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# Southern Europe?

Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece from the 1950s until  
the present day

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## Southern Europe and International Politics in the Post-War Period

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The distinction between South and North is firmly rooted in European intellectual history 'from time immemorial'. In Pre-Modern and Early Modern European history the dichotomy had worked as a distinction between the 'barbaric' Northerners *versus* the 'refined' Southerners (Thompson 1957). It is, in fact, intimately connected to the development of climate theory in European intellectual history, from Ibn Khaldun to Bodin (Tooley 1953; Gates 1967). A key shift took place with Montesquieu's climate theory in 1748, which created the basis for the conceptualization of a 'backward' (Catholic) South *versus* an 'advanced' (Protestant) North (Shackleton 1955; 1960; Berry 1974; Rotta 1974). This dichotomy was further elaborated and expanded, especially after the defeat of Napoleon, with the rise of the North-Western European powers in all fields, whether economic, military or political. A key aspect was the *religious* divide between Protestant or secular-oriented Europe and Catholic Europe. This divide could cut across countries (e.g. unified Germany) or societies (secular elites *versus* Catholic rural populations).

However, until the First World War there was not much inclination to discuss the South as a European region. The focus was, rather, on 'Turkey-in-Europe' (a quite accurate and pertinent label), and later the 'Balkans' (Todorova 1997). The Great Power dreams of Italian Fascism did not lead to the construction of a 'Southern European' identity—not even at a cultural level— as Italy was more inclined to orient itself towards the Balkans and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean rather than towards Spain and Portugal.

As we shall see, categorizations of Southern Europe (which could include Italy, Spain, Portugal, but also Greece and even Turkey) were to emerge only gradually, as a consequence of a series of successive shifts in European pol-

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<sup>1</sup> This paper reflects discussions connected with the research project *European Regions and Boundaries. A Conceptual History* coordinated by the Centre for Advanced Studies of Sofia. I would also like to thank the editors for their helpful commentaries.

itics in the post-war period, ranging from the outbreak of the Cold War, to Southern European democratic transitions, and to European integration. This paper will first illustrate some key developments of the Cold War which affected the Southern European region. It will then focus on the consequences of the end of the Cold War. It will also analyze some key social science debates which concern specifically Southern Europe.

### The South in Cold War Europe

The premises that made Southern Europe a political framework referring to Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece (as well as partly Turkey) emerged, quite literally, with the Cold War. This was the natural consequence of the redefinition of strategic interests at the end of World War II, and was already evident in the well-known Churchill-Stalin conversations in Moscow in October 1944. The so-called 'percentages agreement' involved a re-definition of the borders of Eastern Europe. The 'percentages agreement' has been endlessly interpreted and discussed (Resis 1978; Tsakaloyannis 1986; Sfikas 1999; Roberts 2003; 2006). In this context, what matters is the actual meaning of the presumed agreement. The only substantive point of the agreement was that Greece was going to be left to the Western Allies. The rest of the agreement concerned countries which were already destined to end under Soviet control, and Churchill was well aware of that. As he said to Stalin: "Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. *Your armies are in Rumania and Bulgaria.*" (Churchill 1954, 198; italics added). It would have made little difference if Churchill had tried to formally oppose Stalin's decisions on Rumania and Bulgaria. Even stopping Tito in Trieste in 1945 proved to be difficult enough. The percentages agreement represented a tentative ratification of the new balance of power in Europe, which the military outcome was creating on the ground.

As a main consequence, Greece was *excluded* from Eastern Europe (to which it had always belonged, at least since the Byzantine era). Todorova has pointed out Churchill's accommodating attitude towards a Communist takeover in Yugoslavia. "When Fitzroy Maclean...warned about Tito's open allegiance to communism and his pro-Soviet orientation, Churchill calmed him down with the infallible argument: 'Do you intend...to make Jugoslavia your home after the war?...the less you and I worry about the form of

government they set up, the better” (Todorova 1999, 135). When it came instead to Greece, Churchill had no qualms about resorting to military intervention to prevent a Communist takeover. Hugh Seton-Watson (1975) was one of the few who challenged this exclusion of Greece from its Eastern European historical context.

The case of Turkey was more complex. It had been marginalised during the interwar period, but immediately after the end of the Second World War it suddenly acquired a key strategic role because of the Soviet requests for access to the Bosphorus. Together with Greece, Turkey was an immediate beneficiary of the launching of the Truman doctrine in 1947. The subsequent entry of the two countries into NATO in 1952 ratified a pre-existing strategic alliance with the emerging Atlantic bloc.

Henceforth, Turkish membership of the Atlantic alliance remained crucial to US geo-political interests, but was always problematic. On the one hand, the Turkish Republican Secular establishment (especially the military) willingly adopted the political, economic and military package offered by the USA. On the other hand, since 1960 the relationship became more awkward, for a variety of reasons. In its initial phase the Turkish military coup of 1960, before the higher echelons of the Turkish military reined in, appeared to have a ‘Nasserist’ inclination. The Cuban crisis of 1962 was in effect solved through the US decision to withdraw missiles from its Turkish bases. The Cyprus issue repeatedly involved the possibility of conflict between Greece and Turkey, two NATO members. In any case, from the beginning of the sixties US administrations strove to orient Turkey towards a ‘European’ destination (Bali 2010).

As is well known, the political integration of these two countries into Western Europe was consolidated by their inclusion into NATO in 1952 when they came to establish the ‘Southern Flank’ together with Italy (Hatzivassiliou and Triantaphyllou 2012; Chourchoulis 2015). Even the inclusion of Italy into NATO in 1949 was by no means as smooth as it might seem in retrospect. Truman was extremely reluctant to accept Italy in the first wave of NATO members (after all, Italy was neither Northern nor Atlantic) (Smith 1983). The inclusion of Italy involved the enlargement of NATO responsibility to the Mediterranean, without bringing any significant contribution in exchange (Romano 1993, 58–59). France played a role in supporting Italian entry, stressing the *Mediterranean* dimension of the military alliance, since at the time it had the *Département français d’Algérie* on the southern shores of the Mediterranean (ibid., 60).

The creation of the Southern Flank did not mean the emergence of a clearly defined area called 'Southern Europe'. This was due not only to the most obvious diversities (starting from Roman, Hellenic and Ottoman cultural heritage) but first of all because the Southern Flank always remained within strictly strategic horizons, and never expanded into the political and economic sphere. Furthermore, by 1955 the divergence of interests of the three pillars of the Southern Flank was manifest: for Greece and Turkey, this was made evident by the Cyprus rebellion and the anti-Greek riots in Istanbul in 1955; for Italy, the talks which were to lead to center-left governments revealed an orientation which was quite different from that of the other two pillars. As Dionysios Chourchoulis has pointed out, "the Southern Flank in the 1950s was a political situation rather than a military strategy of the alliance" (2015, 223).

Moreover, Spain and Portugal—the two other countries becoming a main component of the region called Southern Europe at a later stage—were *left out* from the Southern Flank. Spain was an embarrassing partner which was kept out of NATO, and constituted a marginal player in international post-war politics (Guirao 1998). Portugal was a different case, since it had a great importance from a strategic point of view, as a founding member of NATO. However, the country was (historically and economically) more connected with Great Britain than with any other part of Western Europe, let alone the Southern Flank (Kiernan 1973).

In the mid-fifties further developments initiated the progressive convergence—in terms of the international perception as a common area—of the countries of the Southern Flank with the Iberian dictatorships. Firstly, Spain's international isolation, that had also deeply affected its economy, began to be questioned, initially through the US-Spanish rapprochement sanctioned by the Treaty of Madrid in 1953, then in 1955 with the admission of the country as a member of the United Nations together with other countries, including Portugal and Italy (Black 2010, 22, 33). In particular, Spain gradually began to acquire more acceptability. In 1959 it became a full member of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (Ellwood 1992, 222). This then led to the first agreements with the European Economic Community (EEC) in the early sixties (Hierro Lecea 2015; Guirao 1998).

In the light of several further turning-points—the Austrian *Staatsvertrag*, the Soviet-Yugoslav partial reconciliation, the anti-Greek riots in Istanbul (Stourzh 1998; Rajak 2010; Vryonis 2005), the effects of the 'thaw' in Moscow in the satellite regimes of Eastern Europe—another key event was the



beginning of a new balance of power in the Middle East, which emerged with the Czechoslovak-Egyptian deal and the beginning of the Algerian and Cypriot rebellions. As it happens, the crucial French decision to go ahead with the plans for the creation of the European Economic Community — taken in the aftermath of the Suez debacle (Hitchcock 2002) or, perhaps, in consideration of structural economic factors even before (Wall 2001, 62–63; Milward 1993)—corresponded to the partial downsizing of French ambitions as a European power.

This was the moment in which there was a decisive shift from a trans-‘Mediterranean’ framework to a neo-‘Carolingian’ one (in which a Franco-German hegemony was rapidly and irreversibly defined, even in terms of administrative practice of emerging European institutions).

These developments facilitated the further normalization of Spain in the context of international relations and the EEC. The Portuguese case was slightly different, not least because of the strength of the British connection. Portugal had made some initial attempts to achieve associate membership with the EEC, but after the first French veto to British entry, it followed Great Britain in joining the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA). When Britain finally did manage to join the EEC, Portugal began to reorient itself in the same direction (Leitão 2001; 2006; Geary 2009; Cunha 2012; Coppolaro and Lains 2013).

The rise of a military regime in Greece in 1967 appeared to define a new constellation, linking Iberian right-wing dictatorships with the Southern Flank (Greece, if not Turkey). The US together with the two major Western European powers, France and Federal Germany, were quite pragmatic about this aspect (Del Pero 2011). In fact, in December 1973 Henry Kissinger made a point of stopping over in Portugal while flying to Geneva for peace talks “to show appreciation for Portugal’s help, almost unique in Europe, during the airlift to Israel” at the time of the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 (Horne 2009, 361). On the other hand, the survival and emergence of right-wing dictatorships, three decades after the defeat of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, always remained a source of embarrassment and unease at an international level, at least for some North-Western European countries, e.g. the Netherlands, if not for the EEC as a whole.

Italy also appeared vulnerable, if not to a right-wing coup, quite possibly to a left-wing takeover, given the presence of the largest Communist Party in Western Europe. If a Southern European categorization was emerging, it would have been as an area of instability, marked by right-wing dictator-

ships, countries inclined to military coups, and, in the case of Italy, a very shaky parliamentary democracy.

### The End of the Cold War

The wave of democratic transitions in Spain, Portugal, and Greece did not come entirely unexpectedly. What was unexpected was the speed of these transitions, and their virtually peaceful outcome. Although the three 'transitions' reflected three quite *different* processes, they were telescoped into a reassuring narrative of democratization (Linz and Stepan 1996). This outcome allowed, in the eighties, a new phase of enlargement of the European Community, which was now to include 'Southern Europe' in its entirety. European integration was therefore instrumental in establishing and consolidating Southern Europe as a category.<sup>2</sup>

Although the subsequent conflicts for resources in Brussels consolidated the idea of 'Southern Europe' as a common area, other events weakened it, at least in the medium-term: the end of the Cold War and, more specifically, the emergence of Italy and Greece as Cold War 'orphans'. All of a sudden, at the end of 1991, those countries lost their strategic relevance in the eyes of the remaining super-power. Henceforth, some old clients and beneficiaries of the Cold War lost their value. This also happened in South-Eastern Europe, in the Yugoslav Federation, where the consequences proved to be dramatic (Zimmermann 1999; Danner 1997).

Preventing the Italian Communist Party from coming to power was no longer relevant. For that matter, the acceptance in a government coalition of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, which at the time was still loyal to its Fascist heritage, could also take place without much of a reaction from Washington or Brussels. In fact, following the collapse of the established party system, Italy began a period of two decades of virtually continuous neo-populist hegemony in 1994. At an international level Italy began to be seen as a fragile and unreliable democracy.

In Greece, the end of the Cold War also produced a disruption of the existing political alignments. This was made evident by the successive changes

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<sup>2</sup> As regards the consequences of European integration, see Massimo Piermattei in this volume.

in governments in 1989–1993. After this phase, it appeared that the Greek political system was back to business as usual, starting from the continuation of a dynastically-based leadership (the surnames were Papandreou and Karamanlis). At an international level, Greece continued to extract maximum benefit by resorting to the use of its veto power (as it had in the eighties, in threatening to veto Spanish and Portuguese accession to the EEC). This was made evident in the dispute over the recognition of what came to be known as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and, later, over the admission of Cyprus to the European Union (EU), which was successfully made into a precondition for the admission of the other countries in 2004. The entry of Greece into the European Monetary Union (EMU) was by no means a foregone conclusion. As David Close has pointed out, from 1985 to 1998 Greece was repeatedly given a low rating by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and by Brussels. Indeed, “[d]uring the most of the 1990s Greece was under the humiliating supervision by the European Commission and IMF, which both tried to ensure reduction of the budget deficit” (Close 2002, 169). It was the only ‘Southern European’ country to be excluded from the EMU. Entry was sanctioned by Brussels in 2000, and the drachma was replaced by the euro in 2002.

The end of the Cold War was thus profoundly destabilizing in Italy and Greece. This was not made immediately apparent, not least because of the immediate outbreak of the Wars of Yugoslav Dissolution (1991–1999), followed by the acceleration of democratic and economic transitions in East-Central Europe.

Spain and Portugal had a much smoother transition into the post-Cold War world. This was due to a variety of factors. Distance from the dissolved Soviet bloc and the Socialist Federation of Yugoslav Republics (SFRY) helped. In the case of Spain, the process of political and economic transition had been prepared and nurtured for many decades, so the end of the Cold War had already taken place by the early eighties. This was already apparent at the time of the attempted military coup in February 1981, when the political elite reacted firmly and cooperatively. The election of a Socialist government marked a definitive normalization of the Spanish political system. In the case of Portugal, the political turbulence of the 1974–75 period together with the fallout of the loss of the African colonies had been rapidly overcome, with the consolidation of a stable political system. Moreover, in Spain and in Portugal the post-Cold War shift had already been factored in before 1989. This was definitely not the case in Italy. Furthermore, the Span-

ish and Portuguese party systems proved quite resilient in the two decades which followed the end of the Cold War. In fact, at the beginning of the two-thousands Spain was seen as politically and economically healthier than Italy.

In other words, although it had played a significant role within the debates on the monetary union in the nineties<sup>3</sup>, at the very beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the concept of Southern Europe appeared to be about to lose its relevance. The 'Southern European' countries seemed to follow quite different paths of economic and political development. While some had become a model (Spain), others seemed to be stuck in a never-ending political—as well as latently economic—crisis (Italy).

The picture changed radically after the beginning of the Great Recession following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. The chain of financial, economic, and debt crises led to the immediate invention of the acronym PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain). Commentators in the international arena eagerly adopted this unfavourable label, while Southern European governments struggled to distance themselves from their neighbours, arguing that their national crises were quite different. In particular, Spain and Portugal (which had begun to be considered success stories in the EU) found themselves saddled with the negative images which Italy and Greece had already acquired throughout the nineties.

### Echoes in Scientific Studies

In 1958 an American political scientist published a short study of 'Montegrano', a locality in Basilicata, in Southern Italy. Its basic thesis was that what characterised Montegrano was what he designated as 'amoral familism', which he defined in the following terms: "maximise the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do otherwise" (Banfield 1958, 85). This text has been endlessly debated (see e.g. Pizzorno 1966; Ginsborg 1990a; 1990b; Cafagna 1994). It is sometimes taken as a crude exemplar of theories of modernization, while it was in fact a conservative critique of these (Gilman 2003). As it enhanced aspects such as family, honour, patronage or clientelism, Banfield certainly touched a raw nerve. The book anticipated some key elements that have characterized the scien-

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<sup>3</sup> See again Picramatei in this volume.

tific reflection on 'Southern European' societies, as made particularly evident by Giulio Sapelli's synthesis (1995). However, in the fifties and sixties 'Southern Europe' did not represent a relevant analytical framework for social sciences, and it was no coincidence that Banfield's study focused on a national case study. In the first decades of the post-war period, Southern Europe was still emerging as a regional categorization within international relations and was too weak to influence the scientific reflection.

Quite soon, however, the democratic transitions in Spain, Portugal, and Greece led to the emergence of a specific field of research related to 'Southern Europe', i.e. transitological studies. Linz and Stepan (1996) summarized the debate, which can also be gauged from some of the more general studies (Gunther et al. 1995; Morlino 1998; Diamandouros and Gunther 2001). These studies all represented a significant effort to establish an actual field of Southern European studies. At the same time, the consolidation of Southern Europe as a regional categorization in the context of the European integration process offered new perspectives for a 'Southern European' research agenda. In this context, since the late seventies a broad number of scientific studies emerged.<sup>4</sup> The field of Social Policy was very fertile. In the nineties Ferrera (1996) and Rhodes (1997) produced extremely insightful studies of the 'Southern Model' of Welfare. This is not just because their analyzes turned out to be all too accurate, but also because it provided a workable model which could be usefully applied, even outside the borders of Southern Europe as traditionally understood. The comprehensive analyzes produced by Turkish scholars such as Burğa and Keyder (2006) on the Turkish version or adaptation of the 'Southern Model' point in that direction.

However, at the end of the nineties, with the reorientation of European and NATO enlargement towards the Eastern European countries of the former Soviet bloc, debates and analyzes of Southern Europe in the social sciences lost much of their resonance. The post-2008 developments led to a re-discovery of Southern Europe as a field of research. The need for a sustained analysis of what may be termed the 'Southern European Debt Crisis' has now come to the fore (see e.g. Simonazzi et al. 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> Malefakis (1992) provided a useful overview of Southern European studies in the social sciences as a whole.

## Conclusions

As a regional categorization, Southern Europe, due to its peripheral or semi-peripheral position, has been particularly influenced by international settings. After World War II, there existed no categorization of Southern Europe as a feature of international relations. However, several factors—that partially had quite different origins—soon collectively began to promote the perception of Southern Europe as a common area embracing Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and partially Turkey: the emergence of the ‘Southern Flank’, the gradual process of normalization of relations between Western Europe and the Iberian peninsula, the shift towards a Franco-German axis, and, crucially, the European integration process. After the Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek democratic transitions had eventually led to ‘Mediterranean Enlargement’, Southern Europe advanced to an influential category within European relations.

Nevertheless, it faded into the background, as the European integration proceeded eastwards and the ‘Southern European’ countries appeared to follow quite different paths of development at the end of the nineties and at the beginning the two-thousands. The post-2008 revival of the label ‘Southern Europe’ shows how exceptionally flexible and volatile this category has always been. It is a spatial concept that can be activated to negotiate power relations within Europe, or rapidly forgotten if not needed. This is likely to remain the case in the foreseeable future.

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