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The Greek democratic federations and the European Union's integration

Emmanouil-Marios L. Economou and Nicholas C. Kyriazis*

Abstract In the present paper we focus on the two best organised ancient Greek federations the Achaean and the Aetolian. Both were democratic ones. We analyse their institutional structure, decision making bodies, and finances. Then, we compare them to the present European Union (EU) and point out similarities and differences. Lastly, we attempt an evaluation of the two federations and the EU according to a set of criteria, such as the existence or not of direct democratic procedures, single citizenship, common currency, common defense policy etc. We conclude that the present European Union lags behind the Greek democratic federations according to a series of institutional criteria and thus, it has a long way to go in order to develop into a true federation.

Keywords: Ancient Greek federations, institutional organization, European Union, interactive analysis

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1. Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that direct democracy emerged by the end of the 6th century BCE in Classical Greece, the first fully developed example being Athens after Cleisthenes reforms of 510-507 and the fall of tyranny (Hansen 1999).

Democracy appeared in a series of ancient Greek city-states such as the islands of Chios, and Naxos, and furthermore, in the city-states of Megara, Cyrene (in today's Libya), Pontoheracleia (in today's north-west Asia Minor), Kroton, Syracuse and Akragas, in today's Southern Italy etc. (Robinson 2003, p.2; Kyriazis 2012, p.42).

What is less known generally is that within the same democratic environment the idea of voluntary federations of democratic city-states also emerged and was practiced from the 5th century BCE but certainly and in a more organized way during the 4th to 2nd centuries BCE. Since the 8th century BCE a series of religious *amphiktionies*, already existed in the Hellenic world in both metropolitan Greece (the Delphic, the Calabrian and the Boeotian) and three in the Asia Minor (Dorian Hexapolis, Ionian Dodekapolis and Aeolian Dodekapolis).

For Brock and Hodkinson (2000, pp. 25-26) “amphictionies had to do with *“autonomous communities with common ethnic characteristics joined together around a religious center and containing a temple in order to establish effective political and military cooperation. The worship center was chosen to be in a geographically neutral point”*. This neutrality for religious matters was a precautionary measure against any would-be city-state-member which might have an aim to undertake the leadership in the amphictiony against the other members.

It appears that an emerging democratic culture was under way during the Archaic period in many aspects of social life such as religion, property rights protection, warfare, sports (Kyriazis and Economou 2013a, 2015; Pritchard 2013). During the workings of the amphictionic councils, collective decision making procedures were taking place. For example in the council of the Delphic amphictiony each of the participants, the 12 Hellenic tribes had two representatives with voting rights. These representatives were discussing with their colleagues and taking decisions not only for religious matters but very often for a variety of other issues as

well, mainly foreign policy.¹ Forrest (2000, pp. 282-283) adds that “*the amphictionic representatives were being gathered together in order to discuss about internal and foreign affairs policies...we have a cooperation of communities around a ritual center where political decision were taken on behalf of all*”.

Although Greek amphictionies are very interesting as paradigms of “proto-democratic” procedures and collective decision making, they finally did not manage to evolve into federal structures where a series of key criteria are necessary to be practiced, such as common defense and security policy, an institutionalized parliamentary, direct democracy procedures, federal monetary policy, federal judicial service and common justice, single citizenship etc. The same goes for the so called “leagues” or “alliances” which were of course well known during the 5th and 6th centuries, and even much earlier, since the Mycenaean Kingdoms who fought the Trojan war (during the late 13th or early 12th century BCE) were an ad-hoc alliance under a “supreme military commander”, king Agamemnon of Mycenae.²

But the concept of federations of free democratic city-states that unite voluntarily to evolve into a specific political unit with an appropriate institutional structure was completely novel in its width and depth. Many modern authors continue to call them “leagues” which is inappropriate, according to our view, since the political units which we will analyse here, are certainly much more than a mere alliance, thus we will define them as federations. Federations, like the Aetolian and the Achaean we analyse here, and many more, are attested already with certainty during the 5th century, but what was new with the emergence of the 4th century federations was their democratic basis, both at participating city-state and federal level, as well as their elaborate political and economic structure. Since at least the 4th century BCE we have attested at least five democratic federations, the Achaean, the Aetolian, the Boeotian, the Arcadian (which later became part of the Aetolian

¹ For the working of the Archaic Greece’s amphictionies see among others, (Herodotus Hist. 144; Pausanias Ell. Per. 19.34.I; Strabo Geo. 3.9.229; Cary 1923; Larsen 1944; Roebuck 1955; Rahtjen 1965; Hammond 1989, p. 137; Forrest 2000).

² For the Achaean Greek alliance which undertook the Troy campaign see Raaflaub (1993). For the Athenian Alliance see Despotopoulos (1972, pp. 35-37) and Cackwell (1981). For the Peloponnesian Alliance, with Sparta on its head see Cartledge (2012, chapt. 13). For the Greek Alliances of Macedonia see Larsen (1925).

federation) and the Aenianian ones.³

In the present essay we analyse first, as a case study, the Aetolian and the Achaean federations. Then, we compare them to the European Union and make some suggestions as to what lessons and institutional settlements for today's further development of the EU can be drawn from the functioning of these federations. What we also attempt with this paper is to offer arguments in favour of a gradual revision of the wrong way through which we perceive those ancient Greek political entities. Recently, modern authors such as Mackil (2013) and Economou, Kyriazis and Metaxas (2014) have already adopted the term *Koina* the ancient Greek word, denoting a federal state instead of "leagues" to contribute to this revision.

2. The Aetolian and the Achaean federations

The Aetolian and the Achaean federations, are also known with the Greek word *sympolitiae*, which denotes that we are talking about cities who have common structures and share common values and institutional arrangements.

Recent estimates, which have been verified by the ancient sources, have proved that the two federations comprised organized functional federal entities since the late 5th century BCE (Pol. Hist. 2.41. 7-8; Thuc. Hist. 3.102; Xen. Hell. 4.6.2-4; Mackil 2013, pp. 9, 46-52; Economou, Kyriazis and Metaxas 2014). The main reason for their creation was primarily to achieve an effective level of defense against the geopolitical expansion of other states of the era, mainly the Macedonian Kingdom of northern Greece (Larsen 1952; Grainger 1999).

Gradually, during the 4th century BCE both federations, which were also neighbouring states (see pic.1) expanded their influence and increased their geographical territories by the voluntary adhesion of city-states in the wider regions of both Aetolia and Achaia. The Aetolian federation comprised by more than 40 city-states from Central and Southern Greece. The Achaean Federation expanded its influence since 280 BCE. It consisted of 10 member city-states to as many as approximately fifty later (Pol. Hist. 2.41; Rathjen 1965; Larsen 1972, Russel and

³ For the first four cases see among others Larsen (1971, 1972), Rzepka (1999), Scholten (2000), Mackil (2013) and Economou, Kyriazis and Metaxas (2014). For the Koinon of Aenianes see Strabo Geo. 9.4.11, 11.14.14.

Cohn 2012; Mackil 2013).

Both federations became major political powers in the Greek world during the 3rd century BCE but because of awkward geopolitical choices, and their commitment in the wider civil strifes of the Greek world during the whole 431-146 period BCE, they both weakened in economic, population, military and geopolitical terms and at last, they were finally subjugated by the Romans. Indeed, the Achaean federation gave the “last battle of the Greek independence” in 146 BCE at Leukopetra, where the Achaean federal army was defeated by the superior in strength and numbers roman legions (Badian 1952; Oliver 1978).⁴



Pic 1: The Aetolian and the Achaean federations in 192 BCE. The Aetolian federation is depicted with the pink colour in the mainland part of Greece (right side of the picture) while the neighbouring Achaean federation with deep blue colour, (in the southern part of mainland Greece). One can also notice the Macedonian kingdom in the northern part of mainland Greece (with the light blue colour).

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman%E2%80%93Seleucid_War#mediaviewer/File:Aegean_Sea_192_BC.png

⁴ For the historical events between the 5th to 3rd centuries and the rise and the decline of the ancient Aetolian and the Achaean federations, see Fine (1940), Grainger (1999), Scholten (2000) and Mackil (2013).

2.1 Political organisation

Since both federations had similar political structures, we will analyse them together in this section. Both of them were utilizing a mixed system of direct and indirect democracy. Their main institutional body was the popular Assembly of citizens. Every male citizen aged 30 from every city-state could participate in the workings of the federal assembly, where he could vote through a direct democracy procedure, for crucial issues concerning the federation such as war and peace, foreign policy, federal budget etc.

There were actually two federal popular gatherings a year, the one in autumn and the other, sometime during spring. In both cases the first gathering was taking place in the capital of each federation, for the Aetolians being the city-state of Thermos, for the Achaeans being Aegion. In both cases, the second gathering in autumn was taking place in another city-state of the federation (Livy, Hist. R. 29; Davis 1978; Larsen 1952; Granger 1999). It appears that this “cyclic” procedure, had to do with an attempt to offer opportunities in every city-state of the federation to host the federal assembly, for reasons of fairness and justice.

The second main political body in both cases was the *Council* of (Greek: *Boule*), a preparatory body which set-up the agenda for the Assembly's meeting, having perhaps as a model the Athenian *Council of 500*. The members of the Council were elected representatives of the city-states (Polybius Hist. 2. 46. 6; 29, 23-35, 29. 24.6; Livy. Hist. R. 35.34.2-4; Larsen 1972).

Day to day affairs of the federation were performed by a 10-member government executive board called *demiourgoi*, being democratically elected by the two pan-Achaean assemblies, with one year service. Head of this 10 member government board, which can be seen as a federal cabinet, was the *Strategos*, literally meaning the general, who was both the military commander of the federation and the head of the state. Two other high ranking officials of the 10 member board are attested for both cases, the *hipparchos*, (head of the cavalry), and the *navarchos* (admiral) who both served under the general.

Ancient sources attest also the existence of a *grammateus* (“secretary”) who may have been responsible for the up keeping of the general archives of the state, like the Assembly's and the Boule's decrees and laws (Larsen 1972, p. 183; Mackil 2013,

pp. 342-343). Probably, these three officials were part of the 10 member board of the *demiourgoi*.

Thus, from the short analysis we have provided here so far, we think that it can be easily understood that both our cases were comprising functional mixed system of democracy: Direct democracy when the federal assemblies taking place twice a year and when the members of the government executive board were being elected by it, and indirect democracy, when the members of the Council, were being chosen by their compatriots in their local city-states.

One very important institutional mechanism to enforce cohesion and democratic participation within the borders of both federations, was the *isopoliteia* of their citizens. *Isopoliteia*, which literally means “single citizenship,” meant that a citizen of one city-state, retained his political rights if he moved and stayed into another member city-state, a situation that clearly surpasses today’s European Union where a French citizen cannot vote for national elections if he moves say, in Italy.

Another innovative institutional settlement for the era, was the establishment of some kind of a federal Court of Justice. Such courts were empowered to solve political or economic differences arising among member city-states, taking over the role of intermediation. One customary practice was that a third member city-state was to offer judicial services so as to solve the dispute among the member-states (Ager, 1996). The federal court(s) were also responsible for criminal and property rights cases possibly involving citizens of different member city-states (Larsen, 1972, p. 82).

2.2. *Economic organization*

Our information concerning the economic organization of the federation seems less than its political, so that in order to answer some crucial questions, we will advance some hypotheses. What is certain is that both federations were monetary unions such as the contemporary European Monetary Union (EMU), with the difference that Greek federations were also multicurrency areas: there was a parallel circulation of federal and city-state coins, as attested by the archaeological evidence. (Caspari 1917; Thompson 1939; de Laix 1973; Mackil 2013, pp. 251-252).

Federal coins being minted by federal mints in different city-states, were probably used for federal purposes such as payment of the federal army and navy,

federal administration, federal buildings in Aegion etc. Concerning the issue of the exchange rates of the coins, we think that this issue can easily be solved by logical deduction, since the majority of the coins were made by silver, thus they had an intrinsic value so that the exchange was determined according to the silver content of each coin. We also guess that banks must have played a major role in the distribution of money into the market. Many scholars such as Cohen (1997) and Roberts (2011, p. 130) have argued that not only the Athenian democracy but also the Greek world as a whole was highly monetized during the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE. Thus, we believe that the fourth century Athenian banking doctrines would have been diffused to the rest of the Greek world, during 4th - 2nd centuries BCE.

Concerning the setting up of the annual federal budget, we know nothing about federal budget expenses. However, it is logical to argue that such a budget did really exist because we have the evidence of the federal coins themselves as a proof. We guess as stated above, that the federal budget covered military expenditures, federal administration and buildings expenses and perhaps a few extraordinary expenses, such as public festivals. Concerning the federal revenues of the budget, we estimate that the Federal budget must have taken an important percentage of the, federation's total GDP, but certainly much more than the 0.95% of the current EU's GDP represented by the EU budget.⁵

In addition, another crucial element of both cases was the institution of *enkteseis*. It meant the right of ownership and property rights in another city-state (land and houses) and their legal transfer between individuals. This procedure was practically strongly reinforced in cases of intermarriage (Greek: *epigamia*): The groom could easily receive his dowry in another member city-state and establish clear and defined property right there. This was a widely accepted process in Greek federal states, such as the Achaean, the Aetolian and the Boeotian ones (Ox. Hist. 16.3; Mackil 2013, pp. 296-298, 499-500).

Thus *enkteseis* (property and civic rights protection throughout the federations), and *isopoliteia* (political and voting rights protection throughout the federations) were, according to our view, two basic elements, which can be found in a

⁵ For the structure and relative estimations concerning the federal budget revenues for both federations, Scholten (2000), Mackil (2013), Economou and Kyriazis (2013) and Economou, Kyriazis and Metaxas (2014) offer some estimations and additional references on the issue.

politico-economic environment which favours regional mobility of both human and capital and promotes commercial and economic transactions. Free circulation of capital (under a monetary union) and labour (under isopoliteia) which constitute of the two main economic pillars of today's EU did exist in both the Achaean and the Aetolian federations approximately 2300 years ago.

All these institutional settlements prove that both federations had introduced a series of advanced economic practices in relation to the other political entities throughout Greece. Except for the utilisation of federal coins which rendered economic transactions reliable and fast and the protection of property rights, another important institution, being also found in the Athenian democracy, was present: an institutional body called *agoranomoi* (those who check the market's prices) meaning those who were responsible for protecting against exorbitant prices in the market (thus preventing profiteering) and who adjusted disputes between buyers and sellers (Mackil 2013 pp. 268-269). In addition, both *agoranomoi* and the federal courts were also responsible to monitor the legal binding of economic transactions and contracts (*ibid.*, p. 272).

3. The European Union: A comparison with the Achaean federation

In this section we offer compare the institutions of the two Greek federations and the European Union. This is not an anachronism, since we compare our 3 cases under a specific set of criteria, which we consider as crucial for a state to be characterised as a federal one, and not by taking account of the total sum of various new institutions mainly having to do with the modern we examine the EU, which are of course much more complex and sophisticated than the ancient cases. Our criteria through which make the comparison are the following: Common citizenship, Monetary union, Common Foreign and Security Policy, Federal budget, Democratic Structure and Federal Justice.⁶

To start with, from our analysis on section 2.1., it is evident that the Greek federations practiced direct democracy at both the local and the federal level, thus they can be certainly considered as more democratic. The EU practices representative

⁶ For detailed analyses of the main institutional mechanisms of the EU one can read, Moussis (2008), Hix and Hoyland (2011) and Peterson and Shackleton (2012).

democracy at member-state level and through the European Parliament, which has only limited responsibilities. Second, our three cases were monetary unions. EU utilizes a common currency as far as the 19 Eurozone members are concerned whereas, the Greek federations utilised a parallel circulation of city-states currency (both federal and local). Thirdly, all three cases practiced, the free circulation of goods, capital and labour. The two Greek federations were utilizing isopoliteia and enkteseis, meaning property, citizen and voting rights in other member city-states.

Fourth, all three cases had a federal budget, to finance the armed forces and other public outlays such as administration and federal buildings. Fifth all three cases were offering an efficient regime of judicial services to their citizens. Concerning common foreign and security policy, the Greek federations were providing a relatively efficient level of common security and protection to their constituents, while the EU still needs to strengthen the so-called Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), because it is still underdeveloped.⁷ Table 1 summarises our argumentation above.

Finally, another pivotal diastasis of our analysis has to do with the legitimization of the EU institutions in the eyes of their constituents, or alternatively, with the dissatisfaction of the European citizens as to the political and economic institutions and mechanisms of the EU and to the rise of euroscepticism throughout Europe. The main reason is the series of austerity measures being introduced by many EU member-states governments, such as in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Finland etc.

Throughout history it has been proven that harsh measures under extreme pressure or even threats, have led to social uprising and direct controversy with the authorities that impose such measures to their constituents. A characteristic example from the European history, among others, has to do with the so called “Revolt of 1381” in Later Medieval England, where the feudal authorities and the king were gradually imposing more and more taxes to their constituents, and simultaneously, they were trying to keep their wages in a very low level.⁸

⁷ For this issue see Metaxas and Economou (2012) who provide additional references.

⁸ The king and the nobility were performing bad management of the taxes and they had been engaged in an unsuccessful and extremely costly war campaign in Normandy (northern France, which was still

Table 1 Comparison between the institutional organization of the two Greek federations and the EU

Criteria	Ancient Greek democratic federations	EU
Common citizenship	Yes, <i>isopoliteia</i>	No common citizenship yet
Monetary union	Yes, parallel circulation of both federal and local coins in city-states	Common currency for the <i>Eurozone</i> members
Federal budget	An efficient federal budget	Very low (0.95% of the EU GDP)
Common Foreign and Security Policy	Federal armed forces (army and navy)	Low level of social welfare and solidarity No efficient CFSP yet
Democratic Structure	An efficient mixture of both direct (the <i>Assembly</i> and the government) and indirect democracy (the <i>Council</i>)	Indirect democracy Institutional bodies are appointed instead of being elected with exception of the EU Parliament Elements of direct democracy in national and regional level through referendums in some member states
Federal Justice	Efficient level of justice (Local and federal courts in the federal member city-states and in the Capital)	Efficient level of justice European Court of Justice (Luxembourg)

This English paradigm concerning excessive taxation, proves the myopic policies that are still being applied in modern economies, such as in some countries of the EU, and more particularly Greece.⁹ There is no definite relation between increase

under English control). The exorbitant taxation in combination with a policy of suppressing the wages of the Englishmen finally led to the erosion of their personal income and harmful effects to their standards of living. These feudal policies finally led to uprisings throughout the country, which unfortunately for the revolted was quelled in blood. Various other such uprising movements throughout Later Medieval Europe had the same painful result for the rebels. But the main issue here still remains that all these uprisings were the result of the “failure” of the system itself in the eyes of its constituents to gain their own conceptual and practical legitimization. For the implications and the reasons that are related with the English revolt of 1381 see Brenner (1976) and Dunn (2002).

⁹ After the Greek economic crisis manifested in 2010, the Greek policymakers undertook harsh economic measures such as tax on land property which is still into force, the so called “ENFIA” tax. All these measures have caused a social outrage because they were not introduced under a consensus

in taxation and the rise of the public revenues of a state. Laffer curve proves that after a specific point, when the tax rate increases, the opposite outcome occurs with the revenues that are being collected. Excessive taxation is detrimental for the prestige and the legitimization of a political entity to its constituents.

To return to our three case studies, the two Greek democratic federations and the EU, all successful federations are based on three fundamental principles, solidarity, trust and community of interest, both in the relations between their member-states, and the attitude of citizens towards, the federation. Where the three principles are strong, the respective federation shows great cohesion and legitimization in the eyes of its constituents. When they are weak or begin to waken, as in today's EU, cohesion starts to suffer and the federation may be in danger.

In a reverse way of argumentation, the relation between economic growth and the promotion of federalism has been verified by the findings of a series of authors (Musgrave 1961, 1988, p. 187; Pauly 1973, 1988), while De Figueiredo & Weingast (2005) argued that two basic prerequisites are important for a federation to be established: First, there must be "gains" from participation and secondly, those gains must not be found aswell in other forms of political organization.

Such an argument is crucial, since it poses the strong prerequisite of a bottom up legitimization of a would-be federation by the society itself as a whole. If citizens have an active commitment concerning the selection of the political figures that shape the state's policies, and they simultaneously enjoy an efficient level of income through a fair distribution of taxation burdens and welfare among the federal citizens, then they feel more responsible and more willing to actively participate in the formulation of public policy. In other words, they become more "active" as citizens.

These basic elements seem to be lacking in today's EU, a fact that has been also noticed and raised among others by J. Habermas (2012), and we advance these preliminary ideas as a possible explanation, to be analysed more in future works. The

building strategy, as would have happened with the cases of the Greek democratic federations, where direct democratic procedures were functioning as a "safety belt" concerning the introduction of any new state policy measures. Thus, excess taxation measures being undertaken without legitimization on the eyes of the citizens have entailed as a result the gradual rise of extremist parties and the erosion of the EU prestige in the rise of the citizens and in the case of Greece, to the fall of the previous government and the formation of a new one by new parties, after the elections of 25 January 2015.

EU lacks a strong federal budget, common defense and armed forces and democratic legitimization in some of its major institutions.

We think, that a possible future achievement of such principles as those mentioned here by the EU, would strongly counterbalance the arguments and the fears of a portion of European citizens that still are afraid of a possible creation of a European bureaucratic “Super-state”.

4. Concluding remarks

By the functioning and the analysis of the two Greek democratic federations and their comparison with the EU, a series of ideas arise, which can be seen as a benchmark for current EU integration issues: Firstly, more direct democratic procedures must be introduced at the political level, for instance, the President of the EU and of the EU Commission must be elected by universal vote instead of being appointed.

Moreover, the European Parliament, the only elected EU body, should have its competences further expanded. Thirdly, legally binding popular initiatives at the EU level should be introduced (and not as per Lisbon Treaty, only of a consultive character) as practiced in other federations like the Swiss, or some states of federations (such as for example, in California in the USA and in Bavaria in Germany). Fourth, the EU should take further decisive steps for establishing an effective Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Otherwise, the political integration into a federal entity will further be delayed and remain uncertain.¹⁰

Finally, the EU must undertake serious and decisive acts in order to face the *eurocrisis*. To achieve this EU policymakers must increase the the size of budget intended for the recovery of the European economies. The current available sum intended for implementing EU policies is without doubt very low, only 0.95% of the total EU Gross National Income (GNI) compared for example to USA’s 20% federal

¹⁰ For the drawbacks of the European defence policies and the steps that they must be undertaken for establishing of a functional and efficient CFSP in relation to the US hegemony one can see Metaxas and Economou (2012).

budget to GDP for 2014 in nominal prices¹¹ and Canada's 250 billion of Canadian dollars for 2014, being equivalent to 15% of the GDP.¹² Austerity measures in many member-states have negatively affected cohesion and solidarity in the EU level in the recent past. Citizens of member-states suffering under austerity measures, increasingly favour political parties that are against the EU, as Marine Le Pen's in France, thus threatening the future cohesion of the EMU and the EU.

We hope that this analysis and our suggestions may open an extensive future area of research and discussion concerning the future of Europe, which we hope that our paper helps to promote.

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¹¹The US federal budget was 3.5 trillion dollars and the US GDP reached 17.42\$ trillion in nominal prices for FY 2014. See <http://www.statista.com/statistics/188105/annual-gdp-of-the-united-states-since-1990/>;http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/federal_budget;

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¹²http://www.gbm.scotiabank.com/English/bns_econ/fedbudget.pdf;<http://www.budget.gc.ca/2014/docs/plan/ch4-2-eng.html>.

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