

Greek Crisis Shows Weak International Ethics

By Victor Bivell

One good thing that may come out of the Greek and Euro debt crisis is a better understanding that truth has a monetary value and turning a blind eye to dishonesty can cost dearly.

By submitting false data so it could enter the Eurozone, the Greek Government has cost its European partners, its bankers and its own people very dearly. It has become an example of what can happen when a country's commitment to international agreements and treaties is weak and the international community does not follow-up to ensure compliance.

But rather than work to restore its reputation, Greece has hurt it further with its weak commitment to fully implement the terms of its financial bailout agreement, the largest in history.

Politicians, bankers and the public should not be surprised at this behaviour. Even a cursory look at Greece's record shows that Greek governments have a long history of little regard for international organizations and agreements that do not suit it. Along with the European Union, these organizations include the United Nations, the European Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice.

This lack of respect is particularly poor with human rights, and goes back a long way.

An early example that still reverberates today was disregard for the League of Nations. In 1920, Greece signed the [Treaty Concerning the Protection of Minorities in Greece](#). It did so because 7 years earlier after the Balkan Wars, Greece annexed half of the territory of what had been Ottoman Macedonia and took control of its large and diverse population.

Macedonia was famous for its multicultural population, and its many ethnic, religious and linguistic groups became minorities in Greece. It was international concern about these people that led Greece to sign the Treaty with the League of Nations.

Yet from the beginning Greece failed to honour the Treaty and even today, 92 years later, it continues to assert that it has no ethnic minorities and only one religious minority (the Muslims in western Thrace).

Even today the co-signatories to the Treaty continue to allow Greece to continue to make these two false assertions. The co-signatories are Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and India.

When during the 1990s and 2000s the European Court of Human Rights told Greece to recognize specific minorities, Greece ignored its judgements. For example, in 1998 the Court told Greece to allow the establishment of a Home of Macedonian Culture. 14 years later this still has not happened.

The United Nations, which is the successor organization to the League of Nations, has also tried to steer Greece in the right direction.

In 2008 its independent expert on minority issues told Greece to recognize its Turkish, Roma, Macedonian, Pomak and other ethnic minorities. It also told Greece to recognize its religious

minorities - Catholics, Baha'i, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, non-Greek Orthodox Christians, and Muslims outside of western Thrace. (see [Report of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall](#))

The Greek government refused. It repeated that it has no ethnic minorities and only one religious minority, and ignored the United Nations and its report.

Human rights group Greek Helsinki Monitor says 'Greece systematically fails to execute European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments, European Committee for Social Rights (ECSR) decisions and UN Human Rights Committee (UN HRC) views.'

To that list we can now add the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ is part of the United Nations and the highest court on Earth. Its decisions cannot be appealed.

In December 2011, the Court found that Greece had violated a 1995 Interim Accord under which it had signed not to block Macedonia's entry into international organizations if Macedonia entered under the name former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Despite the Interim Accord, in 2008 Greece vetoed Macedonia's entry into NATO. Although the Greek government defended its action, the Court agreed with Macedonia that Greece had broken its commitment. (see [APPLICATION OF THE INTERIM ACCORD OF 13 SEPTEMBER 1995 \(THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA v. GREECE\)](#))

Although Greece was found in the wrong, the Greek government did not comply with the decision. On the contrary. At the NATO Summit in Chicago earlier this year, Macedonia sought to have its membership put on the agenda. This would have given Greece the chance to correct its stance, fulfill its legal commitment, and add another brick to world security.

Instead, Greece was reported to have fought hard to have the issue left off the Agenda, thus continuing to deny Macedonia entry to NATO and showing it has not learnt its lesson from the International Court of Justice decision.

After many years Europe is now alert to Greece's record as an international citizen. Before the Greek election in May, Germany and France insisted that Greek politicians sign a pledge that after the election they would not back down on the commitments they made as part of the massive Greek financial bailout.

Yet the follow-up Greek election in June was presented as a referendum on whether Greece would stick to the agreed bailout, and the party that wanted to renege on the bailout was a close second in the election.

At its root the Greek debt crisis is about fairness and truth.

It is about fairness as Greece's long suffering minorities wonder how the world can be so generous in its debt forgiveness and patience with Greece, while Greece is so consistently ungenerous with its own people.

It is about truth as it shows that international ethics need to be stronger. It is not enough to be for truth. The international community needs to be against deceit. It needs to show more resolve to ensure countries do what they say they will do. Perhaps events would have worked out

differently, and a lot cheaper, if way back in 1920 and in the 1990s the international community had made Greece stick to its word and honour its international agreements and judgements.

That may have shown Greece that its word should mean something. Instead of the mess it is in today, Greece might have developed into an honest and valued international citizen.

It's not too late.

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