



AS WE SEE IT

Nailing down 'academic' freedom and tenure in Greek research institutions

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ABSTRACT: In this essay we describe the different blows that research in Greece has suffered because of the economic crisis (i.e. drastic budgetary cuts, hiring freezes for new positions, severe salary cuts, and austerity-driven brain-drain), despite the fact that Greek research is prospering in terms of publications and citations. In addition, we discuss the last blow to Greek research; notably, the abolishment of tenure and the change in the status of researchers through the new law for research passed in December 2014, and its effects on 'academic' freedom.

KEY WORDS: Tenure · Academic freedom · Research institutes · Greece · Economic crisis · Law for research

INTRODUCTION

Tenure in recent years has been under dispute (e.g. Kaplan 2010, Wetherbe 2013, Peterson 2014). In fact, abolishing tenure is not a surprise given the marketization of the last societal pillars, i.e. education and research (Stergiou & Tsikliras 2014a). Stergiou & Tsikliras (2014b) maintain that the marketization of higher education (e.g. Amsler 2014, Lynch 2014) might be related to the recent decrease in tenured positions (e.g. in the US, the combined tenured/tenure-track rate declined from 56% in 1975 to 31.9% in 2005: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenure>), and the increase in cheaper, more flexible and less secure work contracts. Yet tenure guarantees the freedom of professors and researchers to produce and teach knowledge against prevailing orthodoxies, political and lobby landscapes and fashionable issues. Abolishing tenure strongly impinges on 'academic' freedom (see e.g. www.aaup.org/our-work/

protecting-academic-freedom; Fossey & Wood 2004, Karran 2009, Vrieling et al. 2011, Horn 2015, Lynch & Ivacheva 2015, Nelson 2015, Traianou 2015), which is the pillar of higher educational and research institutions. Although the concept of academic freedom typically refers to university faculty, we extend it to cover research institutions as well. In addition, we consider academic freedom to imply the 3 aspects defined by Vrieling et al. (2011, p. 117): the freedom of individuals, the autonomy of institutions and the 'obligation for the public authorities to respect and protect academic freedom and to take measures in order to ensure an effective enjoyment of this right and to promote it'.

On December 2014, during the sixth year of the economic crisis in Greece, a new law for research was passed in the Greek parliament. In this short essay, we briefly describe the effects of the economic crisis on Greek research and discuss the effects of the volte-face resulting from the new law on academic

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freedom through the abolishment of tenure and the change in the status of researchers; the last nail in the coffin of Greek research.

GREEK ECONOMIC CRISIS AND RESEARCH

One of the actions of the Greek government to 'tackle' the recent economic crisis was to drastically cut the funding of research centres from about 80 million euros in 2008 to less than 40 million in 2014 (EEE 2013). Yet, the memorandum signed by the government for economic support from the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund (known as 'Troika') stated that research should be excluded from the state retrenchment. This is reasonable given the variety of economic benefits of publicly funded basic research (e.g. Salter & Martin 2001). As Nelson & Romer (1996, p. 9) claim: 'Encouraging R&D investment is as important as investing itself'.

Historically, Greek research started to develop mainly within the framework of the European Economic Community (and later European Union). This is reflected in the number of Greek scientific publications (which increased exponentially from 1980 to 2008; Stergiou & Pantis 2006, National Documentation Centre 2014), and the percentage of Greek publications compared to global publications (which increased from 0.17% between 1975 and 1980, to 0.82% between 2003 and 2005; Stergiou & Pantis 2006). In addition, the impact of Greek publications (i.e. the ratio of total number of citations divided by the total number of publications across all scientific disciplines) exponentially increased between 1996 and 2010 unlike that for 27 European Union countries and for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, which exhibited a linear increase (Fig. 1). The rate of increase for Greece was 33 and 50% faster than those rates of European Union and OECD countries, respectively (i.e. the linear slopes of the impact vs. time regression were 0.20, 0.15 and 0.13, respectively) (Fig. 1). At the same time, for each euro on average invested in Greek research centers,

mainly through projects funded by the European Union, 3 euros were returned back to the economy (National Documentation Centre 2013).

This progress in scientific output has also been reflected in the evaluations of Greek research institutions. Thus, the average score of the evaluation of the existing 31 Greek research institutes (belonging to 10 centres) by international committees in January 2014 (www.gsrt.gr) was 4.38 out of 5 (SE = 0.49, median = 4.51) (EEE 2014).

These above-mentioned facts show that Greek research is export-oriented, prospering and competitive in the international research landscape. Yet, this is realized in a politically, socially and economically negative national landscape, which is the result of various factors acting together. Firstly, there is a devaluation of the research (and university) role by the national media (Stergiou & Tsikliras 2012). Secondly, there is the burden of bureaucracy, which was, and still is, a serious problem in Greece (Spanou 2008, Danopoulos & Danopoulos 2009). It is much higher in Greece and other southern European countries compared to the remaining EU countries (e.g. Van De Walle 2006, EconMatters 2011), and has a

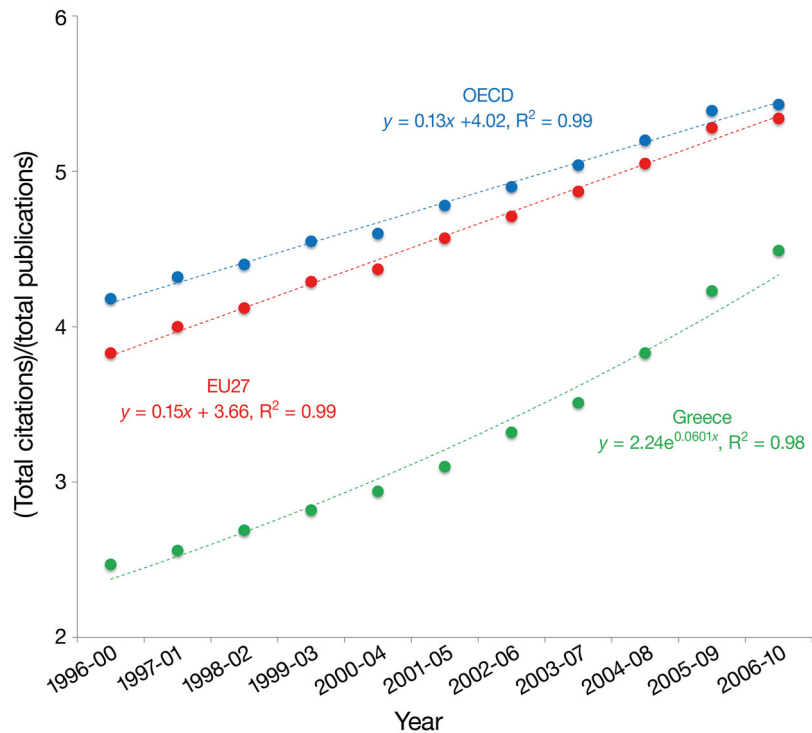


Fig. 1. Impact of publications (i.e. total number of citations divided by total number of publications for all disciplines) in Greece, in 27 countries of the European Union (EU27) and in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Data were taken from the National Documentation Centre (2014), and a time varying regression was fitted

negative impact on the country's economic growth (Papaconstantinou et al. 2013). Greek bureaucracy is generally inefficient and obstructionist (Danopoulos & Danopoulos 2009). In fact, the 'Napoleonic' aspects of Greek bureaucracy have never been thoroughly reformed based on modern managerial practices, and the various reform attempts that have been implemented were often contradictory (Spanou 2008). More importantly, Greek bureaucracy has no autonomy from the state and the political parties, and lacks a universalistic approach (Papakostas 2001). It suffices to say that for several institutions recruitment of scientists and provision of key equipment through tenders is often such a time-consuming process that it negatively affects the realization of scientific projects. Finally, national research funding is very low. The analysis of EUROSTAT data shows that in 2012 Greece spent only 0.71% of its GDP on funding research, attaining the fifth lowest rank among EU countries (followed by Latvia, Romania, Malta and Bulgaria), with expenditure on research being half of the EU average (1.42%) (Feidas 2014). In contrast, Portugal, which was also hit by an economic crisis, spent 2% of its GDP on the same and ranked fourth in the EU (after Iceland, Estonia and Germany) (Feidas 2014).

Apart from the drastic budgetary cuts that took place after 2011, new position openings for research institutes (and universities) were frozen and the salaries of professors and researchers were severely cut (Stergiou & Tsikliras 2012) by about 30 to 40% depending on the rank (Feidas 2014). These were the first nails in the coffin of Greek research (and education), and led to austerity-driven brain-drain (Stergiou & Tsikliras 2012, Trachana 2013).

TENURE LANDSCAPE BEFORE AND AFTER DECEMBER 2014

In November 2014, the Greek government presented for discussion in parliament the new draft law on research (and innovation). All previous laws for research (1514/1985, 3653/2008) explicitly stated that researcher positions of grade A and B (but not of grade D and C) are tenured, as is also (still) the case for university associate and full professor positions (as opposed to lecturers and assistant professors). In the draft law, reference to tenure was removed. The political leadership had several meetings with research centres and other bodies reassuring them that the removal of tenure was a 'mistake' that was to be corrected with an amendment during the discus-

sion of the draft law in parliament. During the discussion period, various bodies (i.e. the union of Greek researchers, labour unions of research centres, different political parties, deputies and other political bodies) proposed numerous amendments on the draft law, including one on the reestablishment of tenure. The law (4310/2014) was finally passed on 8 December 2014. Indeed, the 'mistake' was 'corrected', but in the wrong direction: instead of explicitly stating the symbolic word 'tenure', the corresponding sentence now mentions that researchers are 'of indefinite term' state servants 'under the code for civil servants'. This is even worse than the removal of the word 'tenure' because it implies that research staff owes loyalty to the government and not to the citizenry.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

The removal of 'tenure' and its subsequent replacement with 'state servants' in the new law of research prepares the ground for the gradual reduction in the number of tenured researchers and their replacement in favour of cheap labour on a contract basis. It also allows the state to actually prevent researchers from speaking up, especially for a series of hot issues related to topics such as the environment, climate change, physical disasters, socio-economics and fisheries. This was the case in Canada after the conservative government came into power in 2006, for several environmental issues (see Pauly 2015, this Theme Section). The change from 'tenure' to 'state servants' will have long-term effects on the Greek research system, since it will transform researchers from independent experts to government servants. Thus, the new law could potentially affect all 3 aspects of academic freedom as defined by Vrieliink et al. (2011) (see 'Introduction').

Nonetheless, other underlying reasons (e.g. related to lobbying) might also be behind this law-imposed dismissal of tenure (as opposed to dismissal for cause, e.g. neglect of duty, misconduct). In any case, this last nail in the coffin of Greek research will undoubtedly have wider repercussions on the future economic development of Greece, given that academic freedom is the ticket for future economic growth. This is because academic freedom contributes greatly to the shift from maintenance learning to dynamic learning, with the latter defined as 'problem reformulation and novel thinking to facilitate knowledge creation' (Karran 2009, p. 278). Dynamic learning asks for a continuous questioning of the status quo and ensures that

young scientists will develop ‘... independent thinking and critical reasoning, and thereby better fulfil their responsibilities as active, participative citizens within an increasingly global community’ (Karran 2009, p. 278).

In general, although the Greek state has the recognized ‘brain drain’ triggered by the economic crisis as one of the biggest socio-economic problems, it has never considered research as the ‘cheap’ and best investment for future growth. This is elegantly expressed by the saying attributed to the Greek researcher Giorgos Papanicolaou, the inventor of the Pap test: ‘... If I come to Greece I fear that I will be committing suicide. Americans and Europeans consider scientists as valuable members of the society, whereas Greeks treat scientists as obsolete and burden and in some instances even dangerous...’ Hopefully, this attitude and the implicit ‘mistake’ in the Greek legislation framework for research will, soon, be reversed.

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