

The *panem et circenses* policy of the Regime of the Colonels in Greek sport, 1967-1974

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ABSTRACT “Panem et Circenses” was the policy applied by the Greek military junta between 1967 and 1973. The bread and circuses policy was a well-known recipe with its roots in the Roman era. It included sport displays, rewarding athletes, formal participation of “the Aprilians” (the members of Greek military junta) in sport games, along with the celebration of anniversaries of “The 21st of April 1967 Revolution” all over Greece, which included gymnastic exhibitions. It must be pointed out that the April 21 regime shared a number of similarities with Metaxas’s regime of August 4. Because the “Aprilians” were advocates of Metaxas’s “NO” response, they tried to imitate him and utilize cultural exhibitions, especially sports, as means of promoting the regime’s propaganda to acquire a social face. Both regimes utilized mass celebrations based on traditions of ancient Greece, the Byzantine period and Greek-Orthodox culture.

KEY WORDS sport, national interventionism, dictatorship, politics.

Introduction

The coup d’état of April 21, 1967 and the ensuing military government ruling Greece for seven years, at least at the beginning, invested heavily in the politics of massive emancipation. Apart from the mass media, the dictatorial regime also invested in mass spectacles, e.g. in football, which was perceived as the basic form of national entertainment. The peak of the regime’s interest in football was the spring of 1971, when Panathinaikos F.C. reached the European Cup finals. Also Greek basketball reached the top position during the “Seven Years”, with AEK Athens winning the European Champions’ Cup in 1968. Besides these achievements the regime organized “Greek celebrations of martial virtue” at the Pan-Athenian stadium, April 21st celebrations and Song Olympiads. The athletes were awarded by the colonels with spacious decorations every Easter, and the decoration ceremonies were broadcast nationwide. In this way, a mass emancipation was used to re-design “Greek national history” with symbols, spectacles, repetitions and kitsch – a form of aesthetic aphasia. In other words, the Greek military regime combined mass culture with the national narrative [1].

The phrase “bread and circuses” has its roots in the Roman era and is the translation of the Latin expression *panem et circenses*. According to Giouvaneli [2], the Roman Emperors offered wheat (bread) during amphitheatric spectacles to people to take their minds from society’s worries

and problems of daily life. Nowadays, this expression is used for cases of political pauperization focusing only on temporary pleasures, when politicians intentionally offer entertainments to the public. The expression has entered the language of journalism all over the world [3].

Kitsch is a cultural production based on the worthless imitation of art. It was deified during the Greek colonels’ dictatorship and formed the main symbol of the regime¹. The enforcement of kitsch by the Greek military government mesmerized the whole nation, along with the “post-martial Greek virtues”, “the bird of the last seven years”, “Pattakos’ spatula” and “Papadopoulos’ dance”. The colonels wanted to follow the safe version of “bread and circuses”. In tailcoats and tall hats, they took part in church services, parades and celebrations.

Anniversaries of the April 21 coup

An interesting case of “bread and circuses” policy of the Greek military regime was the celebration of the second anniversary of the April 21 coup at the Pan-Athenian stadium and meticulously organized by the Athenian town hall². Crowds of people gathered in the stadium, among them President Georgios Papadopoulos and many other

¹ Sunday Free Press, 23/04/2006. www.enet.gr

² 21st of April, Parliament in Khaki, (National Archives of EPT documentary), 1/1/2002.

congregational and political leaders. The Evzones corps and a military band were parading in the stadium while young girls and boys in traditional costumes were carrying the Greek national flag. Additionally, commemorative floats labeled "21st of April", "National Education", "Agriculture", "Greek Marine" as well as "the Greek electricity organization" were on the parade. Dancing bands performed Greek traditional dances. Athens was represented by parading buggy drivers in outfits from the early 20th century. Finally, splendid fireworks marked the end of the show.

Numerous male and female students attended the show in the Pan-Athenian stadium³. Georgios Papadopoulos accompanied by many officials including, the Undersecretary of the Department of Education, gave a speech in front of the masses and was loudly applauded. Parachutes with inscribed Greek flags inscribed were soaring above the stadium. Papadopoulos gave his speech to the youth "as a father to his children". He promised further development of the education system and asked the young to get properly prepared for tomorrow, considering the fact that the youth of the country "was the best of the world". He also asked them not to fall into eudemonism, by rather to having faith in Greek Orthodox ideals so that they would become the gem of the world. The authorities of the Athenian suburb of Moschato organized then a spectacle for the April 21 anniversary, with men in traditional costumes performing Greek dances.

The same year in Thessaloniki a crowd of people filled the Kaftanzoglio Stadium to witness another celebration of the April 21 anniversary. The spectacle was attended by the metropolitan authorities of Thessaloniki and many other officials were also present. Students took part in the gymnastic shows in the stadium⁴.

Celebrations of the Olympic Day

One of components of the "bread and circuses" policy was also the celebration of the Olympic Day at the Panathenian Stadium in the Greek capital. This celebration was initiated on the April 6, 1967 by King Constantine II to commemorate the modern revival of the Olympic Games in 1896. The athletic events during the celebration included fencing, Greco-Roman wrestling, weightlifting, boxing, track and field events (men's shot put, men's and women's 100 m run, men's and women's 3000 m run, men's broad jump, and pole vault), friendly basketball matches, gymnastic performances by students of the National Academy of Sports Education and also the biannual National Marathon along the classic route between Marathon and the Pan-Athenian Stadium. The games were attended by all the regime officials including Georgios Zoitakis, Konstantinos Aslanidis and Stelios Pattakos^{5,6,7}.

³ Oblation to the 21st of April (National Archives of EPT's document), 1/1/1999.

⁴ Free World, 22/4/1969, pp. 1, 4.

⁵ Nation, 6/4/1968, p. 9, 8/4/1968, pp. 1, 6, 9.

⁶ Free World, 7/4/1970, p. 10.

⁷ Free World, 7/4/1971, p. 8.

The Football Cup of Greater Greece

The Football Cup of Greater Greece, officially known as the Cup of Friendship between Mother Greece and Daughter Cyprus, was a football cup contested between the winner of the Cypriot Cup and the winner of the Greek Cup held between 1969 and 1972. The cup matches against the Cypriot clubs were played by the Greek clubs of Olympiakos, Panathinaikos, Aris, APOEL, Pezoporikos and Anorthosis. The winners of the cup were exclusively Greek teams (Olympiakos in 1969, and 1972, Panathinaikos in 1970 and Aris in 1971).

Other athletic shows in the times of the Greek military dictatorship

In April 1969⁸, the opening ceremony of the "International Student, Spiritual and Sport Show" was held at the Acropolis. The event was organized by the Coordinating Committee of Collegiate Sports and attended by Greek and Cypriot athlete students as well as by deans and professors of Greek and foreign universities. An international dolichos race (ancient Greek race over the distance of 4,614 meters) and pan-Hellenic student races were organized. The winners, both graduate and undergraduate students, were awarded with trophies funded by the National Bank of Greece. The participants in this international athletic event visited among others the Oracle of Delphi and admired the monuments that reminded them that Greece had been the spiritual nurse of the entire humanity. Nikitas Sioris, regime officials and students attended the opening ceremony, whereas Ioannis Agathagelou awarded the athletes.

In 1969, the 9th European Athletics Championships were also held in the Karaiskaki Stadium and were attended by the regime authorities and many other officials. Young boys and girls dressed in traditional costumes (members of dance groups) paraded in the stadium along with young people with Greek flags and the participating teams. The athlete Chris Papanikolaou recited the athletic oath. The balloons soaring in the air marked the opening of the championships, while the athletes took part in shot put, heel-and-toe, speed races, discus throw, and high jump shows.

In October 1969, the European Zonal Chess Championships were held in the Zappeion Hall and were attended by the Secretary General of Athletics, Konstantinos Aslanidis. Top chess players from 16 countries competed for the chess champion title. In May 1971 the inauguration of the Painting Exhibition of Greek Athletics was held in Aslanidis's presence of in a hotel in Athens⁹.

In June and July 1971 the Piraeus sailing club successfully organized the 3rd International Sailing Rally, in which 24 Greek and foreign crews participated. The starting point for the competing yachts in Tourkolimano was chosen by the Regent of Greece, Giorgios Zoitakisby. The rally participants

⁸ Free World, 4/4/1969, p. 2.

⁹ National audiovisual documentary: "Inauguration of painting exhibition of Greek athlete with the presence of the General Secretary of Sports Konstantino Aslanidi at Athens".

then sailed along the route from Faliro to Kalamata, Zakyntho, Patras to complete the distance of 350 sea miles.

The 2nd International Footrace (ancient Greek race of 4,614 meters) was held on April 8, 1973, and the pan-Hellenic student footrace attended by Aslanidis was organized in ancient Olympia¹⁰. These events saw the participation of students and athletes representing all Greek institutions of higher education as well as universities from West Germany, Switzerland and Bulgaria. Aslanidis himself awarded trophies and olive wreaths to the winners.

The Regime of the Colonels also organized bachelor conferment ceremonies for university students. For example, during the inauguration of E.A.S.A's new wing in Athens in June of 1971, Nikitas Sioris awarded diplomas to the academy graduates¹¹.

The 16th European Youth Table Tennis Championships with 27 national teams were successfully held in the Piraeus National Sport Center. The Greek team won the 13th place and put up a satisfying performance which certified its steady progress into the sport. The celebration, apart from the fans, was also attended by undersecretary Spiros Katsonas and the Mayor of Piraeus, Aristidis Skilitis¹².

Additionally, as part of their particular policy, the Greek regime organized the World Championships of the International Military Sports Council (IMSC) in July 1968 in the Karaiskaki Stadium. The objective of these championships was to exchange views between young people and tighten the ties between the participant countries. Stylianos Pattakos and the commander-in-chief of the Greek armed forces, Aggelis were present at the event. The athletes competed in shot-put, hammer throw, discus throw, hurdles, sprint, dart throwing, broad jump, pole vault, high jump and relay race events. At the end of the games, Pattakos gave trophies to the winners in a splendid ending ceremony involving an enormous firework display¹³.

Attendance of sport events by the Greek military junta

The bread and circuses as well as the kitsch policies required the presence of the Greek Colonels at various sports events. In fact, Greek sport attained numerous successes in the period of Greek military dictatorship. These successes were all witnessed by Georgios Papadopoulos Costas Aslanidis, Stelios Pattakos, Nikos Makarezos, and Ioannis Ladas.

On April 4, 1968, 65,000 spectators gathered in the Panathenian Stadium to watch the European Champions' Cup basketball final between AEK Athens and Slavia Prague. The Greek military government rushed to politically utilize AEK's victory. Before the start of the game Pattakos announced that he wanted AEK to win the match. After that, he entered the pitch and greeted the players and officials

from both teams. Ultimately, AEK won 89-82¹⁴. It is also commonly attested that the AEK's winning the semifinal of the European Cup under its owner Inis Vareze was one of the greatest successes of the Greek sport of that period as AEK became the first Greek team to qualify to the European Cup finals¹⁵. In fact, Secretary General of Athletics, Konstantinos Aslanidis awarded the Cup to the AEK team well in advance.

Panathinaikos is the sole Greek football team which has ever reached the European Cup finals. On June 2, 1971 at London's Wembley stadium, in the presence of the Greek government representatives and led by the coach Ferenc Puskas, Panathinaikos, however, lost 2-0 to Ajax Amsterdam.

After PAO's win in the semifinals over Red Star Belgrade, Georgios Papadopoulos organized a reception for the players in the Greek parliament. After welcoming the players he announced: "I am not going to tell you how to battle because this is ascribed to your techniques. What I really can tell you is not to forget even for a moment that you battle instead of us and that your struggle mirrors the entire Greek nation. If you realize it, then be sure that you will return carrying the Cup"¹⁶.

The Greek military government attempted to reutilize politically the AEK's win in 1968. The Champions' Cup final match at Wembley, was watched by 93,000 spectators, Georgios Papadopoulos with his wife, as well as Stelios Pattakos and Nikos Makarezos. Panathinaikos, despite its defeat, earned the respect of the international media. For instance, The Daily Mail observed: "Ajax climbed up to the European peak but Panathinaikos was the team deeply incised into our minds" [4].

Rewards for athletes

One of the Colonels' commitments was to confer the Best Athlete of the Year Award and other medals. On November 1, 1967, during the awards conferment ceremony by the Athens Association of Football Unions, the Sport Secretary-General, Konstantinos Aslanidis offered the sum of 100,000 drachmas to the Union. The regime also gave awards to the players of victorious football teams. Due to the character of his office, Aslanidis was always present at football matches, where he awarded the winners, as well as at the 1st Youth World Rowing Championships in the Greek city of Ioannina¹⁷, European Water Ski Championships at Vouliagmeni in July 1967 – when the Greek athletes won the 2nd place, and at the National Cup final in 1972 between P.A.O and P.A.O.K where he gave the trophy to the P.A.O.K's captain George Koudas.

Additionally, the Colonels attended amateur games, such as heel-and-toe matches of postmen, organized on February 14, 1971 in the center of Athens by Greek post offices in celebration of their patron saint, Osios Zinonas. During the match a wreath was laid in front of the Theodoros Kolokotronis statue in the Old Parliament square. Then, at

¹⁰ Macedonia, 10/4/1973, p. 4.

¹¹ Free World, 1/7/1971, p. 5.

¹² Free World, 8/8/1973, p. 4.

¹³ Macedonia, 4/7/1968, p. 4, 5/7/1968, p. 4, 7/7/1968, p. 10, 9/7/1968, p. 5.

¹⁴ Nation, 5/4/1968, p. 9.

¹⁵ Macedonia, 15/3/1968, pp. 1, 5, 7.

¹⁶ Free World, 19/5/1971, p. 10.

¹⁷ Swing, 4/8/1970, p. 7.

the end of the match, Aslanidis awarded the winners in the presence of the Mayor of Athens, Dimitrios Ritsis.

During a special ceremony on January 18, 1973 the best athletes of 1972 were awarded prizes of the Association of Press Editors in the presence of Minister John Agathagellou¹⁸. In his speech Agathagellou noted that the budgetary forecast for the next five years (1973-1977) made it possible to assign the amount of 6.000.000.000 drachmas for sport facilities and sport purposes in general.

The Olympic Spirit during The Seven Years

Both the Colonels and King Constantine were always present at the Olympic ceremonies such as the lighting of the Olympic torch and sessions of the International Olympic Academy, especially during the first year of their regime. More specifically, they attended the lighting of the Olympic flame on September 15, 1967 for the Winter Olympic Games in Grenoble, France in February 1968. Konstantinos Aslanidis was at the Panathenian Stadium, where the torch-carrier, who was a member of the Greek mountain association, passed the flame onto the stadium's altar. Then, Aslanidis went the airport where the flame was given to the French Olympic officials in front of members of the Greek Olympic Committee¹⁹.

The official opening of the 7th Commission of the International Olympic Academy commenced at the Hill of the Pnyx on July 30, 1967, with the speeches from President of the Academy, Prince George and King Constantine II. In the archaeological area of Olympia, Constantine presided over the unveiling ceremony of a memorial column honoring the founders of the International Olympic Academy, John Ketseas and Carolos Ntim. Afterwards, Constantine and George attended the Academy's Commission works. The Dean of the International Olympic Academy, Otto Simitsek, and Prince George gave speeches, while the rest of the commission members cheered. Later, King Constantine had dinner with the academy commissioners and watched a volleyball game²⁰.

The opening ceremony of the 9th Commission of the International Olympic Academy took place on August 30, 1969 at the Pnyx as well. The ceremony was commenced by John Agathagellou who announced with emphasis: "Serve suitable ideas, the idea of sport and the Olympic spirit, which attest to the fact that man's homeland is Greece"²¹. The opening ceremony of the 11th International Olympic Academy on July 17, 1971 was attended by 200 guests from 34 countries. The official opening was presided over by Dimitris Tsakonas²². During the commission's works, via a special electronic device a direct telecommunication link was established with Munich, where the Olympic Games of 1972 were to take place²³.

¹⁸ Free World, 18/1/1973, p. 9.

¹⁹ Macedonia, 11/10/1967, p. 5, 26/11/1967, p. 6, 1/12/1967, p. 4, 12/12/1967, p. 9, 17/12/1967, pp. 6, 15, 19/12/1967, p. 11, 20/12/1967, p. 6.

²⁰ Macedonia, 1/8/1967, p. 5, 2/8/1967, p. 3, 3/8/1967, p. 8.

²¹ Free World, 30/8/1969, p. 2.

²² The Step, 17/7/1971, p. 2.

²³ The Step, 9/7/1971, p. 5, 29/7/1971, p. 2, 31/7/1971, p. 2, 1/8/1971, p. 2.

Conclusions

The policies of the Greek military junta of 1967-1973 utilized ancient monuments, country songs, architecture, coins, matchbooks, television, airports, schools and Mount Lycabettus – where a luminous advertisement of a large April 21 badge was installed. A prominent place in the Colonels' preferences was occupied by Easter egg traditions. During Easter, the Colonels visited the army barracks where they attended barbeque parties and tapped hard-boiled eggs with soldiers.

As early as the autumn of 1968, the dictators also announced a contest to write and compose the April 21 anthem. This was a song that students were obliged to sing in their schools [5]. Apart from the anthem, many other songs were also written for propaganda purposes. One of them was a special march for the 1968 plebiscite titled "Yes to the Fundamental Law". The march "Greece of Greek Christians" was based on the creed that Georgios Papadopoulos wanted to enforce. There were also songs in the traditional Kalamatiano and Tsamiko rhythm such as "Hail to the National Government" and "For Our Army's Happy Years". Additionally, the Colonels did not hesitate to use poetry to present themselves more amicably to the Greek people. There was a wide variety of poems and verses which dignified their morale. That was mainly the reason why in 1969, "the Folk Muse" was adopted by the Colonels and included among the highest poetic elations²⁴.

Awards for athletes, participation of the Greek national team in different organizations, attendance of numerous sport events and grant-in-aids to many sport unions are some of actions that could give an impression of good governance, which not only promoted the sport ideal, but were also part of it. In fact, all these actions constituted the political speaking tube for the regime. It is not accidental that in many cases the principles were lost and the regime also lost its orientation. Good examples were political speeches in which the beginning was concerned with a sport display, whereas the rest was composed of theatrical acts concerning ancient Greek history. That kind of exaggeration led to the freeze of artistic expression, which became known as "Junta's kitsch".

All the tensions and cultural developments during the years of Greek military dictatorship had their roots in trends that had already begun in the 1960s. However, they were different from the general trends in of the decade in terms of self-consciousness, political polyphony, and suspicions over the media and ways of communication. They were also movements of frontal strategic attack and responsibility.

It should be pointed out that the dictatorship in Greece coincided with the wider experience internationally defined as the "High Sixties". That era is considered to have started in 1967 and finished in 1974. It featured the stiffening of central authoritative control and included dictatorships similar to "Argentina's Revolution" regime [6], Franco's Spain [7], international interventions such as the Vietnam War [8] and also strict regimes such as the Soviet Union [9] or Maoist

²⁴ The Nation, Topic: Society, "executed the politician for kitsch's glorification" Stella Kemanetzi, 21/4/2007.

China [10]. At the same time, the period featured a frontal counter-culture explosion. The backdrop to these events consisted of capitalism, the end of colonialism, new media and “the global village”, international energy and financial crisis and the emergence of what later will be called the “postmodern situation” [11].

It is also noticeable that that era suits perfectly the Greek case. It can be concluded that the political resistance during the years of Greek military junta could not have been formed in any different way but controversy as defined by the 1960s [12]. The political resistance started unevenly in the early years of the Colonels’ regime in April of 1967 and reached its peak in November of 1973 with the Athens Polytechnic uprising. The end of the Colonels’ dictatorship came on July 24, 1974 when following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, Greek politicians formed the National Union government [13]. The Seven Years showed that sport should in no case become influenced by political utilities.

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