

Institutionalism and the Macedonian Question

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The 'Macedonian Question' is one of the recent elements of the so called 'powder keg' of Europe'. The question has been primarily studied by historians and dealt with by politicians. To my knowledge, Tziampiris's work is the first attempt to employ this complicated issue as a case study in order to test a theory – not always an easy task to accomplish.

The aim in this essay is not to deal with the 'Macedonian Question' per se. Instead, it will focus on the theory and mechanisms of European political integration and seek to demonstrate that mainstream international relations theory may deal with regional issues, such as the 'name' dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

Aristotle Tziampiris's work follows the institutionalist perspective. Tziampiris attempts to test the exegetic power of an institutionalist paradigm. He does it by examining and approaching the workings of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) as an international regime. Besides, he has set two more tasks for himself: first, to present and use as a case study the 'name' dispute between Greece and FYROM; and, second, to control his beliefs and attachments and deal objectively with an issue that he, coming from Macedonia, Greece, has experienced personally since his early youth. I found that he dealt successfully with both of these tasks.

Tziampiris's institutionalist approach is based primarily on international regimes theory. He adopts a 'systemic theory' and follows Robert Keohane's (1982) point of view that 'the actors' characteristics are given by assumption, rather than treated as variables; changes in outcomes are

explained not on the basis of variations in these actors characteristics, but on the basis of changes in the attributes of the system itself' (p.12). This institutionalist approach

'neglects domestic politics, considers rational egoistic states to be the most important actors in world politics and accepts the existence of anarchy. The theory has a somewhat benign view of the consequences of anarchy, and claims that concerns about the relative distribution of gains are conditional.' (p.13)

Tziampiris, however, notes Joseph Grieco's observation about the relative gains problem for cooperation. 'A state will decline to join, will leave, or will sharply limit its commitment to a cooperative arrangement if it believes that gaps in otherwise mutual positive gains favor partners'. In the critics' approach those gains are political rather than economic in nature (p.13).

Tziampiris tried to determine in his book whether the Greek politics of cooperation and those of non-cooperation regarding the issues of former Yugoslavia were determined by the EPC regime. In order to do so, he checked the variables influencing, according to the theory presented above, state behavior. Among them, he chose to put the emphasis on the issues of reputation (the 'shadow of the future') and of reciprocity.

In his testing procedure, however, he sought to examine the workings of those variables against evidence from the domestic arena of Greece. By doing this, he practically set aside most of his previous observations that his institutionalist approach is 'systemic', that the 'actors' characteristics are given by assumption rather than treated as variables', that 'changes in outcomes are explained not on the basis of variations in these actors characteristics, but on the basis of changes in the attributes of the system itself' (p.12), and that his institutionalist approach 'neglects domestic politics'.

This is rather unfair for a theory not built to take into consideration domestic politics. Being what it is, however, the testing of the theory against evidence from domestic politics gave two results. First, the theory was given a much harder test, a test for which it was not designed. Second, at the end, the theory was given the opportunity to benefit from the findings of a domestically grounded case study.

These advantages aside, the choice of domestic politics complicated the issue of the conditions for the theory to work. Tziampiris correctly focused on the two central conditions of the institutionalist approach: that institutionalization in world politics has to be taken as a variable than a constant, and that actors often have mutual interests (p.12).

Specific to the EPC/Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the first condition does not create any problems; it is a reality demonstrated

by the four revisions of the EPC through the Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and the adopted Constitutional Treaty. However, as far as it concerns the influence of the EPC regime to the behaviour of member states, it is more than obvious that the more developed a regime, the more one may expect it to influence state behaviour. Thus, as it is known and as the four mentioned EPC revisions demonstrate, the EPC regime was at its first stage of institutionalization¹ and its degree of influence was to be expected to be rather low. This, however, could not exclude a priori the possibility of the EPC regime influencing the behaviour of Greece in the Macedonian question and Tziampiris rightfully proceeded to its testing.

It is in the second condition (about 'common' interests), the crucial one, where some complications arise in relation to the choice of domestic politics. According to Tziampiris 'the desire that the war raging in parts of former Yugoslavia not spread to FYROM constituted the most fundamental common interest (between Greece and its EPC partners) that also satisfied institutionalism's conditional nature' (p.167). This 'common' interest according to him existed during the entire period, from June 1991 to December 1992. He concludes that this 'common' interest (the war not spreading to FYROM) was based on the fact that there was not a single argument, document or statement by any EU government advocating the opposite (the spread of war). Moreover, given that Greece was the EPC protagonist on this latest episode of the Macedonian Question, he turns and bases his point on the examination of Greek domestic politics. He found that no Greek decision-makers alluded to an argument to the contrary, even Andonis Samaras (then minister of foreign affairs) who, interestingly, also agreed on the existence of this 'common' interest. Thus, in terms of the issue discussed, for Tziampiris this is what the people involved thought before they acted.

As, however, the theory was developed to be systemic and 'outcomes are explained ... on the basis of changes in the attributes of the system itself' the question remains where the author focused in reaching the thinking of political leaders. Fear of the spread of war is not a system-wide attribute or an instrument of state policy within the international system. Structural approaches assert that interests spreading through the system emanate from the condition of anarchy, the units and the distribution of capabilities and are, always, in accord with its homeostatic nature. It would have been more appropriate to the theory and still close to domestic politics, if Tziampiris had focused (because he did inquire!) on governmental actors analyzing the new distribution of capabilities in the region and how they determined their countries' interests in relation to varying capabilities.

It should be stated that Tziampiris satisfies plainly the requirements of the research method (documents and interviews) he adopted. However, his research method presents inherently some limitations. For how many statesmen (or even citizens) are ready to go on the record in public forums or in interviews giving a full account of their country's interests or intentions and saying clearly that they are indifferent about or in favor of a war or the spread of war? Even when they do the latter, they usually speak of necessity or of the need to serve wider ideals or interests. Edward H. Carr's observations are extremely relevant here:

'The common interest in peace masks the fact that some nations desire to maintain the *status quo* without having to fight for it, and others to change the *status quo* without having to fight in order to do so'; and, 'the statement that it is in the interest of the world as a whole that the conclusion eventually reached, whether maintenance or change, should be eventually reached by peaceful means, would command general assent, but seems a rather meaningless platitude'. (Carr 1991: 53).²

Reading chs 4 and particularly 5 of Tziampiris's book creates the impression that when the protagonists assert the need to avoid the spread of war, they link it with the issue of stability in the Balkans (a systemic concern) just in order to be more convincing: all parties to the dispute have made a claim favouring stability, independently of whether they supported or not the use of the name 'Macedonia'. A second impression is that protagonists of all sides they were referring to the general 'interest' of avoiding war and were claiming stability in order to cover and, thus, to promote better their specific national interests.

In addition, and particularly on the wars in Yugoslavia, one may ask two questions relative to the intentions of the EPC member states. First, if European states were absolutely against war, why did they encourage, some more than others, some of the Yugoslav federated states to declare independence (Papasotiriou 1994: 125–37)? Were they expecting that the federal government or the army would not have reacted to such a decision? Second, why did they rush to recognize the new states, contrary to what Greece and the United Kingdom were suggesting (*ibid.*)?

I am not suggesting that EPC leaders were in favour of the war spreading in FYROM. Quite the contrary: at that time it is possible that, for their own reasons, the EPC countries did not want the war to spread to FYROM. What I am trying to say is different and pertains to three more things. First, that the 'common' interest of the war not spreading to FYROM is practically very difficult to falsify. For how one may demonstrate the opposite or that the EPC governments were, simply, indifferent?

Secondly, that for the major EPC players the issue of the war spreading to FYROM, compared at that specific time with other issues in the region, was secondary. After all, when the time for Kosovo came, the West had not hesitated to launch a war because of the risk of involving FYROM into it, in any of the possible ways. Thirdly, even if there had been a 'common' interest, it was formed by secondary considerations. What primarily came to matter for the majority of the 12 EU states of that time was the independence of the formerly federated states of Yugoslavia and what mattered to Greece was the new state not to be recognized with the name 'Macedonia'.

Given the known and inherent limitations of his research method, the question is whether Tziampiris could have found another method to investigate, document and test his theory. This author's straightforward answer is negative. Perhaps, better results could have been produced had Tziampiris shifted his emphasis on what the protagonists thought when they declared themselves against the spread of war.

Tziampiris found that from June 1991 to January 1992, the EPC influenced the behavior of Greece and fostered its cooperative record, as expected by the institutionalist approach (p.167). According to him, this happened because 'during this period, domestic politics [which are ignored by the theory] played a limited role' (p.168).

Why was Greece cooperative? First, because of reputation concerns and, second, most important, because of reciprocity, as Tziampiris notes: 'concepts used in institutionalism such as reciprocity and the "shadow of the future" proved consequential'; and 'certain reputational concerns connected with the possible wrath of Germany against a non-cooperating Greece, probably also influenced the stance of the (Greek) Foreign Minister' (pp.168-9). Why was the government so concerned about reputation? According to the author, it was because of the two goals that Greece had at that time within the EC/EU: the Cohesion Funds and the 'cherished goal' for WEU membership (see also Kouskouvelis 1995: 192). The author suggests that two additional cooperative actions (recognition of Bosnia and the 'dual name' formula), observed during the non-cooperation period, may also be explained by reciprocity and the 'shadow of the future', respectively (p.169).

From 17 January to the end of 1992 it was the period of the non-cooperation and confrontation politics, even though during the same time the 'shared interests became more significant' (p.167). Tziampiris explains the phenomenon by arguing that 'all significant decisions are explained and are produced at the domestic level' (p.170). Thus, for this period of non-cooperation and confrontation, 'EPC's influence on the country's foreign policy towards former Yugoslavia ... can at best be judged of limited

consequence' (p.170), and the institutionalist approach 'fails to provide an adequate explanation for the major developments' (p.170).

Tziampiris's overall assessment of the theory is that although 'certain serious problems arise' from it, 'it can not be discarded entirely since it largely explains Greece's foreign policy towards former Yugoslavia and FYROM between June 1991 and 17 January 1992' (p.167). He also considers that 'institutionalism stands vindicated in its analysis of the conditional nature of relative gains considerations' (p.171), and if the theory was to retain 'its predictive and explanatory relevance, then its conditional nature had to be expanded' (p.171). He proposes to include as conditions for the theory to work the existence of 'highly politicized issues with particular emotional relevance for the people', and of domestic political instability within which a government may not reach important decisions (p.171). His proposal could be adopted and the conditions tested in the context of another case study, with similar characteristics (i.e., EU and the Cyprus issue).

On the issue of relative gains, over which the institutionalist approach has been severely criticized, Tziampiris concludes that it 'stands vindicated in its analysis of the conditional nature of relative gains considerations'. He did not find any evidence in his research, which included EPC documents and interviews, that 'relative gains were part of Greece's decision making process and strategic planning' (p.171). The possible explanation he offers is 'that the difference in capabilities and resources between FYROM and Greece were so immense, that it made almost no sense to think of the dispute in terms of relative gains' (p.171).

Finally, concerning the regimes approach and/or the EPC, he found that it is 'sufficiently comprehensive to incorporate into its analysis all the EPC actions' that he has described (p.177); that 'intergovernmental bodies were responsible for almost all important discussions and decisions' (p.174); and that concerning the rule of consensus, his work 'does not validate the argument that it leads to decisions representing EPC's lowest common denominator' (p.175).

Although the institutionalist approach is systemic, Tziampiris gave the theory a hard test against domestic politics. His findings about the 1991 period confirm the theory. Besides domestic politics, there is however one more reason why Greece was cooperative during 1991 – a reason not in contradiction with the concepts of reciprocity and the 'shadow of the future'. At that time the dominant EPC position was the position of the United Kingdom – a position expressed through the special Conference on Yugoslavia, convened in September 1991 at The Hague under Lord Carrington. According to this position no violent or unilateral change of borders would be accepted, minorities would be protected, etc. (p.88;

Papasotiriou 1994: 133). Such a position was not inconsistent with Greek interests given that the fate of Yugoslavia had not been decided and that unilateral actions would not have been accepted; thus, Greece could still expect from the EPC regime to function in its own benefit. The reversal of the EPC position occurred on 16 December 1991 and the official recognition by the EC countries of Croatia and Slovenia's independence occurred on 15 January 1992. Is it just by coincidence that the non-cooperation politics of Greece started on 17 January 1992?

Tziampiris's findings, however, do not confirm its institutionalist approach during the 1992 period. Is it because of the prevalence of domestic politics that Greece overstepped its 'common' interest bounds or is it because of some other reasons? First, as argued above, it is possible that the interest of Greece was accommodated until about the end of 1991 by the EPC dominant position. Second, the 'common' interest argument becomes less and less convincing for the period of 1992. Perhaps 'the war in Bosnia was endangering FYROM's territorial integrity' (how?), and perhaps 'Greece's reputation was reaching an all-time low' (p.184). But perhaps, and more important, parts of the Greek government (like the minister of foreign affairs and his supporters) understood or came to understand that the interests of their European partners were different from the Greek ones, and that the distribution of relative gains was not even.

The issue of 'common' interest is connected with relative gains. Tziampiris rejects that relative gains were an issue between Greece and FYROM, given the 'immense' difference in capability between them. The rejection, however, of the possibility that Greece was seeking relative gains is not justified by the fervour which Greece has shown over this issue. Of course, Tziampiris argues that Greece's fervour was the result primarily of a traumatic/dramatic historical record and the manipulation of domestic politics by, especially, Andreas Papandreou and Andonis Samaras. Indeed, Papandreou's behaviour was to be expected given his record on foreign policy and that he was the leader of the opposition trying to return to power; the second, however, was the minister of foreign affairs – a member of the government. Thus, Tziampiris had to demonstrate that Samaras was manipulating domestic politics and had to exclude that he had a power-oriented foreign policy approach, given his different political origins compared to those of his prime minister.

Moreover, one may argue that the issue of relative gains was of importance not between Greece and FYROM, but between Greece and its EPC partners, a relationship that was only indirectly examined by the author through the concept of reciprocity. The issue of relative gains is not only about increasing one's own power; it is not about

losing possible additional trade, not having diplomatic relations, or losing any possible advantages, for example, from future investments in the other country. It is also about not losing one's power, not only diminishing it in relation to others, and harming one's interests (Mearsheimer 1994–95: 11; 2001: 36. See also Waltz, 1979; 106.).

The break up of Yugoslavia meant the closing of road communications lines for Greece; this amounted to important economic damage due to the obstruction of trade and losses in the tourism industry, especially for northern Greece. It also meant the loss of a perceived or even possible strategic depth for Greece in case of a crisis to the east and of the certainty of a strong military ally in a Balkan crisis; moreover, it meant the addition of a (perceived?) hostile state to its borders (p.207).

Finally, the author has rightly pointed out the role of intergovernmental bodies in the decision-making process and that decisions within the EPC/CFSP are not always taken at the lowest common denominator (Kouskouvelis 1995: 166). He has also very briefly touched upon the issue of other benefits ('side payments') Greece was pursuing within the EC/EU, such as WEU membership. These related to the EPC/CFSP issues are directly dealt by another approach, namely intergovernmental institutionalism.

Intergovernmental institutionalism is based on 'intergovernmentalism', lowest common dominator bargaining, and strict limits on future transfer of sovereignty (Moravcsik 1989). The theory argues that the EC from its inception has been based on interstate bargains between its leading member states. Major initiatives are taken and negotiated by heads of government, backed by a small group of ministers and advisors. As each government sees the EC through its own preferences, EC politics is not more than 'the continuation of domestic policies by other means' (ibid.: 25). Also, bargaining reflects the relative power positions of the member states. Bargaining between them tends to converge on the lowest common denominator interests.

The history of the EPC negotiations on the issue of Yugoslavia has confirmed some of the intergovernmental institutionalist premises. First, from Tziampiris's work, it is obvious that the governments which dealt with this issue were those of Germany, France and the United Kingdom. If any other government played a role, this appears to be occasional and secondary. The role of the EC/EU supranational institutions was secondary. Second, it seems that intergovernmental institutionalism is also confirmed in terms of the way the bargain was struck. The United Kingdom was ultimately isolated, with Germany leading and France following; the bargain, however, was made at a level higher than the lowest common denominator. Finally, intergovernmental institutionalism is validated on

the issue of 'side payments'. I believe that it is rather easy to accept that the three conditions obtained by Greece on 16 December 1991 were a side payment for its agreement on the dissolution of Yugoslavia, only this side payment was not what Greece thought it was.

This reviewer's assessment is that intergovernmental institutionalism provides a useful framework in explaining European unification and bargaining within the EPC/CFSP. Without diminishing Tziampiris's endeavour, it would have been very useful for his work because it accounts directly for the role of the state instead of that of the system, and for the role of domestic politics. For any future research effort, I believe that intergovernmental institutionalism alone or combined with other institutionalist approaches constitutes a better theoretical point of departure for the testing of the additional conditions that Tziampiris has proposed to institutionalism.

Overall, and independently of what Tziampiris could have done in terms of methodology and research, I consider that he has produced a commendable work whose value lies in the provision of one of the few case studies testing to institutionalism – an international relations mainstream theory. His findings, however, are not encouraging for institutionalism. His institutionalist approach appears validated only when the questions of reciprocity and the 'shadow of the future' are in play; which means that the EPC regime influences state behaviour only when there are interests in play. Thus, when this happens one may wonder whether it is institutions that influence behaviour, as institutionalists claim, or it is interests, as realists argue; in addition, Mearsheimer's conclusion that 'institutions have minimal influence on state behavior' (1994–95: 7) becomes attractive.

Tziampiris's suggestion about increasing the conditionality of the theory with the inclusion of domestic politics influences – even though it may lead to the changing of the original systemic nature of the theory – is worth keeping in mind. The theory, according to Tziampiris, does not yield many results under stressful domestic political situations, and hence it might be better not to rely exclusively or even primarily on institutions but on other concepts as well. However, increasing the conditionality may reduce the simplicity of the model, reduce the generality of the theory, as well as its parsimony.

In closing, I believe that a last comment is fit regarding Tziampiris's exemplary research ethics: When I was studying his text I felt that his effort for objectivity and impartiality was running contrary to his own feelings, at some points against his undertaking to validate his arguments, and, often, at the risk of being criticized by his fellow countrymen for not defending Greece's positions. Indeed, he is to be commended.

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NOTES

- 1 European Political Cooperation functioned, in the legal sense, rather as customary behaviour until the Single European Act (1986/87) codified it.
- 2 E.H. Carr presents an interesting collection of pro-peace statements made by leaders (including that of Hitler) of states involved in the Second World War; see Carr 1991: 52.

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