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Sotiris Walden,

ΠΑΡΑΤΑΙΡΟΙ ΕΤΑΙΡΟΙ. ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΙΚΤΑΤΟΡΙΑ, ΚΟΜΜΟΥΝΙΣΤΙΚΑ
ΚΑΘΕΣΤΩΤΑ ΚΑΙ ΒΑΛΚΑΝΙΑ, 1967-1974 [“Misassociated” associates: Greek
dictatorship, communist regimes and the Balkans, 1967-1974],
Athens: Polis Publications, 2009, 794 pages.

Sotiris Walden is well known in the academic community for his studies on the Balkans, which focus principally on political and economic relations among the Balkan countries. The study that particularly attracts historians' interest is *Ελλάδα - Γιουγκοσλαβία. Γέννηση και εξέλιξη μιας κρίσης και οι ανακατατάξεις στα Βαλκάνια, 1961-1962* [Greece - Yugoslavia: birth and development of a crisis and turmoil in the Balkans, 1961-1962] (Athens: Themelio, 1991), an interesting contribution to the study of Greek-Yugoslavian relations during the Cold War era, which centres on the Macedonian Question. The book under review here is a new, particularly sizeable study, which covers the period of the seven years of the Greek Junta, 1967-1974. According to the author, his study focuses on two issues: first, an exploration of the actual level of the relations between the Greek Junta and the regimes of Eastern Europe; and, second, the relationship between the peculiarity of those seven years of the Junta and the diachronism of Greek foreign policy (p. 29). Although the author mainly discusses political relations, he also focuses on an analysis of economic relations, again through their political assessment (p. 31).

This book is the result of research that was conducted, intermittently, over the course of 30 years. The majority of the archives cited in it comes from the Historic and Diplomatic Archive of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Published archives from the Greek State Department were also consulted, while many facts and data are derived from the public archives of countries such as East Germany and the Soviet Union. Other, mainly Greek, smaller archives offered valuable information as well. The author also based his study on the sizeable relevant literature on the subject.

The study comprises two parts and ten chapters in total. The first part is a horizontal analysis and presents the policy that the Greek government of the Junta followed from its establishment in 1967 to the restoration of democracy in 1974. Emphasis is put on the analysis of Greek-Soviet relations, since these were the barometer of Greek relations with all the other Eastern Bloc countries.

According to Walden, three particular periods form three distinct categories of that time. The first covers the years 1967-1969, “the time of coldness”, as the author calls it, and started when the regimes of Eastern Europe condemned, as was expected, the Junta in Athens, since their ideological differences seemed unbridgeable. Athens’ reaction to this fact was extraordinary, since the dictatorial regime relied largely on its anti-communist rhetoric, yet on the other hand it was aware of the political and economic significance of cultivating good diplomatic relations with the Eastern Bloc, especially with those countries in the Balkans. The Greek strategy started to yield fruit already at the beginning of 1969, when several communist countries started rethinking their attitude towards Greece, probably as a result of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, which obliged Moscow to make an approach to the West, so as to improve its international image.

The second period in Walden’s analysis covers 1970-1971, when Athens made its so-called “approach to the East”. According to the author, this was a calculated action on the part of Greece, one of a limited range and mainly of a communicative nature, as the Junta mostly sought to come out of its isolation and also tried to avoid a diplomatic route similar to that taken by Egypt. The new priorities of Greece were actually made known by the dictator, Georgios Papadopoulos, himself in his message to the Greek people on New Year’s Day 1970. Actually, it seems that the Junta government had the Americans’ assent, since the American Under Secretary of the State Department, Ural Alexis Johnson, had characterized Athens’ initiative as “healthy politics”.

The third period described by Walden concerns the years 1972-1974, the “three contradictory years”, as he calls them. During this period, the relations of Athens with most of the communist countries deteriorated, on the one hand due to the dramatic developments in Cyprus and domestic political instability, and on the other hand due to the announcement of a new agreement for the installation of American military bases in Athens. In the last chapter of the first part, Walden discusses the progress of Greek trade with communist countries during the seven years of the dictatorship. According to the evidence he produces, during the period 1967-1974 the communist countries represented about 10% of Greek trade, which concerned 18% of exports and only 7% of imports. Yugoslavia and the USSR, with 24% and 23% respectively, were the preferential trade partners of Greece. Although Greece had a small share of the total trade between the West and the East, according to Walden it seems that it was more financially dependent on the countries of Eastern Europe, mostly in the case of exports.

In the second part, the author goes on to a vertical analysis, focusing on the relations of Greece with the countries of the Eastern Bloc, mainly in the Balkans, in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. The relations of Greece with these countries were affected by, apart from the general context of a dispute between Western and Eastern countries, the constantly thorny national questions, specifically those concerning Macedonia and Northern Epirus. A speech made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Panagiotis Pipinelis, on 26 April 1968, outlined Athens' policy on the Balkans and boiled it down to an audacious proposition for a multilateral Balkan cooperation on a political level. It was the first such post-war initiative, which met with varied reactions, ranging from a cold refusal from Moscow, scepticism from Sofia, an ambiguous demeanour from Belgrade to a positive reaction from Bucharest. However, the death, in the summer of 1970, of Pipinelis, who was the driving force behind this idea, cancelled the initiative. Athens' relations with Belgrade were characterized on the one hand by coldness on the level of bilateral contacts, and on the other hand by great progress in their commercial relations. Bilateral relations with Bulgaria were definitely better, despite the open diplomatic fronts that existed during that period. A turning point in Greek-Albanian relations was the restoration of diplomatic contact, in May 1971.

Summarising the main features of the policy of the Junta, Walden emphasizes the fact that it always remained aligned to the policy of NATO and the USA, it continued the strategy of maintaining good commercial relations with communist countries, in an attempt to sell “perishable” Greek agricultural products, and it still adhered to the dogma of the “danger from the North” as the fundamental element of its foreign policy. However, the regimes of Eastern Europe treated the regime of Athens with the same realism. All of the above led the author to the conclusion that, eventually, there was no “black hole” in relations with other countries during the seven years of the dictatorship; however, that does not mean that this period was characterized by much progress.

There are many strengths in Walden's study. One of the most important is the sobriety that characterizes the author's description of the actions of the Greek government, without fixed ideas related to ideological prejudice and adherence, which still afflict most of the studies concerning this particular period. The author rightly points out that the dictatorship in Greece was not a regime enforced, against popular will, by foreign forces, but, to a great degree, reflected the policies that “conservative Greek society and the Greek elite of

the time yearn[ed] for”. One of the myths exploded by Walden is the alleged shrinkage of the economy between 1967 and 1974. According to the evidence he produces, the period is in fact characterized by the rapid progress of the economy, in combination with the fact that inflation remained at a very low level until 1972 and never exceeded 4%. The analytical diagrams and tables contained in the book, with useful data concerning the economic relations of Greece with communist countries, are surely another strength of his study.

One of the weakest points of this particular study is the author’s inability to have gained access to archives and relevant literature from the Balkan countries. Walden relied mostly on Greek sources, which leads *de facto* to a one-sided approach to complex phenomena, about which the author used information coming from the point of view of Athens and Washington and allusively from the view of the other – communist – side. However, it should be noted that with the exception of Yugoslavian archives, where researchers could have access, Bulgarian, Romanian and Albanian state archives of that time remained inaccessible. Smaller collections, as well as an extensive literature, both from the field of history and of political science and international relations, could contribute to a more global view of those phenomena. A lesser weakness is the inclusion of surplus information concerning issues that have to do, both directly and indirectly, with the author’s thesis; information that, in some cases, constitutes an impediment to a hitchless analysis of his line of argument.

Walden’s book ought to be considered a valuable general introductory study of the policy of Greece in the Balkans during the period 1967-1974. Certainly the reader will find a starting point for many special studies, which will complete the canvas of the political and economic relations of Athens with its neighbours, as well as with the other communist countries. Finally, the aptly phrased title of Walden’s study, “‘Misassociated’ associates”, confirms that ideological differences and battles of words between countries often prove to be unable to stop the progress in their relations when they are dictated by mutual financial interests.