



Book Review

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Modern Greece: What Everyone Needs to Know

by Stathis N. Kalyvas

New York: Oxford University Press, 2015

242 pages

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The award-winning author of the book, Stathis N. Kalyvas, is Arnold Wolfers Professor of Political Science and Director of the Program on Order, Conflict, and Violence at Yale University. He is also well-known in Greece by his articles in daily-newspapers such as “To Vima”. So the Greek version of the book, published in the same year with the original English one, became best-seller in Greece. However, it must be noted that the initial aim of the book is to reach the readers worldwide and help them understand the present Greek economic crisis by analyzing the Greece via seven successive historical cycles.

The book, after the contents, an acknowledgements section and several maps about the historical path of Greece, welcomes us with the first chapter: “What is Greece?” In which the author explains his motives to write such a book. Then he seeks answers for the questions like the weight of the ancient Greece on the present and the perspective of Greeks about themselves and their historical background. He also touches upon the disastrous and trailblazing aspects of Greece.

The second chapter “Emergence”, starts with an introduction about Greece’s bonds with Ancient, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman eras. It gives information about the Greek nationalist movement that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, also about the Greek Enlightenment, its opinion leaders and the process to rebellion. Then adverts to rebels (armatoloi and klepts), their insurgency, the phases of the rebellion and the way they fought. The following sections address how the western powers intervened to the Greek rebellion and helped to bring the Greek national project to fruition.

The next chapter “Building”, as one can deduce from the title, deals with the building of the new state and the Great Idea, which was the Greece’s central ideological



and political expression for the entire century. It focuses on the irredentist foreign policy, the territorial expansions, the way newly established democratic institutions operate and the state of economy throughout the nineteenth century. One can also find information about the modernization of the country and the course Greece doubled up its territory.

The fourth chapter “Turmoil” probes the “National Schism”, the fight for Greece’s participation in the Great War either allied with the Entente or with the Central Powers, “Asia Minor Debacle” defeat of Greece in Anatolia by the Turkish National Movement and the population exchange between Turkey and Greece in 1922. The book continues with the effects of Great Depression on Greek economy, the spread of communism all over the Greece and arrives to the late 1930s where Metaxas regime (dictatorship) takes over and the World War II breaks out. The author dwells on Greek Civil War, which started following the liberation of the country from a four-year German occupation, discusses its conflicted parties, the stance of the Greek communist party and lastly the postwar political order.

“Takeoff” chapter starts with the aftermath of the Civil war and narrates the Greece’s economic welfare till the 1960s and explains the 1967 military coup. The author tries to answer if there’s a perpetual Greco-Turkish rivalry and deals with the Cyprus issue and the Aegean Sea dispute in a relatively objective way. The book continues with the deposition of junta, abolishment of the monarchy and the restoration of the fully competitive democracy. The chapter also examines the transformation of the political culture, far-left political terrorism and the Greek socialism. While mentioning the participation of Greece to EEC, it also addresses how Andreas Papandreu established his party PASOK, how it shaped Greece and her economy and how PASOK became the most successful party in the country by its contradictions. The other discussions of the chapters goes by the effects of maladministration, populism on social norms and behavior and the way to economic boom of Greece after the economic stagnation period.

The most crucial part of the book “The Great Crisis” debates over how Greece’s robust economic growth took a sharp fall and the crisis broke out. Then goes into more depth by questioning domestic economic and political causes and also the European institutional causes of the crisis. It provides information about the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies and the adjustment program’s failure. The author also draws attention to the Greece’s attempt to exit from the Eurozone by calling it so-called “Grexit” and handles the political aspects by explaining PASOK’s and New Democracy’s stance, the rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party, and the government of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA). Besides European Union’s final decision to keep Greece in the Eurozone and the declaration of the European Central Bank to do “whatever it takes” to stand by her is noted. The chapter closes with the author’s thoughts on the Greece’s options about her economic future.

At the last chapter “Future”, the author sums up his idea of “seven boom-bust-bailout cycles of Greek history” by connecting them to the seven highly ambitious projects of Greece, which he thinks that shared a common goal: transcending the twin constraints of history and geography. One can say that the author is optimistic about the future of Greece provided that the Western intervention to stop Greece’s total economic collapse must be taken seriously and lead to a new national goal. A goal to transform country’s production and administration model more close to the European prototypes.

After the main text, reader finds the Notes per chapter which seems to be a good list for further reading. On the other hand, the book also has a selection of prominent and essential books in various topics and periods about Greece in English under the name “Suggestions for Further Reading”. An Index can be found at the end, as well. In conclusion the book, as the author indicates, seeks to understand where Greece came from, why it evolved the way it did, and how its story speaks to broader themes.