

Editorial

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There are two ways of approaching the Modern Greek studies departments abroad, the former being that of human curiosity and thirst for knowledge, and the latter that of politics. Both approaches are intertwined and correlated, thus coexistent.

The first way has to do with innate human curiosity and the desire to learn and gain knowledge about people, languages and cultures. Within a humanistic-oriented framework, language, history and literature are the defining points of reference for one to understand the *interesting* “other” in comparison with their “familiar” self or their society, and to develop new identities and representations of the world. The aforementioned *interest* might be multilevel, multidimensional, and multi-faceted. As a result, having departments and study centres abroad offers an opportunity for mediation, transfer and intersection that can build bridges of communication and channels of cultural exchanges, promote cooperation, strengthen mutual trust and respect, reduce conflicts and resolve issues which may result from a lack of mutual understanding. In other words, humanities and tradition at their peak.

The way of politics, on the other hand, leads to multiple crossroads. Initially, it has to do with states and their differentiated role on an international level. There are a few globally powerful states which design, promote and implement politics using tools that were developed in the past. On the other hand, there is a vast majority of states which are the object of this politics themselves. For instance, already in the last quarter of the 19th century, texts reflecting French and German political competition in attracting foreign

students as means of cultural, societal, economic and political influence were reported. This does not mean that those countries which are not politically productive in this respect cannot gain from this process. Indeed, the states that became independent after the Second World War, as part of global decolonisation, have shown interest in sending their national elite to be educated abroad (as a result of lack of domestic institutions, personnel, expertise, etc.), albeit not playing a leading role in all this. Lastly, there is a whole host of countries which are still marginalized, not taking part in the above interaction whatever that may mean for the particular peoples and regions.

Greece lies on the borderline between the cases described above. On the one hand, it does not belong to the first category, although some active political stance may be discerned, especially in relation to the Greek diaspora. On the other, even today, its value relies to a large extent on its antiquity, its powerful biblical language and global radiance. This influence, however, is neither limitless nor timeless. For example, nowadays, technical knowledge has marginalized the Humanities and restricted the symbolic value of the “dead languages” (Ancient Greek and Latin) to the upper classes, at least in western societies. Consequently, the role of Greece has been diminished in the decision-making centres.

What does this mean in practical terms in the case of Greek studies centres abroad? This volume aims at introducing some basic discussion lines and raising issues for deliberation by presenting nine different instances of Greek studies departments in Russia, Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain, Sweden and Brazil.

The three papers about the first Byzantine and Modern Greek studies departments founded in 1984 in Russia and in particular at the State University of Saint Petersburg, the Byzantine and Modern Greek Philology at Lomonosov Moscow State University, and the Greek Language Section of the Moscow State University of International Relations respectively, ascertain that Russia, a powerful international force, educates experts who will be active in the field of diplomacy, journalism or commerce. Russia is not alone in this endeavor as all leading nations do the same in their own fashion. However, a close reading of the papers will show that Greece also supports these efforts to the best of its ability. Obviously, there is a vested interest in Greece doing so. The power balance in this bipartite relationship is one of apparent parity, but it is in fact unequal; yet there is room for both sides to find their role and interest. However, we should not overlook those who

implement policies – the human factor. Indeed, if Greece were not viewed as an interesting professional prospect, the foundation and function of the above centres would be problematic. Finally, the fact that these centres are part of higher education institutions provides a relative independence with respect to research and activities away from politics and within the field of knowledge and cooperation.

This political and social role played by the Greek centres abroad is also stressed in the case of Germany (Freie Universitaet Berlin), although the supportive role of the state is discrete. Miltos Pechlivanos, the author of the paper, admits the marginal scientific importance of these centres and seeks means not only for their academic development but also for them to have a broader impact. Being a pragmatist is the only way of comprehending the reason for existence of such centres in the light of a negative political and social climate between the two countries. In this way language, history and literature can serve as meeting places for mediation on various levels (human, scientific, political and social).

The paper presenting Greek studies at the University of Strasbourg, stresses another dimension, that of political choice made by institutions hosting Greek studies centres. It is obvious that this dimension may also be identified in the cases of Germany and Russia, albeit not stressed. Of course, it is worth noting that the institutions' policy cannot deviate from the wider national policy. Lastly, Greece, to the best of its ability, seems to support these centres as well. Consequently, central or institutional policies may find communication channels and common points of reference that make them applicable.

The case of Sweden, which refers to the University of Lund, has a lot in common with the rest of the cases but also some idiosyncrasies. The initial need for learning Greek stems from the reading of the Holy texts of Christianity. This makes the particular case special in comparison with the rest of (catholic) western Europe, but not the protestant countries. Yet this particularity shows exactly how the Greek language, either as an expression of ancient Greek literature and a means for Europe's attempt at rationalism during Renaissance, or as a holy language of Christianity, is considered as a language of transnational importance. On the other hand, the description of the present-day situation is in line with that of the rest of the cases, and depicts something small, fragile and uncertain. Greek support is also found here as in the rest of the centres abroad.

Probably the most pragmatic paper is the one describing the case of Great Britain, focusing on the centre's current situation. What is interesting is that there is no direct mention of states and policies. It describes a situation which once again emphasises the striving for survival of a rather marginal centre. In this case, it is the private sector that lends a helping hand. With Brexit in mind, references to the European Union indicate the contemporary circumstances of social and political risk that do not favour the small-scale centres. Any mention of the political dimension of the centres are indirect and refer either to the Western world in general or individual choices of the graduates as to their professional prospects.

The case of Spain describes the difficulties of maintaining the centres through personal efforts, the small number of participants, the limited professional prospects, but also the inconsistent presence of the Greek language and cultural centres. Once again, the importance of the support on the part of the Greek state is recognized as limited but valuable.

The case of Brazil is a special one. In this example, politics seems to be placed aside and the interest in the language of the Bible, as well as the deep knowledge of the local language, the Portuguese and the Greek influence in its formation, is put forward. What makes it viable once more is the exitance of the interested participants. This case is also characterized by frailty and uncertainty, dependent on individual initiative and action.

The question that arises in conclusion is whether Greece could offer more extensive and substantial support to the above described centres. Taking into consideration the facts presented in this volume, such support would be desirable. However, it is not certain that this is feasible, not necessarily due to the financial capacity of the country. It is probably on account of the lack of a clear vision and will, on the part of the political leadership, as to how strategically and systematically they could make the most of such centres as means of cultural diplomacy. Finally, one should not overlook the fact that a country's global position defines both the range of its activities and the limits of its realisable goals.

Thus, what remains in the end is the zest and the personal struggle of individuals against the occasional and insufficient support by the Greek state within the realm of an international reality.

The wager to be won is, therefore, how the Greek studies departments will be transformed from occasional structures based on private initiative into institutionally organized centers within the framework of a clear-cut strategy in order to ensure longevity and a safe future.