When is the Greek Nation?  
The Role of Enemies and Minorities

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This paper questions the importance and usefulness of identifying, through theoretical analysis and empirical study, an historical moment when a nation comes into being. In the first part of our study, we discuss briefly the theoretical background of the question ‘when is the nation?’. The second part addresses this question with reference to the Greek case. We first look at the process of consolidation of Greek national identity during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The role of Turks, Bulgarians and other neighbouring countries in the development and crystallisation of Greek nationhood is highlighted. We show that although the Greek nation-state was established in 1829, the Greek nation has been in the process of becoming through the nineteenth century until the 1920s, when its ethnic and territorial components were brought together and irredentism was abandoned. However, as we show in the section that follows, the Greek nation has been further reshaped through its interaction with the Muslim minority of western Thrace, its fundamental ‘Other within’ during the twentieth century. In the concluding section, we look at more recent developments, such as the Greece–FYROM controversy, that have further influenced the definition of the Greek nation. By analysing the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of nation formation as a socio-political process, we show that fixing an historical moment when a nation comes into being is an analytic exercise for which there is little empirical grounding. Rather, we argue, scholarly research should concentrate on ‘how’ is the nation.

Introduction

Theories on nation formation may be roughly divided into two main schools: modernists and perennialists. The former claim that nations and nationalism are socio-political phenomena characteristic of the modern era; the latter sustain that nations have always existed albeit in different social or political forms than those characterising modern nations. Different
theorists provide for different definitions of the nation, however, either of
the two schools has difficulty in answering one fundamental question:
When can we say that an ethnic or cultural community becomes a nation?
From which historical moment onwards can we say that the nation has been
consolidated? In short, *when is the nation?*

The aim of this paper is twofold. The first part will discuss briefly the
definition of the nation according to these two strands of theories. It will
examine whether it is useful and possible to identify a historical point in
time when a nation comes into being or whether this is a sterile analytic
exercise to the extent that national identity, like any form of identity, is
dynamic and constantly in evolution. In the second part we shall address
this issue in relation to the case of Greece. Greece is a relevant and
interesting case to test our argument because of the strong ethnic perennial
connotations that characterise political and partly academic debates on the
Greek nation, defining the latter as an essential quasi-organic entity and
neglecting many of the historical and relational factors that have shaped the
nation’s self-definition. First, we shall concentrate on the first two decades
of the twentieth century, which marked a turning point in the development
of Greek national identity leading to the fusion of the Greek nation with the
independent Greek national3 state. The role of Turks, Bulgarians and those
of other neighbouring countries in the development and crystallisation of
Greek nationhood will be highlighted. Second, we shall deal with the
Muslim minority of western Thrace and its role in shaping the self-
definition of the Greek nation. We shall show that the way this minority4 has
been accommodated is an ongoing process closely connected with the civic
and cultural perceptions of Greekness.

In the concluding section, we shall discuss recent developments that
have affected the definition of Greek national identity and highlight the
impossibility to answer in a meaningful and informed way the question
‘when is the nation?’ with regard to Greece. By studying the dynamic and
constantly evolving nature of nation formation as a socio-political process,
we shall show that fixing an historical moment when a nation comes into
being risks overlooking the very nature of nations as a specific type of
collective identity.

**Perennialists vs Modernists and the When is the Nation Issue**

In order to answer the question ‘when is the nation?’ one has first to define
some set of analytic or descriptive criteria according to which, a group,
community or other collectivity may be recognised as a nation. The problem
is not a simple one, not least because a great variety of different types of
groups have asserted their nationhood during the last two centuries. In this
section, we shall classify the definitions of the nation provided by the main theorists in the area and examine the extent to which one may answer the question ‘when is the nation?’ from their different perspectives.

Definitions of the nation may be of an objective or subjective type. The former establish objective criteria, namely a set of features that a collectivity should have to qualify as a nation while the latter define the nation in relation to its members’ sense of belonging. A similar distinction is introduced by Gellner, who proposes two provisional definitions: the cultural, which views a shared culture as the main feature for identification of two individuals that belong to the same nation, and the voluntaristic, according to which ‘two men are of the same nation if, and only if, they recognise each other as belonging to the same nation [...] nations are the artefacts of man’s convictions and loyalties and solidarities’. Seton-Watson also points to the voluntaristic notion of the nation at the collective level: ‘the nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one’. The subjective nature of the nation, i.e., the fact that it does not consist of a set of specific features that characterise fellow nationals but rather refers to their sense of solidarity and common belonging, is pointed out by a number of scholars.

These two different types of definitions provide for two kinds of answer to our question: according to the objective or cultural view, the nation comes into being when it satisfies a set of criteria and, in particular, that of a common culture shared by a given population. Subjective definitions, in contrast, would assert that a nation exists if and when the members of one collectivity perceive themselves as members of that nation, or, which is nearly the same thing, share a feeling of belonging to it.

Anthony Smith provides for a more detailed, objective-cum-subjective definition of the nation, which includes a list of criteria that should be satisfied for a group to be recognised as a national community: ‘a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’. Even though Smith’s definition is essentially of the objective kind, it includes a subjective element to the extent that a shared culture, a single economy and a common set of rights and duties entail a certain degree of awareness of membership to the group. Besides, the enumeration of a set of criteria allows for its operationalisation: one may recognise as nations only the communities that satisfy the above set of criteria.

It may seem logical, within either the subjective or the objective definition of the nation that an historical moment, which can be defined in space and time exists, when it can be said that a nation is formed.
Regardless of whether the nation emerges from a pre-existing ethnic group, as primordialists would argue, or it is awakened from its lethargy, as the perennialist view would sustain, or is formed to respond to the needs of men and women in the modern era, as modernists may suggest, there seems to be an implicit agreement that there is a moment when nationhood comes into being. It would then follow that this threshold, this moment of realisation of the national potential could be located in time and space, if one investigated the relevant historical and sociological parameters.

In our view, however, addressing this analytical question risks disguising the true nature of nations. A student of nationalism may privilege one or other definition of the nation, operationalise its specific elements or criteria and classify human collectivities in accordance to these. But the nation is a form of collective identification, bounded historically, that is, however, in a process of constant mutation, reaffirmation or transformation of its character, including the re-definition of the features that bind fellow nationals together, the scope of the nation and/or its past. This is not to say that the nation is an artificial product of human will. It is not a mere artefact of social or political engineering. The nation is inscribed into a pre-existing matrix of cultural and social organisational forms, including their material aspects, that characterise a given population. It is, however, a collective identity and as such it is constantly in the process of becoming. For the sense of belonging to the nation to survive, it has to constantly reproduce itself both symbolically and materially.

Rather than trying to locate a point in time when the nation comes into being, one should study the nation as a process. In other words, nation formation is not an historical phase that precedes the moment of ‘birth’ or ‘reawakening’ of the nation. It is constitutive of the nation as such. Moreover, it is an interactive process. It takes place in a ‘world of nations’ in which the in-group seeks to assert its distinctiveness and is reciprocally differentiated from Others, groups or individuals, who do not belong to it. In other words, nation formation is both inward-looking and relates to a given set of social, cultural and political elements, and outward-looking, developed and/or transformed by reference to Other groups that (are perceived to) inspire or threaten the nation.

In order to cast light on our argument that nations are constantly in the process of coming into being through introspection of their own features and interaction with Others, we shall explore the dynamics of the formation of the Greek nation. As a full investigation of the process of (trans)formation of the Greek nation from the time of national independence to the present day is impossible to complete in the space available here, we shall concentrate our analysis on a few specific
instances of the Greek nation formation process that, in our view, exemplify the fact that a nation is never fully consolidated but rather its identity and definition are constantly reproduced so as to maintain their symbolic and social function for their members. The following sections will concentrate on the beginning of the twentieth century and the process of transformation of Greek national identity during that period from a predominantly ethnic and irredentist conception of the nation to a combined ethnic, territorial and civic view. We shall emphasise the interactive nature of the process, highlighting the role that Others and minorities play in the development of a nation and its identity. Eventually, we shall argue that although one may identify the period between 1900 and 1920 as that of consolidation of the Greek nation, a closer look at some instances of the more recent Greek history challenges this view. We shall therefore discuss the relationship between the Greek national state and the Muslim minority of western Thrace in the post-1923 period and the more recent (in the 1990s) controversy on the ‘Macedonian question’ as two examples which show that the process of formation of the Greek nation is constantly in action.

**Greece: Creating a Nation and a Nation-state**

Before examining the specific period that is of interest to us here, it is worth outlining the main features of the Greek national identity as it developed during the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, Greek identity encompassed both ethnic and civic characteristics. Even though early Greek nationalism in late eighteenth century was marked by the influence of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, the nation was eventually defined with reference to common ancestry, culture and language. Greek national consciousness was built throughout the nineteenth century with reference to the ‘Great Idea’ of liberating the nation’s irredenta, namely the regions inhabited by Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox populations that had not been included in the independent Greek state at the moment of its creation (1829). Moreover, the independent Greek kingdom accepted *eterochthones*, i.e., ethnic Greeks who were born outside its territory, on an equal footing as *autochthones*, namely those born within the national territory. In other words, the independent Greek state became the national centre: the political and cultural basis for the Greek populations living in the Near and Middle East as well as in the Balkans.

The modern institutions transplanted into the newborn state, although alien to the traditional, rural and deeply religious Greek society of the early nineteenth century, marked a continuity between classical and modern Greece through the intermediary of the Greek Enlightenment movement.
The ancient glorious past was thus incorporated into the modern conception of the nation as its genealogical and cultural cradle. The construction of national identity was completed through the integration of the Byzantine period into the historic trajectory of the Greeks. The ‘invention’ of such a united and unique community started with the work of the Greek historian Constantine Paparrigopoulos and was continued throughout the nineteenth century by means of the national educational and cultural policy.

Despite the contradiction between the particularistic claims of Greek nationalism and the universalistic tendencies of the Christian Orthodox religion, the integration of the Byzantine past into the national consciousness led to the gradual identification of the flock with the national community. Even though this identification was problematic and the separation of the Greek church from the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1833 remained a conflictual issue until 1850, the close link between Hellenism and Orthodoxy was eventually confirmed.

Towards the turn of the century, the process of formation of a Greek nation in the context of the new independent state had gone a long way forward, delineating the (supposed) historical trajectory of the nation and providing for a unitary version of the national history, in which diverse elements were incorporated. Moreover, the development of a national education system and national conscription had contributed significantly to the incorporation of the masses into what was initially a restricted movement of political elites and intellectuals. Nonetheless, the process was far from being complete because the boundaries of the Greek nation were still unclear and the Ottoman presence in the East prevented the realisation of the Greek nationalist-irredentist aspirations. There was an underlying ideological and political struggle between those that viewed the nation as a cultural and ethnic community, defined territorially and politically within the restricted limits of the independent Greek state and those that supported an irredentist vision, whereby the Greek nation included all the neighbouring populations that were related to Greek culture or ancestry.

Crisis and Competing Definitions of the National Community

The path towards national integration during the nineteenth century proved particularly difficult because the limited economic and military forces of the Greek state could not meet the disproportionate ambitions of its governments. Moreover, the regime of ‘conditional sovereignty’ that had been imposed on Greece by the foreign Powers further undermined the prestige and legitimacy of the kingdom as the political agent of the nation. Towards the end of the century, the situation got worse because the modernisation policy adopted by the Trikoupis government in the 1880s led
to state bankruptcy. The national humiliation was complemented by the military defeat by the Turks in Thessaly in 1897 and the country’s submission to the financial control of an international committee. It became then obvious that the Greek nation-state was not able to fulfil the task it had set for itself, namely the liberation of ethnic Greeks living in the Ottoman empire.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the nation experienced a severe economic, political and, most importantly, identity crisis. The state had lost its credibility as the main representative of the nation. Moreover, it was no longer trusted as a reliable administrator of its own affairs. Its double, financial and military, failure put into question its role as the national centre. The situation was made worse by the uprisings in the island of Crete that demanded its union with continental Greece, which increased the strain in the relationships between the Greek state and the Ottoman empire. Moreover, an important source of worry for Greeks were the claims raised upon the territories north from the Greek borders that had been long coveted by Greek nationalists, by Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania.

The early twentieth century and, in particular, the period between 1904 and 1908 was marked by the armed conflict between Greek and Bulgarian bands for supremacy in Ottoman Macedonia. These bands of guerrilla fighters comprised local men, Cretans and undercover Greek army officers supplied by the government of Athens. Gradually, the Greek bands got the upper hand in the conflict, thus preparing the annexation of the region to Greece through the Balkan wars (1912–13).

The ‘Macedonian struggle’ played an important part in revitalising the Greek national identity to the extent that it introduced a new Other, namely the Slavs, and more particularly the Bulgarians, against which the nation felt united. For many Greeks, the Macedonian issue was seen as a test of the nation and they felt their duty to respond. The ‘Macedonian struggle’ emphasised the unity of the nation, if one considers that many ‘Macedonian fighters’ came not only from mainland Greece but also from Crete. It provided for new heroes such as Pavlos Melas, a Greek army officer, son of an influential family, that had long been committed to the Great Idea and its realisation, who was appointed commander-in-chief of the Greek bands in the areas of Kastoria and Monastir in August 1904 and was killed there by Turkish troops in September of the same year. Pavlos Melas and his fellow fighters struck a chord with most members of the Athenian bourgeoisie who participated in social gatherings organised in support of the Macedonian cause.

Under the pressure of the Bulgarian threat in Macedonia, Greece had to revise its foreign policy priorities and thus opted for a strategy of cooperation with the Ottoman empire. The contradiction between the
compromising attitude and weakness of the independent Greek kingdom and the nationalist fervour inspired by the Macedonian question and the struggle of Cretans for ‘Union’ was reflected in the intellectual debates of the period. The idea of the ‘stateless nation’ defined by its ethnic and cultural components gained new ground over the idea of the ‘national state’ based on the unity between culture, ethnicity and territory. The views of some of the most important intellectuals of this period are highlighted below as eloquent expressions of the crisis that Greek national identity was going through.

Ion Dragoumis and Athanasios Souliotes were two well known advocates of the ‘stateless nation’ ideal. In Dragoumis’ view, the ‘Helladic’ state was too small to satisfy the needs of the nation, too weak to pursue the irredentist project and also too corrupted by foreign mores to represent the national community. Since the pursuit of the Great Idea was impossible under those political and military circumstances, Dragoumis opted for an alternative view of the nation as the ‘Greek race’ (fyle), which, to his mind, included all people of Greek origin or culture. In his view, the nation was an ethnic community, which comprised all the areas inhabited by the ‘Greek race’. Given that the political unification of all these areas was impossible, Dragoumis – and also Souliotes – proposed the organisation of ethnic Greeks within the context of multi-ethnic states, such as the Ottoman empire in line with the tradition of ‘Greco-Ottomanism’.

National Revival and Consolidation

This period of crisis was concluded in 1909 with the military coup of Goudi. The coup was enacted by the Military League, it involved a sizeable proportion of the Athens garrison and, even though it originated from professional grievances among army officers, it eventually imposed on the government a number of non-military reforms. The army rose against the corrupt and inefficient political class, under the pressure of the specific domestic and foreign policy circumstances. The coup may be seen as the turning point from national crisis to revival. It marked the beginning of a new period for Greece, during which, under the leadership of Eleftherios Venizelos, and by means of both military campaigns and diplomatic manoeuvres, Greece managed to achieve a large part of its nationalist aspirations. At the election of August 1912, Venizelos and his liberal party won almost 300 out of 364 seats in parliament. The new government’s agenda included both domestic socio-economic reform and the aggressive pursuit of the Great Idea.

During this period, the stateless nation ideology was abandoned, not only because the Greek state acquired new strength and prepared to fight for the liberation of the irredenta, but also because of the forced Ottomanisation
policy inaugurated by the Young Turks, despite their initial promise for equality for all ethnic or religious groups living in the former empire. Turkey’s threat to suppress the ethnic Greeks residing in its territories reinforced the territorial and political dimensions of the Greek nation.38 Besides, the optimism and dynamism injected into Greek public life by the new government strengthened the identification of the nation with the state and re-introduced the role of the latter as the national centre.39

The first Balkan war (1912) was waged between the allied forces of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro against the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman army, being heavily outnumbered by the allied forces of the Balkan states, was soon obliged to retreat. The Greek troops captured Salonica in November 1912 and the city of Ioannina, the capital of Epirus, in February 1913. The Greek navy soon established its superiority in the Aegean by gaining control over the islands of Chios, Samos and Mytilini. The gains of the allies over the Ottoman empire were recognised by the Turks at the Treaty of London in May 1913.

The second Balkan war took place between Serbia and Greece on the one side, and Bulgaria on the other. Serbs and Greeks agreed on dividing the spoils of Macedonia to their favour and forced the Bulgarians to a territorial settlement highly unfavourable to them (Treaty of Bucharest, August 1913). During the same period, Greece saw its sovereignty over Crete recognised but failed to annexe the northern part of Epirus, which was given to the independent state of Albania.

At the end of the Balkan wars, Greece had managed to fulfil a large part of its irredentist dreams at the expense of the Ottoman empire and partly of the Bulgarians. During the years 1909–13, the nation had been united and had supported the government wholeheartedly in its nationalist enterprises. Greek national sentiment had been strengthened in front of the enemies. During this period, Greek national identity remained irredentist in its orientation.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the Greek government decided to side with the Entente forces, even though the King and part of the political class opposed this decision. Despite the country’s successes on the foreign front, discord started emerging in domestic politics. The prevalence of the Great Idea as the national state ideology was attacked by part of the political world – mainly the king and his supporters – which opted for a ‘small but honourable Greece’.40 The conflict between Venizelists and anti-Venizelists did not prevent Greek troops from landing in Smyrna in 1919, with the support of the Allied forces. In August 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed with the aim of installing peace between Greece and the Ottoman empire. According to this Treaty, the region of Smyrna was to remain under Greek administration for five years from then, after which it
would be formally annexed to Greece if the local parliament, that would have been created in the meantime, so requested. The Greek government had good reasons to believe that this would happen, albeit the revolutionary government of Kemal Ataturk did not ratify the Treaty. Furthermore, Venizelos lost the election of November 1920 and the ‘small but honourable Greece’ supporters came to power.

The gradual erosion of national unity in the period between 1914 and 1920 was related to the conflict between the Prime Minister and the King regarding the country’s alliance with the Entente or the Central powers. Internal divisions became wider as weariness from the constant state of war grew and also because of the vindictive behaviour of some of Venizelos’ supporters during his second term in office (1917–20). Moreover, the continuous interference of the Great Powers into the country’s affairs contributed to a sense of loss of national pride. The Great Idea lost its impetus and people started reconsidering their national identity, seeking to balance the irredentist overtone with the territorial and civic concept of the small but honourable Greece.

Nonetheless, the royalist government elected in November 1920 pursued the Minor Asia campaign. Despite the fact that the allies declared their neutrality in the Greek–Turkish conflict in April 1921, the Greek army’s offensive of March 1921 led the Greek troops at the Sakarya river near Ankara. However, the major offensive launched in August 1922 soon turned into a rout. The Greek forces had to withdraw from Asia Minor and large numbers of ethnic Greeks inhabiting the region fled as refugees towards mainland Greece.

The defeat of the Greek army in Asia Minor and its consequences, the loss of the territorial gains of the Treaty of Sèvres and the forced exchange of the Greek populations living in the empire with the Turkish populations living in Greece, marked irrevocably Greek history but also and most importantly Greek national identity. In the period that followed the population exchange and until the suspension of the Constitution by the King in August 1936 and the establishment of the Metaxas’ dictatorship, Greek identity politics were characterised by a struggle to shift from the Great Idea ethnic nationalism to a civic-oriented view of the nation with an emphasis on modern democratic institutions. The anti-royalist feeling of the post-1922 period gave new impetus to the democratic modernising forces in Greek society. Nonetheless, the civic and territorial re-definition of the nation was only partly completed because of the deep ideological and political cleavages that divided the nation, the acute international economic crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s and the resulting weakness of the democratic forces. Nonetheless, even though Greek nationalism retained its mainly ethnic connotations – later further exacerbated by the Metaxas
regime – a territorial and civic conception of the Greek nation was incorporated in the dominant discourses (together with ethnic origin, culture, language and religious faith) and the irredentist projects were abandoned.

**Greece and the Muslim Minority**

In the previous section, it has been argued that the Greek nation was still in the process of ‘being formed’ at the beginning of the twentieth century, nearly a century after its ‘birth’ or ‘re-awakening’ through a national Revolution (1821) and the formation of an independent nation-state (1829). In order to fully appreciate the dynamic nature of nation formation and hence the difficulty in identifying a specific historical moment when a nation comes into being, we shall discuss in this section the role that the Muslim minority of western Thrace has played in the consolidation of Greek national identity in the twentieth century, after the abandonment of irredentism. We will show how the Greek nation has been re-defined and re-affirmed through the partial inclusion or exclusion of this minority. The Muslim minority has played the role of a mirror-image, an external Other, from which the Greek nation has differentiated itself in terms of religion and ethnic origin.

The relationship between the Greek nation and the Muslim minority will be analysed at three different levels, based on Barth’s notion of ‘ethnic boundaries’: civic, ethnic and religious. These three levels can act as ‘social boundaries’ and combined together will be used to examine the way Muslims interact with the Greek society on one hand, and the extent to which Greek society is tolerant towards the Muslim minority on the other. Our aim will be to show how changes in minority–majority relations over time contributed to the evolving character of nation formation in Greece and, hence, provide evidence for our argument that it is not possible to answer the question *when is the nation?* in any meaningful way.

It is our contention that ethnic minorities either deviate or fail to complete the process of nation-state formation mainly due to historical circumstances and the socio-political situation of the minority group itself. Further, the study of minorities is an interdisciplinary subject of interest to many analysts. Here, a socio-political approach will be used, based on both objective and subjective criteria for exploring the main characteristics of the Muslim minority in Greece. The components of the minority will be examined both in terms of the Muslim minority itself and the Greek/Christian majority. The reason for this duality is that whatever the actions of a minority group, they will always be either in reaction to, or in collaboration with the majority group. It is through this interaction that both
populations redefine themselves but also that both Greek and Turkish nationalism is tested.

Legal Aspects
Since the population exchange agreed between Greece and Turkey at the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the Greek state has recognised the existence of a Muslim minority in western Thrace. According to Heracleidis, the official position of Greece concerning the status of minorities is defined primarily within a strict legal framework. The existence of a national minority is a legal matter defined either by the state’s legal system or by international agreements. For Greece, minority rights are part of human rights and they are individual in nature, not collective.

Within this framework, Greece supports the idea that an ethnic/national/religious minority should have the right to preserve its distinct identity. But at the same time the members of a minority should have the right to be assimilated if they so wish. In addition, the members of a minority should co-habit with the majority in the same region or area in order to benefit from provisions made by the state such as teaching in the minority language or provision of religious services.

Socio-political Aspects
A legal framework alone is not entirely adequate to understand the complex issue of minorities. The Muslim minority of western Thrace is recognised as a religious group and guaranteed the same equal citizenship rights as the majority Greek/Christian population. However, this group of people consists of three ethnic groupings, each of which posses distinctive cultural features. We can therefore talk of a group of people, or legal entity with a common religion but with different ethnic backgrounds and different cultural characteristics.

The civic level. The civic concept of nation first emerged in western Europe, and focused on the creation of an independent territorial state whose membership would be based on equal citizenship. The emphasis is therefore on a territorial integrity that requires the active participation of its members. In this sense the nation and national integration is inclusive to the extent that it becomes a unit of identity and loyalty … that citizens recognize one another as belonging together in a subjective, internal sense …

The Greek state has accepted the terms of the Lausanne Treaty to attribute civic/religious characteristics to the Muslim minority. As mentioned above, Greece recognises a minority group (ethnic, religious or linguistic) as a legal matter, defined either by the national or international
set of laws. This relationship becomes more complicated considering the historical territory of western Thrace. That is, there is a strong affiliation to the land by all groups, strengthened by the controversy between Greece and Turkey and whereby victories on both sides during the history prior to 1923 were based on the idea of recapturing ‘enslaved’ land. Even today there is a feeling or a belief among the Muslim population that western Thrace was given as a gift to Greece, and among the Greek/Christian population that the territory was liberated.

However the very foundation of a Muslim civic identity is a matter of controversy. Although the emphasis of the Greek state is on a Muslim civic status, the way Muslims are legally defined by the Lausanne Treaty excludes them from certain parts of Greek civic society. More closely, three areas can be identified.

First, the concept of a legal-political equality is complicated in respect to the civic status of the Muslim minority. This is due to its religious character, which will be explored as a separate level. For the Christian population all civic duties are performed by state institutions. For the Muslims, certain civil duties, such as divorce or inheritance issues, are performed by the religious authority of the Mufti (although legally such duties can be pursued by Greek civil institutions).

Second, despite occasional violations, which Muslims have protested about, the Muslim minority appears to enjoy equal rights with the Christian population. But even in this respect an exclusionist element can be found. For example, Muslim conscripts were not allowed to carry guns, instead being allocated to secondary and unarmed services. This practice has recently stopped but overall in the army, policies and attitudes regarding the Muslim minority are not yet clear.

Third, a segregated educational system leaves little room for a shared culture. Some of the curriculum is common for both Muslim and Christian students; however, the existence of separate schools satisfies the terms of the Lausanne Treaty, whilst widening the gap in western Thrace society. There have been recent changes – what the government calls ‘a positive discrimination’ system – to encourage the entrance of Muslim students into Greek universities. These changes, as in the case of the army, coincide with the state’s recent efforts to strengthen Greek civic society.

It can be argued that the emphasis on the civic definition placed upon the Muslim minority by the Greek state is not entirely realistic. The three areas show that this ‘incomplete’ Muslim identity is the result of two factors. First, the emphasis of the Lausanne Treaty on the religious status of the Muslims limits their civic identity. Second, confronted with the existence of an ethnic minority within what was perceived as a homogeneous homeland and national culture, the Greek state and national elites preferred attributing
civic membership, even though ‘incomplete’, to Muslims.

The ethnic level. As it has been argued previously, Greece is a state with a weak civic identity. The Christian population of western Thrace, as in the rest of Greece, has not only a civic but also a strong ethnic affiliation to the state. This affiliation is maintained and reinforced through the uneasy relationship between Greece and Turkey and the other Balkan neighbours. The long conflicts and disputes, the destruction of Greek irredentism and the birth of the modern Turkish state have confirmed the role of the Turks as the threatening Other for Greece.

This type of perception inevitably leads to a hostile atmosphere and suspicion among the western Thrace population, especially as the Muslims are perceived to be the voice of the external Other which justifies and re-enforces a strong Greek identity among the Christians. An example of this is that until recently all issues concerning the Muslim minority were treated as part of Greek–Turkish relations and came under the jurisdiction of the Greek Foreign Ministry (the issues concerning the Muslim minority are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior). And as opposed to Billig’s ‘banal nationalism’ the flag usually waves in western Thrace, acting as a reminder of national independence. These patriotic sentiments are expressed in local and national celebrations commemorating Greece’s liberation from Turkish rule.

The issue of ethnic recognition for the Muslim minority has been raised since the 1950s by some of its members. These demands intensified during the 1970s, reaching a peak in the early 1990s with the organisation of demonstrations and the public burning of primary school books provided by the Greek government. The answer of the Greek state to these demonstrations at the time was to refer strictly to the terms of the Lausanne Treaty and emphasise the religious and civic status of the Muslim minority.

Recent moves by the Greek government towards a stronger civic society have been accompanied by the introduction and implementation of new equal rights policies concerning the Muslim minority. Some of these policies have been briefly highlighted above. The response to these policies by various sections of Greek society underlines the amalgamations of the ‘modern/civic’ and ‘traditionalist/ethnic’ elements within it. A look at the press reflects this dichotomy.

Modernist views in various articles expressed favourable comments for proposed government changes. For example, in articles such as ‘Thrace within the priorities of the Foreign Minister’ (Ta Nea, 13 March 1999) or ‘The school-desks of equality’ (Eleutherotypia, 7 May 2001) there is a positive and optimistic view concerning these new policies. In addition other articles choose to highlight the cultural diversities of the area in a
positive way, presenting favourably a recent children’s exhibition that depicted the subject in their paintings (*Eleutherotypia*, 6 April 2001). Finally, articles such as ‘The illiterate of Thrace’ (*Ta Nea*, 20 October 1997) show the social problems that affect the area.

A more traditionalist view is expressed by the Orthodox church which warns that Christian birth rates have decreased in western Thrace. In articles such as ‘We are decreasing dangerously’ (*Eleutheros Typos*, 8 March 1999) or ‘We want to save Thrace: Dramatic appeal of the Archbishop to the State’ (*Apogeumatini*, 8 March 1999) there are calls for policies and incentives such as extra financial allowances to encourage more births. Another traditionalist view comes from ex-army officers who write that western Thrace is in danger and has been neglected by the state: ‘What Greece should do to avoid “paying” for the trouble in the Balkans’ (*Oikonomikos Taxydromos*, 8 September 1994) or ‘How Thrace is Turkicised’ (*Apogeumatini*, 12 March 1999). Additional articles expressing wider traditional thoughts include concerns for the new local government system introduced recently in Greece: ‘Superficial, Useless and nationally dangerous’ (*Oikonomikos Taxydromos*, 7 July 1994) is entitled one article for the new local government laws. Finally, other articles deal directly with the problem of the Muslim and more precisely Turkish origin ethnicity: ‘Islamised Greeks the Turkish origin population of western Thrace’ (*Christianiki*, June 1994).

However, as in the case of the civic level, the issue of ethnicity raises further complexities, especially as western Thrace is the arena where Greek and Turkish nationalist aspirations are tested.

The Muslim minority of western Thrace is divided into three ethnic groupings, the Turkish origin population, which constitutes the largest part of the Muslim community (48 per cent), the Pomaks (37 per cent) and the Muslim Rom (17 per cent). Taking into account first the recent calls from Muslims to change their status from religious to ethnic, and second Smith’s highlighted differences between types of ethnic groupings, a possible change in legal terms is not as straightforward.

In particular, the terms of ‘ethnic category’ and ‘ethnic community’ are both applicable as far as the Muslim minority of western Thrace is concerned. The Turkish origin population can be characterised as an ‘ethnic community’ identifying itself as ethnic Turk with Turkey as its historic homeland. The situation is not so clear in the case of the Pomak and Rom groups who, it can be argued, are better described by the definition of an ethnic category than an ethnic community. Neither possess a written language nor do they have a particular affiliation to the land, although the Pomaks are considered more as an autochthonous population, and neither have historical/mythical literature or traditions, invented or otherwise,
praised by Pomak or Rom philologists. Instead, both groups tend to identify with the same demands raised by the Turkish origin elite, which is happy to incorporate them.57 This identification is further reinforced by the Muslim minority educational system where the Turkish language is taught to all Muslim students regardless of their ethnic origin.

The strong concept of ethnic affiliation towards a nation is present both in the Christian and Muslim communities, maintained and reinforced by both internal (perceptions of Turks as hostile others) and external (Greek–Turkish relations) factors. In addition, the application of concepts of ethnicity to the Muslim minority group raises questions that only point to the complexity of the issue beneath a simple affiliation. Relations between the Greek Christian majority and the Muslim minority are constantly (re-)negotiated and their identities (re-)defined in relation to one another, responding to changing policies and attitudes during time.

The level of religion. As religious identities preceded ethnic or national ones, religion has played an important role in the later formation of the nation state and the populations that inhabit them. After the eighteenth century, nationalism replaced great religions as the primary legitimisation of the social order.58 South Eastern Europe is no exception.

Ottoman religious policy remained a major factor determining the historical developments of the Balkan people.59 The development of the millet system provided a degree of religious freedom initially to Armenians and Christians, and to Jews and Roman Catholics60 at a later stage. Despite occasional violence and discrimination, the various religious minorities enjoyed greater freedom than, for example, Huguenots in Catholic France and Catholics in Anglican England in western Christendom. In the long run, it can be argued that the millet system contributed to the preservation of the cultural characteristics of the Balkan people.61

In relation to the study of western Thrace, religion is the only common and officially recognised characteristic among the members of the Muslim community. Communal identities in western Thrace are formed on two levels: the antagonism between ‘Muslim’ and ‘Turkish’ identity and the relationship of this antagonism to the Greek national identity. This identity formation has become more relevant for Greece since the call from the Muslim minority to change its status from a religious to an ethnic one.

Two broad historical stages, from 1923 to the 1950s and from the 1950s to the present day highlight the process of redefining and re-affirming identities in the area of western Thrace. As part of the Ottoman Empire, all members of the population were categorised according to their religion. This theocratic concept of membership was challenged by
the collapse of the Empire. As in the case of Greece, Turkish nationalists had to appeal to deeply traditional and religious communities for support. Kemal Ataturk tried to introduce a secular, westernised view of nationalism but these attempts were not always successful as small towns and villages resisted change, retaining strong Islamic loyalties.\textsuperscript{62} This was also the case in western Thrace. The religious leadership was sceptical of Kemalist reforms and remained attached to the Old Muslim and theocratic characteristics of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{63} In this context, the minority members were satisfied with the official description of ‘Muslim minority’.

During this period the relationship between the Greek state and the Muslim community can be characterised as peaceful. Although the onset of modern Turkish nationalism was reflected in the social and cultural life among the Muslim minority of western Thrace (this influence increased after the 1930s), in its majority the Muslim leadership remained attached to old religious and conservative values.

After the 1950s, reflecting the hostile Greek–Turkish relations at the time, a new secular, Turkish-educated political leadership emerged within the Muslim minority. This new leadership represented a ‘modernist’ ideological trend within the Muslim minority. Closer connections with Turkey were gradually pursued in terms of communication, movement of population and education. This ‘opening-up’ was accompanied by demands for Greece to recognise the Muslim minority as an ethnic rather than a religious community.

These demands met the opposition of the Greek state and once more such actions were perceived as a threat to Greece’s integrity from neighbouring Turkey. For example, in 1984 Greece’s Supreme Court banned the use of the word ‘Turkish’ in the signs of Muslim organisations or associations. By refusing such demands, Greece, a strong ethnic state itself, feeling threatened, sought to reaffirm the homogeneity of its own identity. In contrast, recent developments on the issue, including the use of the term ‘Turks’ in relation to perceptions of the Turkish origin population of western Thrace by the current Greek Foreign Minister, (interview in Klik Magazine, August 1999) highlight the continuing process of re-negotiating identity formations. This process relates closely to the question ‘when the nation?’.

What we have witnessed during the second half of the century is the progressive replacement of the old Ottoman religious values with a secular nationalist/ethnicist affiliation. Therefore, the relationship between ethnicity and religion is an ongoing process of changing identities. As Balibar argues, ethnic identity can incorporate religious consciousness and, to some extent, can succeed in replacing it.\textsuperscript{64} When this relationship is taking
place within a minority population like the Muslims of western Thrace, it presents a challenge for the dynamics of identity formation for the majority, the Greek nation-state in this case.

In summary, the three levels of analysis have revealed the changing character of civic, ethnic and religious identities of the Muslim minority in relation to the Christian Greek Orthodox majority. These changes, occurring simultaneously at all three levels, reflect the ongoing process of defining the nation and the historical challenges presented to the Greek nation-state. The formation of the Greek national identity is re-negotiated either in relation to or in response to Muslim/Turkish identity antagonisms that have taken place from the 1920s to the present day.

When is the Greek Nation?: A View into the Present

It was argued at the beginning of this paper that seeking to identify a point in time when a nation comes into being may prove to be a sterile analytical exercise. A dynamic view of the nation has been introduced which sees nations as in a constant process of becoming. The case of Greece has been studied with the aim of highlighting the dynamic nature of national identity. Thus, we have analysed how Greek national identity abandoned its irredentist character and shifted towards an ethnic but also territorial and civic definition of the nation in the early twentieth century, through interaction and conflict with neighbouring countries as well as internal social and political changes. Furthermore, we have discussed the ongoing relationship between the Greek nation and the Muslim minority in western Thrace. Three levels of analysis have been used, civic, ethnic and religious, to show that Greek national identity has been and still is in a process of evolution. What is the Greek nation and how one belongs to it is constantly re-defined through interaction with the Muslim minority. The existence of the Muslim minority presents a challenge for the Greek state and Greek national identity which is being reinforced and redefined according to Otherness (internal and external) through time.

Even though the modern Greek national state came into being in 1829, its borders were clearly and unequivocally delineated only in 1923.65 Moreover, despite a systematic policy of nationalisation of the Greek society, the Greek nation as a form of collective identification acquired a somewhat stable character only in the 1920s when the irredentist project of the Great Idea was definitively abandoned. Thus, one may argue that from a political science point of view 1829 may be defined as the moment of the genesis of the Greek national state. However, the modern Greek nation with its actual contours came into being as late as 1923 (still with the exception of the Dodecanese island, see Note 65).
Still the definition of the borders of both the national community and the state brought up the issue of minorities. Thus, the meaning of Greekness has been defined and transformed in relation to the existence and claims of the Muslim minority of western Thrace. These were in turn defined partly as a reaction to the national state’s policies but also shaped by external factors such as the relationship with neighbouring Turkey. The minority’s claim, since the 1970s, for its ethnic character to be recognised has provided a new challenge for Greek nationhood.

A closer look at contemporary identity politics in Greece shows that the Greek nation is in the process of negotiating its main identity features as well as its boundaries, under contrasted pressures. The competitive character of international politics, on the one hand, and the closer integration with other European countries in the context of the European Union, on the other hand, have led to the renovation, re-invention or re-discovery of the ethno-genealogical view of the Greek nation. During the last decade, we have been witnessing an increased fetishisation of Greekness whose character as an amalgam of genealogical and environmental elements in which only people born Greeks can participate has been emphasised.

On the other hand, the 1990s have been marked by the ‘Macedonian question’, namely the contemporary issues raised by Greece after the proclamation of independence by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in 1991. The adoption of the name Macedonia by FYROM, after the dismantling of Yugoslavia, and its claims to the cultural heritage of Alexander the Great that was deemed to be ‘property’ of the Greek nation, initiated a controversy between FYROM and Greece, which lasted for over five years. The case was brought to international forums (the UN and the European Union) and included an embargo on the part of Greece to FYROM in the period between 1992 and 1993. FYROM’s location within the geographical district of Macedonia, adjacent to the Greek region with the same name, and its claims on what was perceived by the Greeks as ‘their’ national heritage have been perceived to threaten the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Greek nation. To counteract these claims, Greece emphasised its cultural and ethnic unity and downplayed any political or territorial features which might reveal discontinuities of the national past, in particular the fact that the Greek region of Macedonia was incorporated into the independent Greek state only at the beginning of this century.

Not surprisingly, the government’s initiatives with regard to the ‘defence’ of the nation from FYROM were successful in mobilising Greek citizens at home and abroad. The nationalist movement that emerged has had a double effect. On the one hand, it has led to the re-interpretation of the
national past so that Alexander the Great became an integral part of the ancient Greek legacy. On the other hand, it placed further emphasis on the ethno-cultural basis of the Greek nation.

The recent challenge of the ‘Macedonian question’, like the past and ongoing Muslim minority issue, show that a nation is never a static or stable community, crystallised into a set of features. Even though the Greek nation acquired stable territorial boundaries and a relatively consolidated configuration of identity features in the early twentieth century, it is still in the process of being (re-)formed. Competition in the international arena over economic, political or cultural issues, international migration and minority issues, fuel and reproduce the process of nation formation. In conclusion, the nation is constantly in the process of becoming and for this purpose it needs to engage into struggles over naming, culture, territory, ethnicity or a combination of those. Therefore, in order to cast light on the phenomena of nations and nationalism, scholars should concentrate not on when is a nation but rather on how is a nation.

NOTES


3. The term ‘national state’ rather than ‘nation-state’ is used here to denote the fact that Greece, like the large majority of so-called nation-states, is not ethnically, culturally and linguistically completely homogeneous. Apart from recent immigration flows which have brought to Greece over half a million foreigners, the Greek national state comprises a small number of ethnic and cultural minorities (Turks, Pomaks, Vlahs, Slavomacedonians, Arvanites and others) of which the largest are the Turks, or else called Greek Muslims of western Thrace. These minorities amount to nearly 5 per cent of the total population, according to Greek authorities and 10 per cent according to the Minority Rights Group, *Minorities in the Balkans* (London: MRG Report 1995).

4. The Muslim minority of western Thrace is not the only minority in Greece (see Note 3) but it is the largest and most important politically and historically given its links with Greece’s long-term threatening Other, namely the Ottoman empire and later Turkey. For these reasons, our study focuses on the interplay between this specific minority and the ways it has influenced the definition of the Greek nation.


WHEN IS THE GREEK NATION?


11. According to the primordialist perspective, nations originate from pre-modern social groups like ethnic communities. In this perspective, the ethnic origins of nations are deemed to be more important than their modern features in shaping the specific character of each nation and the content of national identity.
17. Kitromilides (note 13).


24. Kitromilides (note 13).


26. The ‘Macedonian struggle’ was initially waged through cultural and religious propaganda (1870–1903) and eventually led to widespread armed conflict between Greeks and Bulgarians in the region. For a more thorough discussion of the Greek nationalist policy in Macedonia and the social, cultural and political issues involved in it, see A. Karakasidou, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997); P. Mackridge and E. Yannakakis, Ourselves and Others, The Development of a Greek Macedonian Cultural Identity Since 1912 (Oxford: Berg 1997).

27. Clogg (note 16) p.75.


31. Ibid. p.16.


34. For a fuller discussion of federalist plans in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century and the origins of the concept of ‘Greco-Ottomanism’, see V. Roudometof, Nationalism, Globalization and Orthodoxy (Westport, CT: Greenwood 2001), chapter 3 in particular.


37. Venizelos had started his successful political career in his native Crete after the island was granted autonomous status in 1897. Aside from being a charismatic personality and a politician with great diplomatic capacities and intuition, Venizelos had the advantage of not having any links with the ‘old’ political class of mainland Greece.

38. Veremis, ‘Kratos kai éthnos stin Ellada’ (note 13) p.66.


41. Clogg (note 16) p.95.

42. Ibid. pp.87–95.

43. In 1928, the Greek population had risen to 6,204,674 from 5,016,589 in 1920, see N. Kokosalakis and I. Psimmenos, Modern Greece: A Profile of Identity and Nationalism (Project Report, Panteion University, Athens, January 2002) p.11.

44. See G. Mavrovordatos, Stillborn Republic (Berkeley: University of California Press 1983).


46. During the exchange about 400,000 Turks from Greece left for Turkey and 1,300,000 Greeks came to Greece. L.S. Stavrianos, The Balkans Since 1453 (New York: New York University Press 2000) p.590.


50. Smith, National Identity (note 10) p.82.


52. ‘[t]he basic guiding principle of the policy followed by Greek Governments in recent years, vis-à-vis the handling of minority issues have been those of moderation and consensus. This is especially true since 1991, when the Government solemnly reaffirmed the principles of “isonomia” i.e. equality before the Law and “isopoliteia”, equality of civil rights in relation between Christians and Muslims.’ Official Website of Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.mfa.gr>).


55. This statistical information provides an approximate guidance to the ethnic origins of the Muslim population. The terms of the Lausanne Treaty and subsequent policies followed by the Greek state, constituted the three groups under a common ‘Muslim minority’ umbrella since 1923. Close links and intermarriage between the three groups (mainly between Pomaks and Turks) means that conventional demarcations of ethnicity are not clear-cut. The Rom population also inhabits other areas of southern Greece but they are a Christian population excluded from the Lausanne Treaty.

56. To explore the ‘ethnic’ position of the Muslim minority in this amalgamation of a ‘modern/civic’ and ‘traditional/ethnic’ state of Greece, we need to distinguish between the terms of ‘ethnic category’ and ‘ethnic community’. To adopt Smith’s definitions, an ethnic category is a unit of population with very little self-awareness and consciousness that they form a separate collectivity, although they can be perceived as such by outsiders. An ethnic community by contrast shares certain characteristics such as a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific ‘homeland’ and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population (Smith, National Identity (note 10) pp.20–21).

57. The information provided by the official Website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry (<http://www.mfa.gove.tr/grupa/ac/acd/minor.htm>) concerning the issue of minorities in Greece puts emphasis on the violation of human rights in Greece and Greece’s failure to recognise other minorities such as the Vlachs, Jews, Rom and of course Slavomacedonians.

58. Hutchinson, Modern Nationalism (note 49) p.68.


63. Academy of Athens (ote 48) p.39.


65. Still the Dodecanese islands were incorporated into Greece only after the Second World War.

66. The transformation of Greek national identity in the context of European integration opens a new challenge for Greek national identity that would need to be the subject of another
paper. The interested reader may consult A. Triandafyllidou, *Negotiating Nationhood* (note 12), and also Kokosalakis and Psimmenos (note 43).


69. Clogg (note 39).