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**ATHENS AND THE UNITY OF THE GREEK COMMUNITY
AT THE END OF THE CLASSICAL EPOCH**

*(An Essay on the Political Speeches by Demosthenes)*¹

United in Diversity

*(Motto of the first EU Constitution)*²

The purpose of this text is to examine to what extent the Greeks from the second half of IV century BC had been unified and what kind of a unity had it been. Still, on the other side, the text refers to the situation of contemporary Europe. The past two weeks have revealed, that the Europeans are not sure, that they wish to live in one state, or even in a union, which might resemble a state.³ This raises a concern in those among them, who have believed during the previous 50 years, that the existence of such a state will be for good and who have devoted their efforts for its creation, or who merely have hoped it to appear. The concern is not smaller for those, who, for the time being, live outside the political boundaries of what is going to become such a state, but who wish to be part of it.⁴

Now it becomes clear, that there are many citizens of the European states, who have cooperated, agreed, or at least endured the establishment of this union. However, lately they have said that they are not going to

¹ The text had been read as a paper at the International Symposium *European Integration in Philosophical Perspective* organised by Italian Cultural Institute in Sofia and the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University (June 10-11, 2005).

² <http://www.eurominority.eu/version/fra/languages-motto.asp>

³ The EU Constitution Treaty was rejected in France (May, 2005) and in the Netherlands (June, 2005) and postponed indefinitely in Ireland (June, 2005).

⁴ I mean primarily most of the citizens of the candidates Bulgaria and Romania, according to the opinion polls.

cooperate and even endure any more. The question is: how much united might be Europe? And to add: how big might be Europe, and still remain united? And is it possible for Europe to be united not to the extent, presumed by the Constitution and even not to the present-day extent, and nevertheless remain peaceful and free? I will make an attempt to consider these questions with the help of what had happened in Greece at the end of the epoch of the free city states.

Greece during the IV century BC and earlier as well, had suffered difficulties with its unity. Sometimes it had striven to be united, but it had never achieved that, except for rare occasions, partly and for a limited time. So, I am going to take a look at these difficulties, which seem to me not quite different from the ones we encounter today, and I will do this with the help of what Demosthenes had stated in his speeches.

Demosthenes' Cause

Demosthenes remained in the history primarily with his struggle against the Macedonian political and military treat. He argued for the necessity of an active and unified Greek resistance against Philip, who by that time seemed quite ambitious and unlikely to be satisfied solely with conquering South Thrace and North Greece up to Thessalia. Still, in his earlier political speeches it is evident that he could embrace such a cause on other occasion as well. In his *On the Symmoriai* the subject is the need of an intensified military preparation against the Persian threat; and in *On the Liberty of the Citizens of Rhodes* he pleads for an immediate military interference in Rhodes, where the democracy had be re-established and the local oligarchs - removed, since they had been dependent on the queen of Caria Artemisia (the widow of the famous Mausol).

The Greek cities, according to Demosthenes, each by itself and all of them together, are threaten by a barbarian invasion. It seems that the danger of the barbarian invasion is not that much in the war damages (the Greeks themselves mutually caused enough such damages to one another, especially since the beginning of the Peloponnesian war). The danger is that it destroys the liberty - with certainty and maybe forever. It is so because the barbarians are not familiar with the democracy. They are always subjects of a monarchy equal to tyranny.⁵ But, on the other hand, even if some Greeks are in principle not against monarchy or oligarchy, they nec-

⁵ Curiously, Demosthenes does not use the distinction 'a tyrant - a king', which had been employed by almost all influential political thinkers, including Aristotle. Maybe for him all kinds of monarchy are undesirable.

essarily should have been worried by the risk to be conquered of the barbarian – which is something shameful in principle.

The Greeks are unable to reject separately the pressure of the strong barbarian states, and that's why they need a union. This union has to have an initiator, which at the same time should possess the potential of being a leader. We should admit, says Demosthenes, that Athens is strong enough as a city, in order to be a leader. Moreover, it had already been a leader.

And more. Athens, being a democratic city-state, could guarantee the freedom of all the Greeks, even if it will be accepted as the only leader, because it never supports tyrants and oligarchs, but offers even to its opposition self-governing (democracy).

So, Demosthenes is a speaker of those Athenians who see their city as the adequate leader of all Greeks, standing in front of a serious and permanent external military threat. The unity, which he is advocating, is a must, if the Greeks want to evade the yoke at all. For the time, that is the only reason to create this union.

The Balance of Powers

When speaking about Athens as a leader and initiator of the Greek union, Demosthenes refers to a kind of tradition in the Greek history during the last 140-150 years. This is the tradition of the unions, appointing cities, which are supposed to become 'patrons of the Greeks'. In the times before the Persian march against the European Greeks, the polises had been always disunited. They never established great unions (excluding the Trojan precedent) and they lead regular, although insignificant wars against each other. Moreover they had been too much occupied with internal political struggles, which impeded the consistent diplomatic activity and made all unions and pacts unreliable. So it could be assumed, that the first time the Greeks began to consider a union, it was during the Ionian revolt against Persia, which then reigned over the Greeks of Asia Minor through tyrants, controlled by the King. This union might succeed and keep the independence of the Asian Greeks, if it had been more resistant. However, in a fatal sea battle near Miletus, the Greeks had been defeated. Herodotus claims (VI, 14), that it had been the fault of the men from Samos: they had been strong in the naval affairs, but suddenly they betrayed their position and left the united navy. After the suppression of the revolt they remained dependent on the Persians but managed to keep the island and its inhabitants safe and secure (VI, 25). This union had not a distinguished leader, but had an initiator – the polis of Miletus, then lead by the tyrant Aristagoras, who, like his predecessor and relative Histiaeus, came to power not without the consent of Darius (V, 23-35).

The next union appeared after the victories of the European Greeks in 490 and 480. It had been more lasting, having a strong leader – Athens, which won almost alone the important battles at Marathon and Salamis. After the second victory the Athenians enforced the democracy in their city; they launched an anti-Persian union, embracing many islands and continental cities outside Peloponnese and allocated a relatively large budget of the union. Later they privatized the right to manage this budget almost unaccountably (Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, 23-24). Thus Athens acquired extraordinary wealth, and no city could leave the union without the consent of the Athenians, although they had seen how their money is spent. The most serious separatist attempt had been made by the state of Samos, but Athens had been powerful enough to attack the island and suppress the revolt (Plutarch, *Pericles*, 25).

Thus the Athenians lost credibility among the majority of the Greeks and provoked the anger of Sparta. This enmity seems to be the chief reason for the Peloponnesian war (Thucydides, I, 23). The claims of Athens during all these 60-70 years after the Peloponnesian wars had grown too much and they had intended not only to preserve the union, but also even to expand their influence far beyond the Aegean Sea (Thucydides, VI, 1; Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 17). They aspired to a kind of empire, which had to include all the Greeks and not only them. However, they had been defeated in this war and thus a project for the unification of Greece had collapsed at the end of the V century.

Athens from the middle of the V century is proud with its political model and its successes, as can be heard by Thucydides (II, 35-46). There Pericles points to the advantages of the city compared to Sparta. Athens, 100 years later, in the middle of the IV BC, continues to insist on the merits of democracy, but already sees itself more as a political and ideological guide, advising the Greeks to follow its example as a defender of Greek independency against non-Greeks (Persians, Macedonians). Hence, it is not going to be a patron, demanding obedience from other polises, but rather a center of the resistance against barbarians and a guarantee for the independence of any Greek city. In brief, Athens doesn't want an empire for itself, but a union of independent states. This union might engender a military union upon necessity, but provided that the separate states will remain sovereign.

When speaking on these matters, Demosthenes has in mind the developments after the end of the Peloponnesian war. The Lacedaemonians did not allow the devastation of Athens, because probably they have been aware of the fact, that it would have lead only to a change of the rival city.

Then the center of the influence from the North would have moved to Thebes, Corinth or even to their old rival Argos. For them an oligarchic and controlled from outside Athens had been more suitable. Or maybe they just feared the very sharp change in the entire Greek world, which might be provoked by the disappearance of such a powerful state.

However, only ten years after that (394 BC) the Lacedaemonians had to fight against a coalition of several cities, one of which again had been democratized and recovering Athens. Then they needed the support of the Persian king. After another twenty years (371 BC) they had been greatly and scandalously defeated by Thebes. This unexpected victory rendered Thebes so mighty, that now the Spartans themselves had been threatened with destruction. But then Athens supported them against Thebans. Thus the balance of the powers had been kept once more and it had begun to shape out that the polises will never allow any of them to acquire exceptional domination. It was obvious that a stable union between the most influential cities was rather impossible, and even the preserving the status quo (a politically multi-polar Greek world) inevitably led to new wars. Nevertheless, all that wouldn't look so horrifying, if Philip of Macedonia had limited himself with the control over the territories between the Adriatic Sea, Thessalia and the Black Sea coasts. But it had been evident that he is eager for more.

The Failure of Athens

Demosthenes himself seems to hold the opinion that Athens is already decaying as political and military force and therefore does not possess sufficient potential for the struggle against Macedonia. Besides, the mood in the different speeches is different: prior to the entrance of Philip in Phocis and even more before the capture of Olynthus, Philip seems threatening, but still fightable. But after his march to the south of the Thermopylae it becomes clear, that the capacities of the Athenians to confront him are suspicious, and, what is even worse, that the peace already seems hardly negotiable.

It becomes clear that Philip does not want a lasting peace with anyone; whereas the Greek cities, including the Athenians, have deluded themselves that he is offering them peace. That's why the mood becomes more pessimistic from the First Philippics onwards, although Demosthenes continues to speak on the necessity of the resistance and points to the proper measures to be undertaken. However, his attention splits: on the one side he speaks about the coordinate actions between the cities and the organization of the resistance, but on the other he is more frequently ruminating on the topic: 'Why this happened?'

A Step Aside

Today Europe is not threatened by an over-ambitious conqueror as Philip, neither so much by the Islamist terrorism, but rather by the fear, that 'the things are not going as earlier.' Indeed, it is difficultly believable that peoples will become richer and richer, and this will go on endlessly. Always comes a moment, when their wealth and even their culture begin to raise the interest of the neighbors. Then comes the time to act. And indeed Europe acts through its present day leaders, but some of the effects lead to undesirable changes (people do not merely get richer; sometimes other things happen) and the discontent appears. It is this discontent, caused by the fear that is the real enemy of Europe today. And due to the fact that today it seems quite strong, the politicians and the troubled citizens, just like Demosthenes, ask themselves both the questions: not only 'What is to be done?' but also 'Why it happened like that?' And if the asking of the latter question becomes more and more frequent, this will be a sign that the situation worsens.

What are the causes for the weakness of Athens, according to Demosthenes? First of all, paradoxically, is the democracy itself, whose procedures impede the necessary reaction of the state in critical circumstances. Unlike the Athenian politicians, Philip of Macedon takes all the decisions by himself: he commands the army, he presides the negotiations (if not he in person, the messengers lead them instead of him; these people would never dare to work in favour of another Macedonian, opponent to Philip); he allocates the money and is unaccountable to anyone. No one can sue against him; no one can interrupt him during his speeches (as happens to every Athenian politician); his proposals are not subjected to a vote, because he is not making proposals, he just commands. All this still does not mean that Demosthenes is complaining of the democracy in principle. But he says that there are moments, when the city should behave as one, and not only the city, but also all Greeks. If this does not happen, the democracy itself, which cause such delays in the communal decision-making, will be destroyed.

The second problem is the corruption. There are Athenian politicians, Demosthenes says, who are working for Philip; they are simply paid, or something is promised to them, or they are hope to gain power after the loss of the independence. However, no one can prove indisputably their guilt. And the people do not worry about their deeds, because they, unlike Demosthenes, assure the citizens, that everything goes well, that the city is powerful enough, and Philip is harmless; or even that he is already an ally.

Finally, the mere laziness of the Athenians is a problem; and it is caused by the irresponsible redistribution of the money of the state. The Athenians are accustomed to many feasts, which usually are visited by many foreigners. The mere presence of the Athenian people as audience at these feasts is paid by the state treasury and no one can offer these money to be spent on something else – for example on shipbuilding. Shortly, the Athenians are convinced that they live better than the rest of the Greeks and they are reluctant to be deprived from this social acquisition. That's why they are not disposed to think that the situation is so much serious as Demosthenes describes it. But such a city seems sentenced to loose its political significance – and it is precisely what had happened. In the centuries that followed the polises had made several attempts to gain independence – either from Macedonia, or from Rome – but Athens didn't take part in these developments and the center of resistance against foreign powers had moved to the south – to Corinth and the Peloponnesian cities.

The Unity of the Greeks

Now a few words about the different forms of unification of that occurred to the Greeks from the colonization times onwards.

Firstly, the forcible union. It may come from 'inside' or from 'outside'.

From 'inside' means that one of the polises succeeds to subdue the majority or all of the Greek cities, to create a union and then, by war or diplomacy, to keep its power. This never happened, except of the cases with 1. The coalitions, presided by Athens and Sparta, and 2. the ephemeral dominations of Sparta and Thebes during the IV century.

Analogically, modern Europe does not remember such a union, although in certain periods the power of France, Germany, Russia and even Turkey had been really great and jeopardizing for the rest.

Then, the unification from outside. Such unification seems to have occurred at the end of the classical epoch with the Macedonian invasion. Philip II was considered 'a barbarian' by some Greeks like Demosthenes (3 Philippic, 31). It is certain that he thought of himself at least as a semi-Greek. He was descendant of Alexander I (498-454), who at his time had insisted to the organizers of the Olympic games, that he is a Greek from Argos - and indeed he had been recognized as such (Herodotus, V, 22). Obviously, sometimes it is difficult to decide whether the conqueror is external or internal.

Today, for example, it is difficult, if at all possible, to discuss on the theme 'Are the Turks European?' There is no influential politician in Europe who dares to say that Turks 'are Asians'. In fact, the basic question is: 'Is the EU

an organization for the Europeans, or it is for every state in the world who wishes and is able to join it? If it is only for the Europeans, who are they?’

Secondly, the classical Greeks could be united simply *ad hoc*, because of a war. Thucydides says that this had happened for the last time during the reign of Agamemnon, when practically all of the Greeks marched against Troy. But this happened only in deep antiquity and according to Homer; in the historical times however, this was not achieved, although there have been plenty of different military coalitions. They usually have been directed against someone in Greece itself. The coalitions against Philip and that in the middle of II BC against Rome may be seen as exceptions – but even then only some of the polises participated.

Still, there was another possibility for a unification, which had been accomplished to a considerable degree, and even before the time of the unions, mentioned so far. This is the colonization.

The Greek colonization is a peaceful expansion. In this epoch there had been enough ‘free territories’ around the Mediterranean – free not in the sense of ‘uninhabited’, but in the sense of ‘lacking a state’, and consequently ownership of the land. On these territories the Greeks had established cities, but had not expelled the old population altogether, neither exterminated them, nor even fought against them, unless they had been compelled to do this. At the same time they relayed a lot on the other Greeks of the older polises – not only from the metropolis, but from other as well. And precisely this connection with other independent states with similar jurisdiction and similar culture, expressed in intensive trade and participating in communal feasts, is the unity, which the Greeks had managed to acquire.

The Greek Model and Contemporary Europe

What has been said so far does not presume that some situations in history repeat themselves exactly, and that consequently the historian is able to predict the future and react better than the ignorant. But the lack of positive knowledge about the future is not a reason for giving up the acting. Since the lack of activity entails certain consequences, it turns out to be a kind of activity as well. Hence, the plain non-acting, especially in politics, is impossible. Therefore, it is better to have an idea of the Good and to act according to it, relying on certain examples from the past. These examples are the historical experience; and being such they offer already forms of action, which might be taken into account.

So, the Greek polises spread their political culture and accumulated their wealth during the so-called archaic epoch. During the classical epoch

they, with a few exceptions, did not multiply, and at the end of it they already lost their independence. Now we should not hurry to declare, that today Europe is decaying and there is nothing to be done. Still, it is beyond doubt, that Europe has changed rapidly through the centuries, and that the last of them has brought death, destruction and slavery in the greatest degree. And taking for granted that the process of the changing cannot be stopped, we should think what might be its direction.

The confining of Europe in its present day boundaries with the conservation of the 'national identity' is a demonstration of obstinacy, an attempt to stop the time. The continent is not a museum, it is a place inhabited by living people. The stress on the national (sometimes disguised as 'cultural') identity, forced and simplified by the humanitarian education in the primary and secondary state schools, will lead to nothing better than wars. Hence, if we have to choose a problem, let it be the problem of the Greek colonization, as it is possible today – and it is an attempt of a peaceful multiplication of the existing political model. The place of development should be directed outwards. The union might not be one state, but it should find a way to continue its expansion and to include not only all the Balkans and Turkey, but also Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasus' republics, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel, and even the north of Africa. In return for the difficulties that we will encounter on this way, we will receive at least half a century of peace, freedom and a life with a good and serious mission.