The State and Organised Social Groups in the Republic of Cyprus

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The present Special Section is the scholarly outcome of the Cyprus Review's Spring 2021 call for papers on 'The State and Organised Social Groups in the Republic of Cyprus'. The call was issued in response to the scarce research that exists on the political and legal aspects of Cypriot institutions and even less popular application of sociological and inter-disciplinary, conceptual and methodological tools. Thereby, the intention was to invite such perspectives and in doing so to publish articles which consider interactions between the State and organised social groups, and more broadly civil society actors (value-based or interest-based). Two main questions were articulated: How do social groups approach the State and what strategies do they craft to oppose it, utilise its structures and services, complement or influence it? What institutional response does collective action outside the State evoke by State and government institutions themselves? Given the multiple crises (the pandemic, economic meltdown and austerity, and the declining democratic legitimacy), Cyprus, like many other countries, has been through, these are timely questions with multiple conceptual and normative implications.

While we know that Cypriot democracy was severely impaired by ethnic division, semi-feudal relations, clientelism, foreign intervention and para-state activity in the 1960s and 1970s, developments thereafter when a monoethnic State took hold with features of party system stability and voter loyalty are much less explored as far as State-society dialectics is concerned. In addition, we know little about Greek Cypriot State-society relations also in the sense that both the State and civil society –the two sides of the political relation under study– may have been potentially changing by facing external pressures or influences, declining political trust and a more fragmented party system. Have recent developments evoked an evolving response by the State to organised pressures and influences from society?

As a stepping-stone towards addressing this gap, the three papers that appear in this special section investigate the input of social and economic forces operating outside of formal institutions and how these shape output-democracy, the real

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flesh and blood of democratic politics as it is situated in its local, historical and contemporary context. According to a number of studies, collective action from without the State has received at best a bureaucratic and suspicious responsiveness by government institutions. In the first article, Epaminondas qualifies this view by tracing how the relationship between the State and the Cyprus Family Planning Association (CFPA) has evolved. In a country where family is sacred as a social unit and given a civil society actor with near-universal and humanist appeal in its aims, the relationship has been smooth, as detailed and accounted for by Epaminondas. Yet, the State's entrenched and hegemonic conservatism contrasted and confronted the association's more liberal profile, most evident in the latter's campaign for the introduction of sexuality education in schools. It took a favourable opportunity structure, contingent on various parameters of politics, the author explains, to render the State accommodating to the particular demand.

Panayiotou takes on the period of 'neoliberal assault', a crisis-ridden series of developments that Cyprus was to witness at a later stage compared to the rest of southern Europe, and through the particularity of the financial bail-in. The author looks into the linkages between the cartel-like banking sector, on the one hand, and the State and government on the other, between the early and late 2010s. Situating his approach historically, the author contextualises state-capital interaction with respect to the nature and level of socio-economic development in Cyprus as embedded in the global system of international political economy. What emerges is how political conflict is directly intertwined with economic interest and vision with alternating heads of State bringing about differentiated linkages between the polity and capital. This is also an article about how mass communication intercepts power struggle. Linkage and input can have very negative consequences when driven by profit-seeking oligopolists, Panayiotou shows. Doesn't this make parties more, not less valuable as an intermediate structure between citizens and the State, one might ask? Such is a question to build upon.

The third article by Kyriakides, Christias and Hindle analyses comparatively the pathologies and gaps in the process of Cypriot public consultations. In Cyprus, there is not an established, common practice for public consultations, prompting the authors to pursue and suggest elements from the UK's public consultation system and the EU's framework of public governance for increasing 'input-legitimacy'. Kyriakides et al provide us with both a thorough and detailed portrait of current deficiencies and a two-pronged way, examining how their suggestions respond to the

present state of affairs in Cyprus. From this rich empirical account, one can deduce virtues and manifestations of deliberative democracy, so that input is enriched not only in quantity, but also in diversity so as to reflect as broadly as possible, and thus strive to aggregate, sectional and value conflicts among the population.

Certainly, this short special section provides through reason and empirical illustration only some indication of the academic challenges ahead for understanding (and trying to better) Cypriot democracy, focusing in particular on a relational perspective, on interaction between State structures and social organisations. In doing so, it provides a three-fold articulation of how democracy works in the Republic of Cyprus in terms of its distinct but inter-connecting constituent principles. What stands out in total is more about deficiencies and entrenched ignorance to progressive reform than any strength in capacity or democracy. However, dialectical effects are there, in so far counter-hegemonic, forward-looking and resistive agency can also be observed across and between the lines of the three contributions. Above all, the articles altogether bear out that although State-civil society relations do not always have a linearly progressive effect on government, they are nevertheless always a key ground for understanding policy outcomes. Whether the interaction is between State, parties and the financial sector, between public bureaucratic structures and civic associations, between citizens at large and the government, or about the media taking side in a conflict, it can illuminate how allied or segmented power networks shape public life, how ideas and interests are contested, and how administrative modes and overarching cultural norms infuse politics. Hopefully, elaboration in these directions will continue to inform future Cyprological research.