

RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR PH.D THESIS

‘Social Partnership in the Greek System of Industrial Relations’

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INTRODUCTION- RESEARCH PROBLEM

During the last decade a significant part of the academic literature on Employment Relations has been devoted to analysing the economic and social record of Social Partnership (SP). This has been in the context of an escalating trend among enterprises towards organisational restructuring and flexibility, and the overt shift of employees' attitudes and demands towards job security and quality of working conditions. In many extreme cases some authors have identified Social Partnership as the only viable approach to contemporary industrial relations (IR), a panacea able to remedy the distortions of global capitalism and outflank the sclerotic character of neo-corporatist decision-making structures. Conversely, others have argued about the treacherous pervasive function of partnership, which constitutes a '*poisoned chalice*' for unionism and a '*Trojan Horse*' of unions' erosion (Marchington, 2000; Claydon, 1998).

This thesis aims to investigate the different 'starting points' and associated processes that have subsequently generated the particularities of the conceptualisation and the practical implementation of consensual initiatives in the Greek IR context. The latter is frequently characterised as an '*immature*' IR system, mainly due to the weakness of the social partners and the relevant organised institutions to achieve a position of influence in the socio-economic development (Kritsantonis, 1998). That is, partly, a product of the

historical evolution of Greek industrial relations and the profound governmental paternalism of Greek labour movementⁱ.

Moreover, Greek industrial relations -and in particular partnership arrangements- have not been the object of a multidimensional and interdisciplinary scientific approach heretofore (Spiropoulos, 1998). Most of the existing studies are focused on the political or legal aspect of labour issues, giving therefore a restricted view of this multilateral field. The utter lack of an evaluative research on SP and Social Dialogue in Greece -particularly related to the perceptions/attitudes/ambitions of the IR actors directly involved and affected by these arrangements- begets the need for a thorough and detailed qualitative analysis of the partnership developments in Greece. This research project endeavours to provide useful insights regarding the processes of formation and implementation of SP initiatives and also to create a robust platform of academic knowledge in relation to the evolution of Social Dialogue in the Greek IR system, contributing in that way to the existing literature concerning the Mediterranean/S.European IR model. This urgent need for an 'IR' approach on these issues becomes even more intensive if we consider the idiosyncratic characteristics of the Greek IR system, which is marked by the continued presence of class politics and a segmented bargaining structure.

For that reason, this thesis attempts to compare and juxtapose the starting dynamics and consensual initiatives in Greece with other European SP models and approaches, so as to highlight the ‘different paths’ followed by the national IR actors and their subsequent effect on the final form of cooperative relations and collective bargaining. Therefore, this study deals also with a salient divergence of SP orientation between Anglo-American countries (mainly the UK) and the rest of the EU, namely the adherence of the Anglo-Saxon model to SP at the workplace level -targeting primarily firms’ performance- contrary to EU countries experimentation and focus at ‘higher’ levels (national/sectoral), which aim at the enhancement of national competitiveness. In other words, the backbone of partnership concept both in UK and the EU countries is presented schematically, together with the resulting disparities and the potential overlapping objectives of these two approaches.

Within this broader analytical framework Greece comprises a representative case of a ‘top-down’ approach to Social Dialogue that overtly pursues broader societal objectives, whilst allows an open space for flexible adaptation of framework peak-level agreements at lower levels of collective negotiations. Yet, the particularity of the Greek approach is reflected in the anaemic espousal of these national-level initiatives by the IR actors at the company level, which -in some cases- *de facto* circumvents the general guidelines and the standards set by the framework agreement, either due to the specific requirements of

the company/industry or as a result of the imbalanced distribution of power amid the IR actors. Under these circumstances, the asymmetry of power among the negotiating parties can easily alter the general framework provided by the central agreements and use it as a '*starting point*' for further negotiations that may exceed the final outcomes reached centrally (Ioannou, 1998).

Thus, this research topic has a great potential for future investigation and analysis, shedding an original light on the dynamics of the Greek SP model and stimulating a comparative approach and study of industrial relations. Additionally, the ambition of this study is to rouse the interest of the academic community in Greek IR and subsequently to promote the further development of the field in Greece.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- '*Why has the Greek approach to Social Partnership developed a set of idiosyncratic characteristics and processes, regarding its mode of implementation?*'

SUBSIDIARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the '*different paths*' that have been followed by the IR actors and why?
2. To what extent have the different degrees of emphasis laid by the Greek IR actors on certain SP principles/objectives shaped the current form and perspective of Social Dialogue in Greece?

3. Why has the espousal of SP been limited at the lower levels of collective negotiations?
4. What are the factors that enable or hinder the evolution of SP?
5. What are the core issues that have been the main subjects of partnership negotiations between the Greek IR actors?
6. How does the introduction of SP arrangements affect other IR issues?
7. What is the optimum level of partnership negotiations in the Greek IR system? How can be achieved and what would be the repercussions for the future structure of collective bargaining?
8. Is there sufficient and significant evidence regarding the effectiveness of the introduced partnership agreements and what are the difficulties in measuring the outcomes?
9. What is the association (if there is any) between the implementation of partnership agreements and performance requirements (at different levels of implementation)

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

The proliferation of 'Social Dialogue' and consensus between the Greek social partners faces structural and functional limitations. This phenomenon is not merely an outcome of the enduring interventions of the political parties that foster the manipulation of the trade union movement. It is also a result of the limited binding ability of the central agreements *vis-à-vis* the decentralised negotiations at the lower levels, which constitute the recent trend in the Greek IR context

(Ioannou, 1998; Koutroukis and Tzekinis, 1998). In a nutshell, what is required is a well-articulated structure of autonomous social partners (TUs and employer organisations), who are competent and professional enough to get involved in constructive bargaining with each other and with state representatives, in order to regulate collectively certain IR issues and further the interests of their members (Ioannou, 1999; Lixouriotis, 1999)¹.

However, during the last decade we have witnessed a series of governmental initiatives aiming at the modernisation of the IR system and the gradual emancipation of the Greek social partners. These innovative steps encompass the replacement of the obsoleteⁱⁱ system of compulsory arbitration by a newly established voluntary system of conciliation and arbitration, the institutionalisation of individual employment rights and benefits and *a priori* consultation with the social partners regarding labour legislation (Kritsantonis, 1998; Spyropoulos, 1998). Moreover, a changing process seems to be underway in the last couple of years, which endeavours to eliminate the climate of mistrust among the IR actors and to facilitate the amplification of co-operative initiatives amid Greek TUs and employer organisations². This evolution does not pursue the complete ‘ostracism’ of government’s role as a social partner. On the contrary, it cultivates a healthy and viable type of tripartism, in which each actor plays an

¹ The reversion of the above climate requires also a mutual clarification of the relationships between TUs, the state and the political parties, followed by the ‘weaning’ of employee organisations from state financing (Spyropoulos, 1998; Kouzis, 1999; Ioannou, 1999)

equivalent role in the formation of a joint view of national competitiveness and of a new type of solidarity between the social partners for the accomplishment of common national objectives (e.g. development of the economy and the human resources -similar to tripartite agreements and social pacts agreed in Italy, Spain, Portugal) (Spyropoulos, 1998; 1998; 1996).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of analysis followed is comprised of an intensive review of the relevant Greek and English literature, combined with a sufficient amount of empirical evidence. The latter will be derived from an in-depth investigation of pioneer Greek companies (in terms of partnership structures and equivalent cooperative initiatives)³. These case studies are combined with a parallel analysis of analogous developments and consensual agreements at higher echelons of collective negotiations, namely national and/or sectoral level. This form of case study analysis enables us to conduct a thorough examination of partnership arrangements in a dynamic (real life) context and hence to apprehend the meaning and the processes of SP in the Greek IR system⁴. The research tools utilised in this investigation

² *'Confidence Pact between the Government and the Social Partners on the Way to the Year 2000'* signed in 1997 (Mouriki, 1998)

³ The first case study company -that has been chosen for further investigation- had signed the **only partnership agreement** in Greece, regarding the flexibilisation of working time, as a result of the national level framework agreement signed by the social partners in 1997 ('Confidence Pact'). The second potential case study investigates the **first partnership agreement** that has been signed in Greece after the latest legal reform of the Labour Regulations. It is obvious that both of these companies represent pioneer SP cases and they also allow us to analyse and evaluate the associated SP arrangements and processes at different stages of development.

⁴ These are potential research findings that quantitative research methods could not possibly shed a light on (realism - scientific analysis).

are comprised of a set of semi-structured personal interviews with trade union officials, government officials, employers' organisation representatives, CEOs, personnel managers and individual employees, together with a detailed review of secondary data (relevant academic literature, statistical figures, research documents, databases)⁵. This research design attempts to highlight the associated SP practices and processes -by using qualitative evidence- whilst being highly theoretical and analytical, as it reveals which of the accompanying principles of partnership are most prominently espoused and pursued in the Greek framework of IR and in what way.

ⁱ The emergence and evolution of the Greek IR context is tightly interwoven with the political history of the Greek State. Greece won its independence and its democratic constitution much later than other European countries and the Greek union movement was severely suppressed during long periods of dictatorships (Fakiolas, 1985). Thus, Greek unionism was unable to keep pace with the rest of West European countries, where the seeds of industrialisation bred the urge for the formation of the first trade unions from the start of 19th centuryⁱ. This considerable time lag, regarding the institutionalisation of the Greek labour movement, accompanied with the adherence of the state to a legalistic approach on IR issues have formed a '*legal-administrative*' environment for labour relations, which has subsequently influenced the mentality and the actions of the national IR actors (Ioannou, 1999). Furthermore, factional rivalry within the union movement and the considerable decentralisation of bargaining power constitute additional obstacles to the unions adopting a more *active* and legitimate role in the Greek IR context.

ⁱⁱ The above assertion is justified by the fact that straight after the abolition of the system of compulsory arbitration there was a gradual decay of the role of arbitration as a whole, with a sharp decline in the number of industrial disputes resolved by arbitration (65.1% in 1986 – 16.6% in 1998) (Ioannou, 1999). In parallel with that, during the 1990's there is a precipitous growth of collective agreements reached on the company and sectoral level –which were not allowed by the previous IR system-, a fact that facilitates the adjustment of central, peak-level agreements according to the needs of social partners on lower levels.

⁵ This research approach might also use a number of questionnaires in samples of employees of the investigating companies, in order to undergird the impressions gained by the interviews (Marchington et al, 1992).

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