Belonging to the West? Geopolitical Mythmaking in Modern Greece from the Enlightenment to the Euro-crisis

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Abstract:
Throughout modern history, Greece has exhibited a consistent determination to be part of, be allied to or be an adherent to Europe and the West. This is more obvious in the second half of the twentieth century, with Greece’s participation in early stages of European integration, the full membership in the European Communities, the gradual Europeanization of domestic and foreign policies, and, more recently in the continuing resolve to remain at the Eurozone’s core despite the severe economic and political displacement during the Eurocrisis. However, Greece’s determination to be considered European has been an element of Greece’s domestic and foreign policies, even before the establishment of the modern state in the early nineteenth century.

Greece’s geopolitical attachment to Europe and the West is frequently explained by a set of factors that range from rational calculations of Greek national interests (e.g. security), to the systemic pressures coming from the international system (e.g. Cold War) and the making of a modern Greek identity that frames these interests. Although these factors have shown considerable explanatory value, they are occasionally missing the wider framework of Greece’s determination to belong to Europe and the West.

This dissertation combines the literatures on geopolitics and political myth to approach Greece’s determination to belong as a geopolitical myth, i.e. an ensemble of narratives and stories that appear to have a constant presence and political usage, from the Greek Enlightenment to the Eurocrisis. The myth of belonging is a product of a long process of mythmaking that also involves an opposition with rival myths and geopolitical referents such as Russia and the Byzantine Empire. Myths and the mythmaking process seem to function as an interface through which both rational interest calculations, external events or interventions and identity perceptions acquire form and meaning, in order to define the country’s sense of place in the world, and legitimize and frame Greece’s pro-European strategy and foreign policy. This ‘making’ of the belonging myth complements in various interesting ways our understanding of Greece’s geopolitical behavior.

On a theoretical level, the dissertation proposes the concept of Analytic Geopolitics as an innovative, historical-structural approach for analyzing geopolitical myths. Framed in a critical realist framework, the proposed Analytic Geopolitics has the ambition to bring the geopolitics field up to date with similar philosophical developments in IR, expand the use of myth in an exciting new direction and therefore improve our potential to explain patterns of strategic behavior in international relations. (405 words)