

Integrity initiative: Notes on discussions in Greece, 2017

In black type are the analytical notes made by CND & SPCD of their meetings in Athens in Feb 2017. In red are the comments on those notes made by John Rendon's staff based in Athens

ELIAMEP

Greeks have a romantic notion of Russia; "In difficult times they will help us." Although there is no evidence that this will be so, eg the Russian failure to bail out Cyprus with loans. Most recent polls say: "Russia is the most friendly power to Greece".

The Greek Government well understands the value of disinformation and uses it domestically. But the Government is completely closed to hearing the message that Russia is conducting an influence and disinformation campaign against Greece. The public will likewise resist the idea, indeed they will conclude that it is others who are doing this.

ELIAMEP tries to be non-ideological and useful to the government. ELIAMEP cannot do anything which targets Russia alone. Moreover there are very few staff who are competent to address this issue. Most staff have had very little exposure to the outside world. Few speak good English. Many have ideological problems.

ELIAMEP will fight to prevent Greek reorientation away from the west towards Russia and China. But the current argument is to improve relations with Russia and China. ELIAMEP cannot publicly say "politicians are taking Russian money, or Russia is spreading disinformation to deceive us".

The question is, are people pro-Russian because they understand, or because they don't understand? If it is the latter, ELIAMEP can help put this right. It is fine that Russia and China should pursue their national interests. But Greece should understand its national interests and the need to protect them.

So, it needs a lot of thinking about how to manage introducing this issue so there is a positive effect. Perhaps the way for ELIAMEP to introduce this issue would be to expose professionals to the idea that the nature of conflict and competition in the world is changing, starting by/ looking at new methods of conflict. Understand that people are using information in new ways which we need to be aware of, etc. looking at Russia's use of new weapons in different places. This can be done and will start the process of making people aware.

SIDENOTE. The Government could be crumbling and may be out in 6 months. If Mitsotakis wins the next elections and become PM, he is not pro-Russian.

[CP]: The ELIAMEP issue is multifaceted:

1. The institution depends financially on the GR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and other State funds. As such its opinion cannot be differentiated. It follows the same approach: pro-European, modernist, not publically pro-American, no criticism of the GR GOV [regardless of the GOV].
2. ELIAMEP scientific staff is not of high calibre. The majority of staff considers ELIAMEP as a source of additional income or the opportunity to make publications. Its management staff is of the same calibre, hence there has been no progress the past 20 years.
3. Most importantly: ELIAMEP constantly avoids taking part in rhetoric conflicts / debates, even regarding topics that it supposedly has expertise on. Relations with Russia is a highly

publicised debate in Greece which needs strong positions and the desire to have a public debate. ELIAMEP cannot and does not want to do it.

Based on the above, ELIAMEP cannot be utilised as a frontline vehicle to address the ongoing Russian influence.

Well connected Political Commentator

Key Government people have close links to Russia.

[CP]: The real pro-Russian group [LAE party] is not part of SYRIZA anymore. The GOV officials that derive from SYRIZA party [including the PM] are pragmatic and utilitarian, they are not ideologically close to Russia. They are looking to Russia in order to obtain [via erroneous analyses and assessments] a counterweight and support against the EU and Germany pressure. This was particularly visible during H1 2016. This trend is currently moderate, but the need to obtain support against EU pressure remains.

The Government is now covertly pro-Russian; it was overtly so at first. Pro-government Media is also pro-Russian. The Government is trying to control the media completely. It has failed so far, so it is trying to get the media which does support the government to undermine media which does not.

[CP]: The same applies to pro-GR GOV media, they are not pro-Russian out of belief, but out of the need to support the GR GOV in its attempt to avoid EU pressure. The GOV is trying to create pro-GR GOV media [not strictly partisan] that will have wider support. The GR GOV is against traditional media owners and is trying to turn them against it. The pressure derives: 1) by utilising the banks to put pressure on the media owners to repay their debts, and 2) by intensification of judicial audit of their past loans. At the same time, the media finances and personal wealth of the media owners is audited [together with reviewing the way that the media licences have been obtained]. These moves are well received by a part of the people that want corruption to be addressed [corruption is understood as the entanglement of the past political establishment, loans from the banks and assignment of Public works to media owners]

Ivan Savvidis, a strongly pro-Russian entrepreneur in Northern Greece is trying to buy a very important centrist media outlet, which is upper middle class and pro-western. It includes: Lambrakis Press, the weekly "To vima", the daily "Ta nea". If he succeeds it will have an important effect.

[CP] Ivan Savvidis is not simply a pro-Russian entrepreneur. He is an active member of the Russian plan for Greece. His moves are planned [politically, economically & socially]. Lately, he is aspiring to find access to the Trump administration [via the Greek diaspora]. He has made several moves regarding the GR media, with no result. He aspires to obtain fame rather than making a major investment [his name is there when it comes to acquiring any of the major media that are in bankruptcy – i.e. MEGA or DOL]. Overall, he does not have significant financial strength, but he has created an image projecting greater wealth than what he actually has.

Greeks think they need the US but they like Russia. If Trump and Putin reach some sort of agreement this will also reinforce pro-Russian sentiment. Whatever specialness the US was seen to have will be lost completely.

A Professor from Macedonia University who runs a public opinion survey with SKAI. They report that the attitude to Russia, especially from young people, is devastating and a very serious issue. These people do not remember the Cold War at all and are really attracted by Putin's demonstration of power.

The main vehicle for Russian influence in Greece is cultural, showing the affinity between peoples. This is reflected in lots of TV programmes.

[CP] It is more complicated than that. Youth [and not only youth] are inspired by the Putin image [statesman – politician protecting his country's interest]. This is reproduced. The differences between the geopolitical power of Greece and Russia are obviously not understood. In reality, the Putin model outlines the lack of trust to the GR political leadership. People think that they are subordinate to foreigners and that partisan interest is above peoples' interests.

Regarding overall culture, it is clearly pro-Western. Consumer habits and patterns are Western, dominant values are Western, knowledge is organized by Western standards, art has a western orientation. In terms of mass culture, Hollywood standards and its products prevail [lately, the Survivor reality show, a western-concept is hugely popular in Greece]. In addition, sports are integrated in Western institutions.

The Orthodox religion is an important weapon which Russia is using. The Russian patriarch is trying to exceed the influence of the Greek patriarch. The Montenegrin church is trying to sabotage discussion of religion and security. Montenegro and other Balkan Orthodox religions look to Serbia and Russia, not to Greece. The exceptions are Bishop Anastasios in Albania, Bishops in Romania and Kosovo.

[CP] There are serious challenges in the Orthodox Church. The Russian Patriarchate challenges the primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, yet not in a conflict mode. It simply exploits the power of the Russian state to expand its influence. At the same time, the Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarchate faces issues with the Greek Autocephalous Church for a series of issues that have been pending for decades. The Greek Church has no power over Mount Athos. The Constantinople Patriarchate oversees Mount Athos. Mount Athos is of interest to Russia. Moscow is trying to expand its influence and has succeeded [to a degree].

The Greek educational system may be challenges, as most teachers and professors are dogmatically very left-wing.

Politicians: even "New Democracy" party, the centre-right junior coalition partner, cannot afford to come out as anti-Russian. Its key deputy leader, MOD Kammenos is pro-Russian. Indeed, very few in any party will be prepared to come out as anti-Russian.

[CP] There appears to be some sort of misunderstanding. Panos Kammenos originates from New Democracy, but left the party in 2012. He has created the Independent Greeks party [ANEL] which is currently the minor-coalition government partner of SYRIZA. Kammenos is Minister of Defence and maintains relations with New Democracy members that are pro-Russian, as well as Ivan Savvidis and other entrepreneurs that are pro-Russian. Kammenos is currently seeking access to the Trump administration.

Defence procurement: Russians are well entrenched in this, due to bribery. Greek defence correspondents accredited to MOD are the most corrupted of all Greek journalists. They work as a criminal organization.

[CP]: Those journalists are bribed by all companies, regardless of representing pro-Russian or Western armament systems. They represent companies and are paid by them. The recent trials on armament contracts in Greece revealed that bribes of military and politicians took place by Russian and Western companies, while the later are the majority of judicial investigations.

Journalist, *Inside Story*

In Greece, the press is not just black and white, it is also a grey area.

For example, they got Wikileaks three years ago. The dilemma was whether to publish or not. 98% of Greek journalists will publish anything. Some would only publish if they can demonstrate the facts are true, no matter what the source.

There is a serious problem with Russians, they are more and more skilfully exploiting the rules of our society. For example, they offer journalists a scoop playing to our system when, in fact, it is an "Active Measures" activity designed to deceive us. The Russians steal material and pass it to the press through a 3rd party for deniability. Good journalists will try and verify the information but the Russians can often manage to fake the verification. About 63% of journalists are Russophiles in Greece. This is very similar to how the Russians operated in East Germany, noting that journalists received material from East Germany which was subsequently proved to be planted and the journalists were manipulated.

[CP] The above are correct

There is currently a serious Russian backed attempt to take over a significant section of the Greek media. This is led by a Russian Ivan Savvides and a Mr Karageorgis, a friend of Malofeyev. Malofeyev paid for Karageorgis' marriage in Moscow. Karageorgis has purchased 11 local TV channels across Greece and wants to create his own national network.

[CP] The plan was cancelled and Karageorgis is wanted for several cases.

The current Govt. sees this as an advantage and not a problem. The main Greek news agency has Sputnik and RT officially as its main partners. They are vulnerable because they need money. The Russians are able to buy people quite cheaply in Greece. They look for those with financial problems and pay them relatively little money. For example, LEVANIS, owner of Epikera, gets 50k Euros from the Russians each year.

[CP] This is a publishing house established by the Vardinoyiannis family and enjoyed the support of PASOK. Its initial orientation during the 80s was pro-American, and more specifically pro-Democratic. This lasted until 2010. There was a patriotic/ nationalistic turn then, and consequently a turn towards SYRIZA [based on the readership requirements]. Its publisher was a SYRIZA MP candidate in the 2015 National Elections. There is currently economic support from entrepreneurs of pro-Russian orientation.

Someone is producing a TV programme on Cyber warfare. It is now being edited and should be ready by the end of February. It will look at elections in France and Germany. He talked first to companies doing post cyber-attack autopsies rather than talking to State run organisations. Most countries outsource their analysis / autopsies of cyber-attacks. Only the Estonians never do this.

Subsequently he did talk to the Federal Germany office for IT Security. He has studied APT28, the Russian group who hacked the German parliament and the Democratic convention. He has studied the hacking of Channel 5 Monde in France, and the Russians setting up of a CDU page in the Baltic states.

He assesses that the Russians started to hack into French systems at the same time as the sale of the Mistral ships to Russia were stopped but he is certain that the Russians had penetrated the French system 3 months before this.

He works for a Conservative newspaper but he has trouble from his Editor who is frightened of his attacking the Russians (in print).

The Russians think of Greece as their own back yard, for historic reasons. Greece is thought of as a special case. The Prime Minister went on a visit to Ukraine yesterday and even the simple act of visiting gave him a lot of problems from supporters of Russia in Greece.

He understands that Putin outsourced the Ukrainian operation to Malofeyev and gave him all the hotels as a reward. The current Greek defence minister has attended a party organised by Malofeyev who paid for his electoral campaign.

[CP] In reality, Minister of Defence was invited in the Kareagiorgis wedding, together with another 80 individuals from Greece.

Russians see Greece as a weak link in NATO.

[CP] Russians had this understanding, but it is debatable whether they still believe so. They never managed to exert pressure in NATO via Greece. GR PM Tsipras has understood that it is not to the GOV's interest to question NATO at a time that he faces challenges within the EU. The IMF stance on the GR Debt issue helped, regardless of the GR GOV's inability to manage its relations with the IMF, the European Commission and Germany.

Arkady Rotenberg from St Petersburg was sent to try and buy up lots of Northern Greece from Russians who had moved into Northern Greece.

Ivan Savvidis is a Pontic Greek from Georgia but speaks Russian, not Greek. He was the Director of a tobacco company in Rostov on Don smuggling tobacco into Transnistria via Cypriot companies with offices in London. He is a Russian citizen and the main spokesperson for Russians in Northern Greece.

The Kathimerini group, which includes SKAI TV, is the biggest Conservative media organisation in Greece and it includes Inside Story. They have been helped by TE Correspondent in the Netherlands. They are entirely web based and put out two (02) news stories per day. They have 2000 subscribers in Greece. Inside Story has written extensively about Russia. But no one else will publish about Russia. People are frightened to tackle Russia. For example, General Kostovakos who is head of the EU military delegation in Brussels is a good guy but he "would not mess with the Russians".

[CP] Kathimerini group is considered credible, but in Greek standards, it is a right-wing institution supporting neoliberal ideas. There are pending judicial cases regarding the group and its owners. It is considered a pro-European institution [by the majority of people], which was in the past assessed as a positive notion, yet not currently. Some of their management staff are considered by the public as extremely pro-Americans, reducing the reach of their opinions.

Inside Story is not a medium of high prominence or appeal, as it is considered an elitist medium. It focuses on investigative/ revealing journalism more than reporting on political developments. The medium cannot support a pro-Russian approach with success. It is mainly driven by Tassos Telloglou who is largely pro-German and in direct contact and alignment with the German Embassy in Athens. He is a healthy force, although he tends to mix his personal political centre-right ideas with his otherwise very credible and serious investigative journalistic work.

Kathimerini group, given its credible image could be utilised in order to halt the pro-Russian rhetoric, but it has to be part of an overall plan.

General Michalis Kostarakos is president of the EU Military Committee. He is an officer of low capability that is primarily interested in his career. The fact that he does not want to be 'mess with the Russians' is not because of his beliefs but because of the overall policies followed by the EU on the matter.

Lecturer at Thessaloniki University. Expert on the Balkans.

He is seriously concerned about Russia in the region. The region is so weak despite heavy investment by the West that the situation could be overturned by Russia. This is especially true in Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo.

[CP] Correct

Russian influence is insidious but everywhere, so it is difficult to pinpoint. Their funding is difficult to identify. The current crisis is transforming Greek society very negatively. In the early 1990's Greece was not pro-Russian. Even in 2005 there was immense trust in the EU. (Although not in the US), and 5 times more people trusted the EU than trusted Russia. But this is not true today. There is a need to fight to re-establish in Greece trust in Western institutions. Furthermore, anti-German feeling has been revived in Greece. There are historical reasons for anti-German feeling but this later revival has been artificially generated.

[CP] Correct

The best regional analysis by the Ministry of Interior think tank which gets most EU funding, which makes it self-sufficient from Govt. It is an internal body which does officer training.

[CP] Not clear.

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