Government) successful operation to dispose of special auditing mechanisms, necessary both for its good operation and for its defence against «outward» (administrative) attacks.

Nonetheless, beyond the hereby shortly mentioned, due to lack of time, suggested

measures and policies on the subjects of decentralisation and regional organisation of administrative services, it should also be taken into consideration that «political will» should be exhibited, independently from political cost and far from short-sighted political interests or disputes.

We, as greek Regional Scientists, servers of decentralisation ideals, have only one way out: The support and evolution with wisdom and daring of new structures established by political authority. And this should be done right now, since, as Herakleitus said: «time does not wait».