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EUROPEAN STUDIES**

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**Referee report about the dissertation thesis "Parakratos in Post-Civil War Greece, Reality and Interpretation", by Nikola Karasová**

I hereby provide you, as per your request from May 13, 2021, an external referee report for the dissertation thesis "*Parakratos in Post-Civil War Greece, Reality and Interpretation*", which was submitted by Nikola Karasová. This thesis is a valuable contribution to both the post-war political history of Greece during the Cold War, and to the discussion of Greek historiography and its treatment of this notoriously contested period. The candidate has proved successfully not only her familiarity with the subject matter but also her ability to 'digest' a substantial amount of primary and secondary sources and to write a clearly structured, well-argued historical narrative with well thought arguments and results.

The content and objective of the work are clearly stated in the introductory chapter and consistently followed in the almost 250 pages of text that follow. In the center of attention is the concept of the so-called *parakratos* (para-state) in post-Civil War Greece, which was an important political reality (especially until 1967) but as we learn from this work, also an if not more powerful conceptual trope used by authors, especially left leaning ones, to make sense of Greece's murky postwar politics. On page 10, the author formulates a set of four main questions and objectives which she wants to address with her work: (1) she intends to analyze "parakratos" as an analytical concept in academic literature on Greece's contemporary history; (2) she plans to position this concept, and the underlying political reality in a Cold War context, which is why she provides brief comparisons with the so-called deep state in Turkey and Italy – two other important NATO allies in which the USA supported unofficial military and intelligence structures to prevent a communists takeover; (3) she aims to highlight the political bias and meaning of the term "parakratos"; (4) she promises to showcase the diversity of interpretative takes as

to be found in Greek historiography, trying also to highlight the changing symbolic meanings of the concept.

These aims are achieved by extensive discussion of Greece's post-war politics, with a particular focus on anti-communist legislation and measures which in a way provided the soil on which also all kinds of conspiratorial narratives could emerge. She details the efforts by the Greek state, in alliance with US institutions, to build para-legal structures to suppress the left and keep it out of power. The author also provides a concise summary of similar developments in Turkey and Italy, in the latter case focusing on the so-called Gladio operation, which was revealed only after the end of the Cold War. These comparative dimensions, though not fully exploited by the author, make clear that the Greek story is embedded in larger cold-war developments and that the United States implemented similar measures in countries which were strategically vital for the US but where the US administration was concerned about a potential communist takeover. The author does a good job in detailing the organizations (formal and informal) and political measures in the 1950s and 1960s behind the creation of a (para-)military and civil para-state. In that she succeeds to show that civil society organization can be "uncivil" – something, I would invite her to emphasize stronger and use as a departing point for a critical discussion of mainstream research on civil society. In the longest chapter (ch. 4) she presents a well-informed and comprehensive summary of approaches in Greek historiography towards the phenomenon of the "para-state", highlighting both the contribution of Greek historians to reveal its realities but also showing that in much of the literature, the concept had also a strongly representational dimension. In connection with social and political change, the meaning of the concept also changed. In the conclusions she not only provides a succinct summary of her findings, but also emphasizes that the concept of parakratos is well alive and kicking in today's Greece – although it does not exist anymore as a hidden political structure. Yet, political parties from all camps use it to denounce their opponents; for example, the left-wing Syriza party, that ruled from 2015 to 2019, was accused by the right to build a left-wing parastate. It seems, that this concept travels easily in Greece and one would have liked the author to explain this applicability and flexibility of the term more forcefully.

The methodology and theoretical approach of the work consists of a combination of conventional, though well executed political history, and of conceptual history built on Kosselleck's ideas. For the first, she mainly draws on the existing scholarship on Greece's postwar history, which she has systematically reviewed. Quotes from archival documents and newspaper add some further nuances but a more of an illustration here, and less a means to build an original argument on postwar Greece history. The conceptual history draws on the extensive reading and analysis of the existing Greek scholarship. The work is based on sources from seven archives and libraries, on legislative texts, on newspapers and a very broad array on secondary sources (mainly research literature). The discourse analysis is contextualized before the background of political developments as well as situation within the authors' political stances. Karasová also makes clear the intricate relation between the two dimensions of the

parakratos: as a hidden political reality on the one hand and a conceptual notion on the other. Because the structures of the parakratos operated clandestinely, all kinds of conspiracies could be linked with him – to such an extent that even in historiographic literature the line between evidence-based narratives and conspiracy theories is not only clear. In that respect, a more intense engagement with the literature on conspiratorial thinking would have been welcome. To what extent, for example, are the narratives about the parakratos embedded in a wider conspiracy-theory prone mindset? Is Greece an example of the validity of Michael Butter's controversial idea that conspiracy theories are orthodox thinking in Eastern Europe while in Western Europe, they are heterodox. The author did not exploit the full potential of her findings here for making an important contribution to the current scholarly debate about conspiracy theories.

Both the logical structure and the formal aspects of the work are flawless. The English is excellent, the prose finds the right balance between analytical scrutiny and narrative flow. The sequence of chapters makes sense, each chapter has an introduction and a brief summary, so the reader never gets lost. The author does a good job in flagging out what is important and included signposts for the reader's orientation. The author provides more than sufficient sources and literature references for her arguments; the footnotes and the bibliography are extensive and well-styled. I have no remarks on the formal side. Analytically, the author could have been more consistent in the application of the conceptual history approach, and also could have engaged more with its theory. In so far, the work is clearly more descriptive and narrative, then theoretical and analytical in nature, which does not reduce its value as a remarkable piece of independent research.

The somewhat inconsistent application of conceptual history is my main critical comment, although it does not affect my generally very positive impression of the thesis. The strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses. It is a highly informative piece and brings to light debates and writings generally not known outside of Greece. The author also clearly succeeds in showing how difficult it was for Greek historians, in this case especially left-wing ones, to tread the fine line between knowing and speculating – in an environment where access to information was (and is) notoriously difficult. Until 1967, the assumption of a US sponsored conspiracy behind the surface political phenomena was correct but it became a myth of its own. I was less impressed though by her application of the tools of conceptual history. At the end, the work spends more space and effort in reconstructing the 'real' history of Greece's postwar politics (which is fine enough) than on a rigorous discourse analysis. Here, I miss a clear positioning of the work in current trends of discourse analysis. One would have expected a more thorough engagement with concepts such as framing. The chapter on Greek historiography is highly informative, well written and overall convincing but we do not learn much about the quoted authors and how they interacted with each other; sometimes, the time of referred to debates and information about the political backgrounds of the authors are missing, and their intellectual genealogy is not dealt with at all. So, this is probably the greatest weakness of the work: the authors on whose interpretations the

conceptual history rests remain colorless. What are the main patterns of the shifting semantic notions of parakratos? A more consistent discourse analysis would make the work even more original than it already is.

As for potential questions to raise at the defense, I'd be most curious to hear the candidate speak about interactions and intersections between the historians and observers who formed the notion(s) of the parakratos. Did they speak to each other, did they refer to each other's work and what kind of scholarly debates emerged? I also wonder how important the nexus between academic and more popular forms of history writing was for the emergence of certain images of the parakratos, and whether scholarly historians were involved in both fields. Few people read scholarly historical works, so which more popular media and texts framed this issue? Generally, the author could situate the historiographic treatment of this important issue more strongly in the development of Greek historiography after 1945: who were the historians, on which information did they draw, where did they learnt their trade? Thinking along these lines might help the candidate to fully exploit the potential of her important work for a publication, if such is planned.

**I recommend this work emphatically and without any reservation for defense.** I congratulate the authors for her rigorous and well-executed research and the quality of her writing.

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Ulf Brunnbauer