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## **FUNDAMENTALS OF GREEK NATIONALISM: THE CASE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD**



**Abstract:** This article shows that historical realities of Greek nationalism continue to be relevant today. Dual heritages of Greek nationalism, Byzantine (Orthodoxy) and ancient Greece, have been a source of different answers to the question of



what does it mean to be original Greek. The ambiguity originating from diverse explanations for a real Greekness has led to the incompatibility between the imagined Greek nation of traditional and of secular nationalists, triggering the controversy over ID cards as a contemporary case. While, for conservatives, because the role of Orthodoxy is vital in protecting Greek identity, religion box should be included into identity cards, modernists are in favor of the formation of a common homogenized European culture and thus do not endorse the presence of religion in a formal state document, ID card.

**Keywords:** Greek Nationalism, Identity Card, Modernists, Traditionalists, Hroch's A-B-C Phases

### **Introduction**

This article proposes to underline the actuality of key historical characteristics of Greek nationalism in order to understand diverged ideas over today's debated issues in Greece. In this sense, firstly, it will be searching for key

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characteristics of Greek nationalism from its first impulse to WW1, and then, will evaluate the national identity card crisis in consideration of the fundamentals of Greek nationalism.

### **Methodology**

For the sake of simplicity, this article will adopt a methodology created by Miroslav Hroch to be able to analyze Greek nationalism. The methodology (Hroch, 1985: 22–24) structures national movements into phases A, B, and C. Phase A is the period of intellectual interest on the language and antiquity of the oppressed nationality. Scholars were interested in the systemization of the national language and the scientific determination of national qualifications and characteristics. What motivated them was “a patriotism of the Enlightenment type, namely an active affection for the region in which they lived, associated with a thirst for knowledge of every new and insufficiently investigated phenomenon”(Hroch, 1985: 23). In this phase, national consciousness remained at the individual level. Phase B fermented national consciousness and made it the concern of the masses. In this phase, the national consciousness among the people was gradually attained with the help of channels such as education in which systemized language, antiquity, and locality-oriented emotional values such as culture and religion were driving forces. Such forces were utilized to indoctrinate the people into the membership of the nation “more than a simple natural fact or a political consequence of subjection to a particular monarch” (Hroch, 1985: 23). The last one, Phase C, refers to the emergence firm organizational structures, such as regular army, serving the national movement over the whole imagined territories.

### **Phase A**

In the context of Greek nationalism, Phase A includes the creation of Greek national identity and community with the efforts of Greek intellectual vanguards. The origins of this phase can be traced back to the time a new intellectual atmosphere emerged with the economic revival in 18<sup>th</sup> century. The combination of the industrial revolution in Europe and Karlowitz(1699), Kuchuc Kainarji(1774), and Anglo-French wars after French revolution paved way for the emergence a new Greek mercantile class in coastal sides and gave them opportunities to fill the shortage of shipping raw materials from Balkans to Europe (Stavrianos, 1958: 274–277). Such merchants had a very close relations with many European cities. During the years of this interaction, they and their acquaintances had been impressed by the principles of the Enlightenment which underlined two political views, liberalism and democracy, addressing “the nation beyond membership in the aristocratic elite” (Hupchick, 2002b: 192).

Liberalism by John Locke focused the requirement of a constitutional basis for the inalienable rights of all individuals to eliminate hereditary privileges (P.M. Kitromilides, 2013: 14–15). Democracy by Jean-Jacques Rousseau

envisioned active political equals, called as citizens, participating in developing the laws in favor of the collective good that may be against self-interests and obeying the laws (Hupchick, 2002b: 192).

This merchant interaction with Europeans had deepened to the appearance of a new Greek intellectual atmosphere. For example, Adamantios Korais (1748-1833) who is a son of a merchant family, took his education in France and adopted classical ideas or classicism (Hupchick, 2002b: 207) in that, in the Western Enlightenment period, ancient Greece was seen as an ideal precursor of democracy, philosophy, and scientific inquiry (Tsoukalas, 1999: 8). He published series of classical texts to revive the language of ancient Greece. This linguistic reform would serve to cultivate the continuity between ancient Greeks and Modern Greek by adopting the knowledge of the ancients (P.M. Kitromilides, 2013: 266–277).

An amelioration of civilization in modern Hellenic lands was possible with the enlightened Greek people (Frangos, 1973: 92) through the intellectual heritage of ancient Greece. Intellectual philhellenism and classicism exhibited by Korais showed the secular project that “involved a rejection of the ecclesiastical unit of Rum millet in favor of a secular Hellas” (Roudometof, 1998: 29).

The target of the transformation of a religious Rum millet identity into a secular ethnic one was a challenge to Millet system. Not surprisingly, Phanariotes and Balkan Orthodox Church disagreed with and reacted against Korais’s secular project (Roudometof, 1998: 26) because they were satisfied with Ottoman Bureaucracy and Millet system in which there was a Greek superiority over other Balkan nationalities due to the fact that original language of the Bible was Greek (Hupchick, 2002b: 208; Roudometof, 1998: 19). Also, the Phanariote Greeks called themselves as “‘Romaioi’ (‘Romans’, i.e. inhabitants of the Roman Empire)” (Mazower, 2001: 53). Such a distinct historical identity guaranteed by the Ottoman’s protection of Orthodox ecclesiastical center as a former Byzantine institution provided conscious Greek elites with an advantageous position compared to other ethnic groups within the Orthodox millet hierarchy. So, Phanariotes tried to keep their Greek’s Orthodox millet leadership and did not support any independent movement early on.

Rhigas Pherraios, who was an active and revolutionary intellectual similar to Korais, attacked above-mentioned traditional Phanariote ideas and called for a Greek revolution. He tried to encourage the Greek society and sought to put revolutionary nationalist theories of French revolution into practice by writing a ‘war hymn’ or ‘national anthem’ (Stavrianos, 1958: 279).

Such efforts of new secular Greek intellectuals could not easily make Greek religious establishment and Phanariotes consider Greek ecclesiastical supremacy in Rum Millet as national supremacy (Roudometof, 1998: 20). However, the millenarian ideology of the church that “merged the reconstruction of

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the Christian Empire with the Second Coming, at which time the Ottoman Empire would collapse and God's earthly kingdom would be reconstituted" (Roudometof, 1998: 17) denied - de facto - the Ottoman Sultan's legitimacy and gave attention to Byzantine past. In process, this millenarian ideological orientation put Orthodox religious conservative side into a position supporting a religious dream of liberation even if not a national dream of an independence movement (Roudometof, 1998: 34).

The "vicarious beginning"(Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 160) of Greek revolutionary intellectuals having sympathy with Hellenic secular culture and classicism was sustained with the rise of romantic nationalism that shows locality and refers to a particular history, religion and culture within a definite territory (Hupchick, 2002b: 189) while excluding elements of foreignness.

### **Phase B**

Rise of Romantic Nationalism in Greek case is Miroslav Hroch's B phase which is indoctrination of nationalism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the independence. Greek Romantic nationalism was based on, as Kitromilides argues, internal and external dimensions (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 161–172), of which the first one was about the state policies of nation building in the Greece, and the second one put state initiatives on "Greek-inhabited territories of the Ottoman Empire which were considered as integral parts of the historical patrimony of Hellenism" (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 161).

The internal process of Greek nation building aimed to homogenize national identity and to socialize the society into the tenets of nationalism. Here, educational system became a major channel through which people living in the most remote places of the country could be cultivated to adopt a common nationalist culture and to create a linguistically homogenous society that was important for Greece's survival and integration after its independence (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 163).

As for unredeemed Greeks, the Kingdom mobilized all educational networks to convert them to the nationalist values of free Greece (P.M. Kitromilides, 2013: 330). Greek consulates in the Ottoman state supported educational activities that "encouraged gestures of national identification with Greece" (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 170). Also, the establishment of Greek schools under Ottoman rule served for the idea of the unity of Hellenism by connecting "that distant and self-contained society with the common Greek language and culture emanating from the Greek state" (Bryer, 1980: 171–190; Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 171) and situating common religious values into national attachments. By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, such Greek cultural and especially national evangelism through educational endeavors beyond the borders of Greek

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Kingdom paved the way for the creation of “the broad imagined community of the Greek nation” (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 170).

Another major channel was the regular army to mend social cleavages and to cultivate national unities. Building a regular army was to put men from different backgrounds and attachments in “a mechanism of socialization into the political culture of the new state” (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 162). Under the control of the Greek state, they were exposed to common mentalities and attitudes under nationalist values. Homogenization through the army excluded foreign elements of its recruits’ identity and social experience, cultivating a sense of the common homeland.

So, education and the army in romantic nationalism period of the Greek case became effective mechanism for indoctrination of nationalism in nation building process. Both served greatly for the linguistic Hellenization of the Greek people and the development of the nationalist culture.

Beside cultural and linguistic unity, there was a need for an essentialized religious unity. The formation of an autocephalous Greek national church was important to consolidate its national identity. In the first twenty years of the independence, the Church of Greece was nationalized and “spearheaded all nationalist initiatives in the latter part of the nineteenth ... century” (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 166). This development showed the importance of “the shared bond of religion [that] gave the nation a unique spiritual core” (Gallant, 2016: 90), cementing nationalist feelings in the Greek state-building process.

Consequently, internal dimension of Greek romantic nationalism cemented Greek social cohesion widely and paved the way for the formation of self-dedicated nationalism in the minds of the regular army recruits, through which Greek irredentism, called as Megali Idea, appeared in the Balkans.

### **Phase C**

Megali Idea can be seen as the C phase of Miroslav Hroch’s methodology. It is the external process of Greek nation building, involving the export of Greek nationalist tenets to outside territories under the assumption of the unity of Hellenism that refers to the historical continuity of the Greek nation “from Homeric through Byzantine to modern times” (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 167). Addressing the geographical inheritance of the Byzantine Empire, after 1860s, the Greek state portrayed its imagined national space as a target of national unity.

Greek irredentist goals in the soft form desired the incorporation of all Greek inhabited areas such as Thessaly and Epiros (Hupchick, 2002a: 223). Megali Idea in the radical form aimed the restoration of Byzantine Empire to gain “the “natural” Greek state with borders defined by Greek linguistic dominance within the Ottoman Orthodox millet” (Hupchick, 2002a: 224). For example, Greek language speakers in Macedonia was the reason to implement interventionist

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program towards Macedonia by the Greek nation state. Also, Greek Kingdom gave its attention periodically to Crete, over which there was Greek nationalist aspirations for enosis, union with the mother country Greece. Recurring revolts in Crete led Great powers to persuade the Ottoman Sultan to give concessions to the Cretan Christians, however, the propagandas for enosis by nationalists was considered as a national betrayal and a war between the Ottoman army and Greek expeditionary force was broke out in 1897(Stavrianos, 1958: 470). Although Turkish army gained the victory, with the help of great power intervention, the Greeks gained what they want in Crete: Prince George, the son of the Greek King, became the commissioner of Crete (Stavrianos, 1958: 471).

Although Megali Idea involved common external national goals mentioned above, it was exploited to distract attention from internal problems(Pepelasis, 1958: 19–27), as diversionary theory of war assumes (Levy, 1989: 259–288). Irredentism was a demagogic channel for the executives to sustain their status quo in the Kingdom of Greece and to defuse domestic problems and social unrest by making the Greek people focus on the importance of the Panhellenic unity (P.M. Kitromilides, 2013: 330–332).Because Megali Idea possessed the promises of social economic developments and civil libertiesfor the mass,irredentism, it dominated Greek domestic and foreign politics, however, it was “unrealistic because of the fantastic disproportion between national strength and national ambitions” (Stavrianos, 1958: 468).

All in all, A, B, and C phases were turning points and fundamentals of Greek nationalism. Together with this, this article does not ignore that the creation of the Greek nation state was both a natural process and a project at the same time. It should be always kept in mind that Greek nationalism was not only a production of feelings of Greek people and intellectuals but of European great powers. During the period of colonization, because Greek lands were very important and strategic, Greek revolt had much more widespread effect on the great powers than Serbian uprising which was the first revolt in the Balkans (Stavrianos, 1958: 269). Although the partition of the Ottoman state through European intervention involved a great risk that was the upset of European balance of power (Stavrianos, 1958: 287), “popular sentiment throughout Europe was rallying to the side of the Greeks” (Stavrianos, 1958: 288). European people and statesmen in spite of some perils supported Greek revolution under the influence of philhellenic organizations and western philhellenes, of which Lord Byron (Dakin, 1973: 107–120), a British poet, was the most prominent one who advocated the Greek independence against the Ottoman state. Thus, colonial interests and Western philhellenism led the great powers to support for the Greek cause.

### **The Case of National Identity Card**

Within the context of the fundamentals of Greek nationalism, the selection of the national ID card issue as a case study provides a very unique contemporary controversy between secular and conservative side of Greek nationalists. This section will mention the issue itself in modern Greece and then try to focus on the views of the opponent leading group through historical references.

In 2000, the socialist government of Greece called to enact a code that removed religion from national identity cards (Greece's plan to drop religion from ID card causes uproar, 02.09.2000). The reason for this calling is to protect "a citizen's right to privacy and freedom from discrimination" (Greece, church clash in feud over ID cards, Reuters, 16.05.2000). Greek Orthodox Church considered this plan as the Europeanization of Greek politics and charged the government with the attempt to "appear more European ahead of the European Union" (Greeks Rally to Keep Religions on ID Cards, The New York Times, 22.06.2000). In order to make the government retract its decision, Greek Orthodox Church organized a big protest at the center of Athens and expressed its worries with thousands of its clerics and many ordinary Greek citizens (Kishkovsky, 2011). People in the protest shouted anti-secular change slogans and blamed the government to obey the forces of globalization. More importantly, chanting "Greece is Orthodoxy" (Abrams & Latimer, 2017), protesters and the Church considered the Orthodoxy as an indivisible element of the Greek identity.

Historical roots of this split between parties should be discussed in the context of the dual heritage of Greece; the ancient (Hellenic) and Byzantine (Orthodox) heritage. After the independence of Greece, both heritages were combined under the term of "Helleno-Christianity" (Tsoukalas, 1999: 13) representing "the historical and cultural continuity of ancient Greece, through Byzantium, to modern Greece" (Molokotos-Liederman, 2003). Since then, there has been a historic partnership between the Greek state and Orthodox Church. However, this dualism in Greek heritage or identity has been a possible source for conflicts, such as ID card issue, between traditionalist and modernist groups.

Those traditionalists who are in favor religion on ID cards consider Greek Orthodox Church as an entity having a substantial share in forming Greek nationality in that "the Orthodox Church played a major role in nation-building by preserving collective identity under the Ottomans and by preparing the advent to independence" (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 178). Also, after the emergence of the independent Greek state, although the church was initially opposed to the revolution, it preferred to become autocephalous and thus nationalized with its total submission to the Modern Greek nation state (Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 1989: 179–182) because otherwise the ongoing dependence of the Orthodox church of Greece on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the capital of the Ottoman State would

have regarded as a national humiliation. Politicization of the Greek Orthodox Church increased especially with the aspirations of the Megali Idea that were to restore Byzantine heritage. In this respect, Greek irredentism brought together the Greek nation-state and the Greek Orthodox Church, cementing the Church's position in Greek identity (Molokotos-Liederman, 2003: 4). These contributions of Greek Orthodox Church led it to support the notion of Helleno-Orthodoxy conception which embraced the continuity from antique Hellenes to Byzantine Empire to modern Greece in that "the idea of national continuity demanded that Eastern Orthodox Christianity should be seen as an immediate and legitimate descendant of ancient Hellas" (Tsoukalas, 1999: 12).

Therefore, traditionalist sidereminds the uniqueness of Orthodoxy in interpreting a real Greekness (Molokotos-Liederman, 2007b: 195) and aimed to maintain Byzantine(Orthodoxy) legacy. In this direction, the Church resists against the obligation of Greece's increasing EU integration (Mavrogordatos, 2003: 133), which is the prohibition of declaring religion on ID cards, and asserts that any decision to remove religion from ID cards breaks the historical bound between the Greek nation and Orthodoxy, thereby taking away religious symbol for Greek national identity (Molokotos-Liederman, 2007b: 198).

Those modernists who oppose the inclusion of religion in ID card do not bypass the Byzantium(Orthodox) heritage of Greece (Mavrogordatos, 2003: 133) and acknowledge its importance in shaping Greek identity but do not agree with the identification of Greek nation with Orthodoxy (Molokotos-Liederman, 2007a: 152–155). They ignore the "holistic view of Helleno-Orthodoxy" (Molokotos-Liederman, 2003: 12) and consider Orthodoxy heritage just as a religious tradition. Defending the idea that "not all Greeks are Orthodox, nor all Orthodox are Greek" (Molokotos-Liederman, 2007a: 152), they restrict Orthodoxy to spiritual spheres to limit religious discrimination in political arenas (Molokotos-Liederman, 2007a: 147). They pay attention to the role of the heritage of Hellenic classical antiquity in forming today's Greek identity (Molokotos-Liederman, 2007b: 195). They underlie Hellenic-inspired Western modernism identified with the idea of progress (Tsoukalas, 1999: 7–10), secular-liberal Enlightenment values, and the growing trends of rationalism (Molokotos-Liederman, 2003: 19). In this direction, they do not regard the obligation of the EU to delete religious box from identity cards as a threat against Greece's unique identity (Molokotos-Liederman, 2007b: 197).

So, on the one hand, socialist and left wing politicians and intellectuals in Greece supported secular nationalism and ignored the importance of Orthodox character of Greece, on the other hand, the Church members and right wing politicians and intellectuals defended conservative nationalism and placed importance on the position of religion in Greek tradition.

### *Conclusion*

*This article show us that the phases, mentioned above, and historical realities of Greek nationalism continue to be relevant today. Dual heritages of Greek nationalism, Byzantine (Orthodoxy) and ancient Greece, have been a source of different answers to the question of what does it mean to be original Greek. The ambiguity originating from diverse explanations for a real Greekness has led to the incompatibility between the imagined Greek nation of conservative/traditional and of secular/modernist nationalists, triggering the conflict over ID cards. While, for the formers, because the role of Orthodoxy is vital in protecting Greek identity, religion box should be included into identity cards, the latter ones are in favor of the formation of a common homogenized European culture and thus do not endorse the presence of religion in a formal state document, ID card.*

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