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Reforming of the UN Security Council: The Greek Perspective¹

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Abstract

The reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) remains a contentious and complex issue, especially considering the Council's perceived inaction during recent global security crises. This debate involves institutional, operational, and political challenges, notably the entrenched structure of the UN Charter which requires unanimous consent from permanent members for amendments, and the strategic interests of the victorious powers of World War II that continue to shape the Council's actions. Greece, a candidate for a non-permanent UNSC seat for 2025-2026, has historically supported democratic principles and international law, advocating for greater participation in decision-making processes. However, its current campaign emphasizes maintaining the status quo rather than proposing concrete reforms, reflecting a passive approach to international politics. To promote meaningful UNSC reform and enhance its global standing, Greece should adopt a more active diplomatic role, forming strategic alliances, advocating incremental changes, and engaging in multilateral negotiations. Aligning with the Group of Four (G4) nations could bolster Greece's influence and support for expanding both permanent and non-permanent membership, ensuring a balanced and pragmatic reform process. By pursuing these strategies, Greece can significantly contribute to evolving the UNSC and strengthening its position in global decision-making.

Keywords: Reform, United Nations, Security Council, Greece, Perspective.

Introduction

The reform of the United Nations Security Council is one of the biggest and most complex areas of debate both within the organization and in the academic community. The successive security crises of the first two decades of the 21st century, combined with the Council's inability to take decisive actions to address these issues, raise the following question: Is the Security Council capable of defending international peace and security anymore?

This question does not admit a single answer, as each member state of the UN has a different perspective on how the Security Council should act. However, where most - if not all - states agree is on the existence of the problem. Many scholars point to specific reasons for this 'inaction.' These reasons could be divided into institutional, operational, and political factors. These institutional and operational reasons revolve around issues related to the structure of the United Nations Charter and the Organization's inability to amend Charter articles without the unanimous consent of the permanent members of the Security Council (UN Charter, 1945). This entrenched situation is characterized as a

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'locked-in condition' that does not allow for substantive reform not only of the Security Council but also of the entire UN (Baccarini, 2018). In addition to the above, there are also deeper, highly significant, international political reasons. Since its establishment, the Security Council has operated within the broader strategic objectives of the victorious powers of the Second World War, framing the concepts of international peace and security within their own adapted perception of collective security, so as not to lose their gains and their power. Nowadays, in our modern and evolved international system, this mindset is not feasible as a guide for the practices and actions of defending international peace and security. On the contrary, it pushes - primarily the permanent members of the Council - into a situation of 'coercion.' That is, into practices and strategies that do not aim at international cooperation but rather at achieving national and/or alliance goals, which often conflict with the needs of the international community (Papaiosif, 2023).

Amidst this complex and challenging path towards resolving the issue of reform, it is very interesting to examine the Hellenic position. As a state that advocates its alignment with the UN and supports the organization's efforts, having put forward its candidacy for a non-permanent seat for the next composition of the Security Council.

Main Considerations

Greece, as a member state of the UN with deeply rooted sentiments of democracy, the safeguarding of international peace and security, and the defense of international law, has served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council twice (1952, 2004). During these two terms, Greece strived to alleviate the participation of states in decision-making processes through a broad range of dialogues with other member states. Through its policies focused on commitment to peace, respect for international law, democracy and human rights, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and the strengthening of international cooperation, Athens managed to preside over two sanctions committees of the Council, those for Ivory Coast and Sudan and the Working Group for General Sanction Issues. Additionally, Greece held the vice-presidency of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Today, Greece is running its candidacy for a third term on the Security Council for the period 2025-2026, with elections to be held in June 2024. Athens has made it clear that its approach within the Council and the organization in general will remain within the policy frameworks mentioned above. However, it emphasizes that its efforts will focus on the so-called "three Ds": Dialogue, Diplomacy, and Democracy. As stated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "the three Ds of the Greek candidacy logo will be our compass in this journey. We aim to conduct an open Dialogue with every interested

party, on all issues that fall under the competence of the Security Council. Diplomacy will be our tool, in order to bridge differences and reach mutually acceptable compromises. Our vision is Democracy in the sense of respect of sovereignty, rights and freedoms and will of the people.” The key pillars that Greece promises to uphold within the Council are six: the peaceful resolution of international disputes, respect for International Law and the principles of the UN Charter, the role of women in the promotion of peace and security, the link between climate change and security, the eradication of the use of child soldiers in wars, and the enhancement of maritime security (Greece: United Nations Security Council 2025 – 2026, 2023).

Based on the information provided above, Greece represents a "typical" member state of the organization, aiming to maintain the current status quo. However, is this enough for a state to serve as a non-permanent member of the Security Council?

The pattern of response—yes, no—should not be given in an absolute manner here. The correct answer varies depending on how one examines the issue. However, as this text attempts to analyze the Greek perspective regarding the reform of the Security Council, it is fair to say that no, maintaining the status quo is not sufficient. And by referring to the change of the status quo, it is not meant to imply a change in the global status quo, but rather the status quo within the United Nations Security Council itself. Analyzing Greece's campaign for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council, it becomes apparent that Athens encounters some contradictions and half-measures. On the one hand, it mentions that it seeks the "democratization" of the Council through the participation of more member - states, the inclusion of new topics for discussion, and the strengthening of the Council's role, when on the other hand, it does not specify how these goals will be achieved. This means that Athens consciously chooses not to mention possible frameworks and ways in which the Security Council can complete a reform process to meet, combat and tackle the difficult challenges that the modern world faces, not because it cannot contribute to this global discussion, but precisely because it wants to participate in the Security Council without disrupting the existing status quo.

This occurs due to Greece's "passive" interpretation of international politics. Historically, Athens remains passive in the face of major geopolitical and geostrategic events, refraining from initiatives that would contribute to the maintenance of global peace and security. Instead, it consistently focuses on issues concerning only its neighboring countries. By doing so, Greece indirectly or directly endorses the notion that "the victors of great wars seek to maintain their power" (Ikenberry, 2001). In other words, through this stance, Greece demonstrates its unwillingness to address the significant political problem of interpreting collective security, as mentioned earlier in this paper, which plagues the UN.

The larger questions that emerge from this discussion, however, are how can Greece change this stance? How can Greece promote different policies and use other "tools" with the aim of reforming the Security Council and enhancing its own status on the global stage?

Obviously, the solution does not lie in crafting a regional or global revisionist policy of radical change to the status quo that might lead to a potential clash with and within the major powers. Greece should adopt a more active and realistic role in its diplomacy both within and outside the organization, as well as in its actions as a state. By "active" and "diplomatic," it is meant that Greece should make a concerted effort to engage significantly in the discussions taking place within the UN (and beyond) regarding the reform of the Security Council. Greek diplomacy should establish a consistent voice in committees such as the Intergovernmental Negotiations Committee or the UN's Advisory Group on Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency, consulting with other member states on the conditions that will initiate the reform process.

To achieve this, Greece should take under consideration the following political lines. Forming strategic alliances with countries that share similar goals for Security Council reform can strengthen Greece's position. Collaborating with these nations to draft and support reform proposals can create a stronger push for change. Greece could host international forums and conferences dedicated to discussing the Security Council reform. By bringing together diplomats, scholars, and policymakers, Athens can facilitate dialogue and propose actionable solutions. Advocating for incremental changes rather than radical overhauls can make reform more achievable and less threatening to major powers. Small, strategic adjustments can pave the way for more substantial reforms over time. Investing in the training and development of diplomats with a focus on multilateral negotiations can improve Greece's ability to influence UN processes effectively. Utilizing its position within the European Union, Greece can work with EU partners to present a united front on Security Council reform, increasing the weight of their collective voice in the UN. Greece should demonstrate its commitment to international peace and security through tangible actions, such as participating in peacekeeping missions, contributing to humanitarian efforts, and promoting human rights. Conducting public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of Security Council reform and Greece's role in it can garner broader support both domestically and internationally.

Additionally, for Greece to achieve its goals regarding reform, it would be very beneficial to align with a group of countries within the organization that is actively working on this issue. The ideal group could be the Group of Four (G4). This group, consisting of Germany, Japan, Brazil, and India, is composed of four emerging powers that either already have or are poised to gain a significant role in international politics. Greece does not necessarily need to agree with the entire negotiation

framework of these countries on the issue. Instead, it should focus on aligning with them on the reform structure of the Council, which currently advocates for expanding the number of both permanent and non-permanent members. According to the G4's proposal, the number of permanent members should increase by six, including the G4 themselves, while the non-permanent members should increase by four or five, bringing the total to 25 members. The proposal also includes an equitable geographical distribution of seats and suggests revisiting the Council's composition 15 years after implementing the reform. During this period, the new permanent members would not have the right to exercise a veto. Additionally, the G4 group expresses a positive stance towards the reform proposals of other coalitions, such as the African Group.

By aligning with the G4, Greece can achieve leverage collective influence by joining forces with powerful and emerging nations can enhance Greece's influence and bargaining power in the reform discussions. Also, can have shared objectives by aligning with a group that has similar objectives regarding the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership can provide Greece with a solid framework to advocate for its position. At next, the backing of countries like Germany, Japan, Brazil, and India can lend credibility to Greece's reform proposals, as these countries are recognized for their significant contributions to global peace and security. So, the G4's balanced approach, which includes a review period and temporary restrictions on veto power, aligns with a pragmatic and gradual reform process, which can be more acceptable to current permanent members. By supporting the reform initiatives of other groups, such as the African Group, Greece can help build a broader coalition of support, increasing the likelihood of achieving meaningful reform. Through these strategies, Greece can play a more active and impactful role in the efforts to reform the UN Security Council, thereby enhancing its status and influence in international affairs inside the UN.

Conclusions

To conclude, Greece should not adopt such a passive stance regarding the effort to reform the Security Council. The continuous evolution of the international system, successive crises of all kinds, the inadequacy of security, and the increasing competition among major powers leave no room for maintaining the current functioning of the Council. Through the positions mentioned, Greece can contribute both to the effort to evolve the Council and to the effort to reinforce the understanding that the highest body legally capable of safeguarding international peace and security is the Security Council. Moreover, if Athens follows these policies, it will be able to significantly upgrade its international role and gain a voice in major international decision-making centers, from which it can exert its influence on decisions related to collective security. This proactive engagement can position

Greece as a pivotal player in global affairs, enhancing its diplomatic influence and contributing meaningfully to the stability and security of the international community.

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