Southern European Public Bureaucracies in Comparative Perspective

DIMITRI A. SOTIROPOULOS

The public bureaucracies of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain may be set apart from the rest of West European bureaucracies. Until the mid-1990s, the former were distinguished from the latter by certain interrelated structural characteristics. These characteristics were extended politicisation of the top administrative ranks; enduring patronage patterns in recruitment to the public sector; uneven distribution of human resources; formalism and legalism; and, with the exception of Spain, absence of a typical European administrative elite. The characteristics were related to the type of capitalism and political development in Southern Europe. South European bureaucracies have started evolving towards decentralisation and privatisation. However, convergence with the bureaucracies of other EU member-states is an open question.

Perhaps paradoxically, the comparative study of modern bureaucracies has been less advanced in European countries associated with negative stereotypes of administrative performance. Such is the case of the countries of Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain). Comparative studies of models of government or traditions of governance usually do not include Southern Europe (e.g., Ziller 2001; Bevir et al. 2003). Bureaucratic structures in the four countries during the post-authoritarian period have not been systematically studied, even though after the mid-1970s the political science literature on Southern Europe burgeoned, focusing on successful transitions to democracy (Pridham 1984; O’Donnel et al. 1986). There has also been a separate literature on the integration of Southern Europe into the EU (Tsoukalis 1981; Featherstone and Kazamias 2001). In most of the above research, emphasis was put on the comparison of processes (transition, consolidation, integration) rather than structures, such as bureaucratic institutions. Exceptions have been studies looking at the state structures of Southern Europe indirectly, i.e., in regard to specific policy areas (e.g., Pridham 1996; Bermeo 1999). There is a general understanding that the four bureaucracies share some empirical parallels or similarities (Goetz 2001: 1042–43) and even that one may speak of the ‘state in Southern Europe’ (Giner 1985; Pagoulatos 2003).
The traits of South European bureaucracies have not been clearly formulated either in the literature on democratic consolidation in Southern Europe (Pridham 1990; Linz et al. 1995; Morlino 1998; Diamandouros and Gunther 2001; Magone 2003) or in the literature on the common features of South European welfare states (Ferrera 1996). On the other hand, research based on induction from empirical data is inconclusive: research on comparative public policy for the period 1960–95 assigns Greece, Portugal and Spain (but not Italy) to a southern family (Castles 1999). Other research on the same period shows that Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain fall into the same ‘family of nations’ in regard to social and economic policy (Obinger and Wagschal 2001: 103, 107).

In view of the above, a deductive approach may be worth exploring. Since the early nineteenth century Greece, Portugal, Italy and Spain have followed a comparable, long road to socio-economic modernisation and democratisation (Malefakis 1995). Accepting that ‘the sphere of modern public administration is an integral part of the consolidation of democracy’ (Goetz 2001: 1033), we may deduce that the particular South European pattern of democratic consolidation in the twentieth century, involving social mobilisation and ideological polarisation after transition from authoritarian rule, fits with a distinct type of administration.

Research on non-compliance in the European Union (Börzel 2001: 818) shows that until the early 1990s Italy, Greece and Portugal led the other EU member states in the share of formal letters from the Commission, reasoned opinions and referrals to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). It is possible to claim that there is no ‘Mediterranean syndrome’ (Börzel 2001: 820), since France and Belgium also belonged to the same group of laggards (behind the above three South European states), while Spain was close to the EU average. However, one cannot help noting that in 1978–92 the aforementioned three South European states accounted for a little less than half of all referrals to the ECJ (with the addition of Spain, the share of Southern Europe surpassed 55 per cent of all referrals; Börzel 2001: Table 4). It is reasonable to deduce that a particular model of public administration hides behind such a difficulty or reluctance to implement European law.

It is equally plausible to assume that the ‘southern model of welfare’ corresponds to a distinct set of bureaucratic institutions. The policies which have characterised the South European welfare model could probably have not emanated from a state apparatus associated with different models of welfare, such as the social democratic, Scandinavian or the conservative-corporatist West European welfare models.

Observers of Southern Europe may associate bureaucracies of the region with corruption or inefficiency. However, these are behavioural patterns rather than structural characteristics. In addition, corruption is notoriously
difficult to evaluate in a comparative perspective. Thus, in this article we do not list debatable stereotypes, but discuss structural characteristics of South European bureaucracies, which are inter-related and may constitute a ‘model’. The purpose of this exercise is to obtain a starting base, i.e., an ideal type against which relatively recent changes in South European bureaucracies can be described. Some of the changes have originated at the international level. Given that domestic bureaucratic structures mediate the influences of globalisation and European integration, neither convergence among EU member states nor the outcomes of externally driven pressures to reform can be assessed without knowledge of the original state of affairs in individual national bureaucracies or sets of bureaucracies.

Similarities between the bureaucracies of North, Western and Southern Europe, owed to the diffuse of the Napoleonic model of administration, may be deceptive because they hide informal patterns which characterised South European bureaucracies until the end the twentieth century. In the following sections of this article we will first put South European bureaucracies in the context of South European political economy. We will then distinguish between two patterns of clientelism and discuss three more distinguishing characteristics of South European bureaucracies, which stem from clientelism. We will end with a note on new trends, indicating the variable distance from the original model which the four bureaucracies have travelled.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOUTHERN EUROPE

North (Scandinavian) and West European states have traditionally played a historical role which differed from that of South European states. The state in Southern Europe has ‘assisted’ the development of capitalism for a longer time and to greater extent than states in other European capitalist economies. The ‘assisted capitalism’ of Southern Europe is contrasted to the more ‘competitive capitalism’ of the capitalist core economies (Giner 1985: 291, 318, 338; Vasquez-Barquero and Hebert 1985: 291; Maravall 1993: 79). On the one hand, ‘assisted capitalist development’ is not the same as ‘dependent development’, which underlines economic dependence on foreign capital rather than on the state and which has been suggested by dependency theory. Capitalism in Southern Europe never looked like capitalism in the Third World or the ‘periphery’ of capitalism, where notions of ‘dependent development’ apply. Over the last quarter of the twentieth century, Southern Europe has shifted to the ‘core’ (Giner 1985: 339).

On the other hand, ‘assisted capitalism’ signified indicative planning, nationalisations and *dirigisme*, which are traits associated with post-war Western Europe, but with a particular twist. While the activism of post-war South European states was ‘typical of financial and industrial interventionism
in late industrializing countries’ (Pagoulatos 2003: 172), these states have traditionally promoted economic development through patronage of certain industrial sectors and business interests. In the South European version of capitalism, there has been extensive (although nowadays declining) public ownership of important corporations. The role of the state in South European societies has involved protectionism, autarky, transfers and subsidies to and control of specific industries. Of course, in the twentieth century such strategies of development were well known to other European states where there was ‘competitive’ rather than ‘assisted’ capitalism. The difference was that in Southern Europe such strategies were used in a very particularistic, if not personalistic fashion. Corporate governance was characterised by close personal relationships, developed by membership in closed elites (Rhodes and van Apeldoorn 1998: 409 and 411). The principal benefactors of this role of the state in society were the extended families of large landowners, industrialists, bankers and ship-owners who constituted the core of South European capitalist classes. They became accustomed to depend on the state for their enrichment and for the reproduction of their power position in society. They relied on preferential state loans, contracts and other outlays to sustain their share of their market.

On the other hand, states in Southern Europe have also had the opportunity to promote a set of different interests. Liberal professionals and segments of the petite bourgeoisie benefited from lax tax collection. Public sector employees have obtained much better social insurance, health and pension schemes than farmers and private sector employees. The South European capitalist classes have benefited from the incorporation of segments of the lower classes into the political system in a clientelistic, ‘vertical’ fashion, linking political elites with specific segments of society. This mode of incorporation was divisive of the ‘horizontal’ interests of the lower classes, which were internally fragmented and inserted into opposing clientelistic networks (Mouzelis 1986). Thus, upper and upper-middle classes, tied to the state through political party elites alternating in power, have benefited from clientelistic practices. For this reason they have not rallied around any reform which would have rationalised the bureaucracy. Modernising elites had no wider social support to promote administrative reform, let alone to change the first thing which most analysts associate with Southern Europe, namely clientelism.

**POLITICAL CLIENTELISM ‘AT THE TOP’: THE EXTENDED POLITICISATION OF THE HIGHER CIVIL SERVICE**

While clientelism may also be observed in the rest of Western Europe, e.g., in France or Belgium, in Southern Europe it has shown particular endurance and
has permeated public bureaucracies at two different instances of the administrative hierarchy. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, in Southern Europe the old person-to-person clientelism, often leading to the hiring of new lower-ranking employees in the public sector, was replaced by ‘bureaucratic’ clientelism (Lyrintzis 1984; Cazorla 1992). The latter has been organised by the bureaucracies of parties, which have replaced individual patrons. Clientelism has not been limited to hiring practices at the lower echelons of ministries and public enterprises (‘clientelism at the bottom’), but it has also taken place ‘at the top’.

By the ‘top’, we mean the higher echelons of ministries and public bodies. After each government turnover, a large number of top administrative posts are filled by appointees of the governing elite. These appointees are not necessarily civil servants. But even in the top posts reserved for career civil servants, there is apparent political party intervention. Some political colonisation ‘at the top’ of the civil service is practised in liberal democracies by many incoming governments. By itself, political control of the bureaucracy ‘from above’ is not a distinctive South European trait. For instance, in the USA some 10,000 positions change hands at every presidential turnover. Given the size and international role of the US administration, this is not such a large number. However, the equivalent practice is more exaggerated in the comparatively smaller administrations of Southern Europe.

For example, in Portugal, it has been estimated that after the elections of October 1995 approximately 6,000 political appointments were made by the incoming government of the Socialist party (PS) at the top of various ministries and public agencies (Oliveira Rocha 1998: 225). This was not an exceptional situation. Large-scale changes of this kind had taken place in 1986–87, when the Portuguese Social Democratic party (PSD) formed a majoritarian government. Similar changes had occurred in 1974–76, at the fall of the authoritarian regime. In 1989, a law specified that the two highest among the four top civil service posts (i.e., the posts of directors-general and deputy directors-general) were to be filled by the government among candidates from outside the civil service. The lower two posts (directors of service and heads of division) were to be filled by civil servants again selected by the government. However, in the late 1990s in Portugal there were efforts to decrease the extent of politicisation. A new law passed in 1997 specified that the two lower posts were to be filled by civil servants through competitive entrance examinations (Oliveira Rocha 1998: 225–6).

In Spain, comparable developments took place in 1982, when the Socialist party (PSOE) came to power (Beltran 1990: 347; Alba 1998: 237; Baena de Alcazar 2002: 326, 329). Even though PSOE may have not used clientelism for purposes of electoral mobilisation (Hopkin 2001) and despite the tradition of bureaucratic autonomy and the power of civil service corps (Molina 1999),
‘the arrival of the Socialist Party was going to bring the most radical practice of the spoils system known in the history of public administration’ of Spain (Alba 2001: 103) A similar pattern occurred again in 1996, when the Conservative party (PP) replaced PSOE in power (Parrado 2000: 266). The PP government replaced all civil servants from the level of deputy director-general upwards and all directors of public enterprises. In contrast to other South European cases, in Spain appointees were often handpicked civil servants (rather than party cadres). However, even though not as extreme as in the cases of Greece or Portugal, politicisation was quite widespread in the Spanish central administration and even more accentuated in some autonomous governments, such as in Catalonia and the Basque Country. (Alba 1998: 239–40; Hopkin 2001: 128, 132).

Much more politicised practices have been common in Greece (Sotiropoulos 1996). Changes in the posts of general and special secretaries of Greek ministries and managers of major public corporations used to occur in the 1980s and the 1990s even after each Cabinet reshuffle of the same government. The post of director-general was abolished altogether in 1982, a little after the arrival of the Greek Socialist party (PASOK) in power. The functions of the abolished posts were assumed by appointed cabinets ministeriels and Special Secretariats. In 1990, the abolished post was re-instituted with the return of the Conservative party (ND) to power (Spanou 1996: 107, 109).

Italy seems to some extent to have been spared such practices ‘at the top’, in the sense that managerial-level changes involved members of the conservative political class. Career civil servants were less affected. Despite the frequent government turnover, the stability of the administrative personnel’s profile was probably due to the ‘re-cycling’ of the same political elites and to the relative isolation of bureaucrats from politicians throughout the post-war period. However, surprisingly enough, Italy may have belatedly caught up with the other South European countries: in 1998 a legislative decree tied the occupants of the upper echelons of the civil service to incoming governments (Battini 1998: 214–15; Lewanski 1999: 121). Also, contrary to an Italian practice dating from 1924, the same 1998 decree allowed for the appointment not only of civil servants, but also of politically loyal (but ‘external’) experts to the cabinet ministeriels. These staff units have also been found at the side of cabinet ministers in the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish states. Such cabinets have been familiar to other European states (e.g., in France). Top civil servants in other European bureaucracies have traditionally been politicised (e.g., the Belgian ‘cabinets’, the German ‘political bureaucrats’), However, what is peculiar about Southern Europe is that the breadth of political appointments to the bureaucracy has been quite extended and unpredictable. Tenured bureaucratic positions could become
slots for temporary political appointees and vice versa. In that respect, the aforementioned Italian change towards more politicisation was not an exception; Greece, Portugal and Spain witnessed similar situations at different times.

POLITICAL CLIENTELISM ‘AT THE BOTTOM’

The second relevant pattern is the other side of political clientelism ‘at the top’. This trait of South European states is widely known as party patronage and can be called ‘clientelism at the bottom’. It refers to the relation between political parties and society (Morlino 1995: 350–51; Graziano 1978: 297). Throughout the twentieth century, parties used to offer their voters jobs in the public sector. This pattern was intensified in Italy in the 1970s (Morlino 1984: 62), in Portugal between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s and in Spain after 1982 (Gillespie 1990: 112; Puhle 2001: 320–21).

The absorption of new personnel was effected through extraordinary procedures, e.g., through by-passing competitive entrance examinations. This was the first step in a process labelled ‘titularisation’, which was quite common in all four countries of Southern Europe. By contrast, this process did not occur in other West European states. Titularisation involves hiring personnel to meet temporary labour shortages in the public sector and then granting to these personnel the status of civil servant or the functional equivalent (i.e., permanent job contracts). In Italy, as Sabino Cassese writes it can be estimated that, in 1973–90, about 350,000 people were recruited without entrance exams, and then had their posts made permanent by twelve special laws. In the same period, in the same administration, about 250,000 people were recruited through regular exams. It seems therefore that titularisation is the predominant way of entry into the civil service. (Cassese 1993a: 325)

In Italy, in the post-war period northern industrialists and southern landowners reproduced the earlier patronage patterns which had been suited to their interests. They sought to fragment and to exclude the lower social classes from power (Shefter 1977: 444). This strategy of public labour supply ‘from above’ was met by a corresponding demand for work ‘from below’. Throughout the post-war period, public employment rose steadily, corresponding to the demand for jobs emanating mostly from the south of Italy, which was economically underdeveloped. This led to the ‘southernisation’ of the Italian civil service. Compared with the population of northern Italy, the population of southern Italy was over-represented among Italian civil servants, including the highest ranks of the civil service (Cassese 1993a:

In Greece, laws passed since the 1974 transition to democracy offered tenure to successive waves of temporary employees who had been hired on the basis of renewable fixed term contracts or contracts for the duration of specific projects (Spanou 1996). In the Greek wider public sector, there has been a discrepancy between a small increase in new total employment and a larger growth in new public employment (Christodoulakis 2000: 100–101). In Portugal, in the period after the revolution of April 1974 the public sector absorbed excess labour created by the economic crisis which followed the regime change and by the influx of refugees (the retornados) from the former Portuguese colonies. Many banks and other private enterprises were nationalised. As a result, public employment rose very fast (Graham 1986: 6; Bruneau and Macleod 1986: 188–89; Opello 1991: 132–3). In Spain, patronage-driven recruitment followed the rise of the Socialist party to power in 1982 (Beltran 1990: 347; Puhle 2001: 320).

To what extent may public employment growth in the 1980s be attributed to clientelism ‘at the bottom’? By the 1990s public employment in Southern Europe was relatively larger than in Western and Northern Europe (Table 1).

Public employment in Southern Europe tended to be costly. Table 2 indicates that South European states used to spend relatively large shares of their state budgets in salaries and wages. In the decade of the 1990s, South European states followed the general trend towards a decrease of the share of wages and salaries in the state budget. A similar retrenchment occurred in the size of public employment (Table 1). However, in two consecutive periods, 1981–90 and 1991–95, in Southern Europe the average share of public employee wages and salaries in the state budget was still roughly double the corresponding share in West and North European state budgets (Table 2). This South European pattern cannot be the result of difference in size (large western and northern states, compared to smaller southern states). In terms of population size and size of national economy, Italy and Spain belong to the large European states. Nor can the disproportionate share of South European budgets channelled to wages and salaries be the result of relatively underdeveloped welfare systems in the south of Europe. After the transition from authoritarian rule, there was welfare expansion, manifested in the growth of expenditure on pensions and unemployment benefits in Greece and Spain and in the creation of National Health Services in Greece in 1983 and in Italy in 1978 (Maravall 1993, Petmesidou 1996).

The South European pattern of disproportionate share of public personnel costs in the state budget is probably an indication of a major difference between South European and other European bureaucracies. The former used to be employing agencies, i.e., ‘social shock absorbers’ (Spence 2000: 135).
South European states catered to the economic needs of the political clienteles of alternating governing elites, taking particular care of the working population already safely employed in the public sector. Social protection was fragmented (Ferrera 1996; Petmesidou 1996). By contrast, West and particularly North European states had developed more universalistic welfare systems, taking care of society as a whole.

### THE UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The third trait of South European bureaucracies is an uneven distribution of personnel. This trait is an outcome of the erratic application of clientelist criteria to the allocation of human resources. South European bureaucracies have been overstaffed in some of their quarters and understaffed in certain other ones. For instance, certain state-owned enterprises, such as the Italian postal service or the Greek state airlines, have hired an excessive number of personnel.

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**Source:** Elaborated by the author on the basis of OECD 2002: Table 2, ‘Civilian Labour Force’, data for various countries (‘paid employment: distribution by branch and activity’). Total paid employment includes persons who performed some work for wage or salary, in cash or in kind.
employees. Public services, particularly in remote or mountainous provinces, have remained understaffed. In the late 1980s, there were more civil servants per 1,000 inhabitants in the centre and the south than in the north of Italy (Arabia and Giammusso 1993: 441; Cassese 1993b: 335–6). In the same period, in addition to the postal service, there were surplus personnel in some Italian schools and in the state-run railway company. By contrast, there were insufficient personnel in the Italian Ministries of Industry and of Environment and in other more technical services (D’Orta 1990: 447). A similar trend was observed in Greece, in some overstaffed public services in Athens compared with services in any other area of Greece. In Spain, the Ministry of Agriculture and the local government of Madrid were overstaffed, while the police and the traffic agency lacked personnel (Parrado 2000: 257–8).

LEGALISM AND FORMALISM

As is well-known, modern state authorities are allowed to engage only in those actions which are set out in law. This principle is applied in South
European bureaucracies in an excessive and fragmented manner, which has led to an over-production of laws and decrees. The reason is that clientelism breeds an inflation of regulations. This is owing to special treatment offered by the state to particular labour unions and socio-professional categories as well as certain local or regional groups, which enjoy privileges awarded to them a long time ago or else benefit from special access to the incumbent government. Regulatory over-production is linked with legalism, the tendency to view things through the lens of provisions of law and to address all new problems by resorting to the passage of new legislation or amendments to an existing one. This is partly due to the fact that many South European civil servants are law school graduates.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the formal structure of the bureaucracies of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain was not considerably different from that of their North and West European counterparts. All four bureaucracies were shaped along the lines of the master-plan of Napoleonic administration and continental European administrative law. Despite the formal, Napoleonic-type similarities between North, West and South European bureaucracies, in practice the latter have functioned in a different manner, formally announcing one thing while actually doing another. In Southern Europe the distance between legal provision and administrative practice was to a certain extent the result of the superimposition of modern political and administrative institutions on pre-modern societies and of the informal workings of all sorts of interests (e.g., for Greece, Mouzelis 1986). In various policy areas and with a lot of differentiation from one region to another, the state in Southern Europe was permeated by sectoral and local interests and functioned under a plethora of laws. Estimates of the statutes enacted in Italy by the beginning of the 1990s vary between 100,000 and 200,000 (Cassese 1993a: 318; Della Cananea 1996: 333). In Greece, between 1989 and 1996, 5,286 new laws and different sorts of regulations were passed (Eleftherotypia, 15 Aug. 1999). Obviously, the implementation of laws requires issuing further decrees and ordinances, which amounts to still further increases in formality and rigidity. Laws and decrees accommodate different interests but, as a consequence, also subject equivalent interests to unequal treatment. For instance, in Greece, liberal professionals (lawyers, doctors, etc.) and employees of some public corporations have succeeded in carving out a particularistic social insurance framework, thus adding a plethora of new laws and resulting in inequity of the relevant legislation.

The result is a vast and inflexible legal framework, which has provoked the rise of informal arrangements and corrupt practices, thus side-stepping, if not violating, the law. As De Sousa Santos argues about the Portuguese state: ‘the Portuguese state is an informal state, a state in which hyper-formalisation breaks into available informality. In a sense, there is an unofficial state that
acts in parallel to the official state’ (De Sousa Santos 1986: 188). Writing about Italy, David Hine distinguishes between ‘formalistic mechanisms’ which dominate policy-making, on the one hand, and the lack of ‘shared attitudes towards the role of programmatic political leadership’, on the other (Hine 2001: 42). Also in Southern Europe the implementation of regulations affecting the civil service status has been selective and complementary to informal practices. Such practices have varied according to the traditions of individual ministries or departments (in Greece) and corps of civil servants (in Spain) and to rapidly changing policies of incoming governments.

LACK OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE

As a consequence of clientelism at the top, Southern Europe lacks a typical European administrative elite (well-educated top civil servants sharing an esprit de corps and enjoying high social esteem). This probably holds for Italy (Cassese 1993b: 336), Greece and Portugal and is related to the fact that so many waves of civil servants have been hired on criteria other than meritocratic ones, as well as to the fact that higher civil servants do not have very strong historical traditions of their own. Spain seems to be different on that count. Owing to the tradition of cuerpos, in the central services of Spanish ministries there are higher civil servants who enjoy some power and prestige. By contrast, attempts to construct an administrative elite, as with the creation of dirigenza in Italy and the foundation of elite national schools of public administration in the early 1980s in Italy and Greece, have failed (Della Cananea 1998 on Italy, Papoulias et al. 2002 on Greece).

In Southern Europe incoming governments have frequently attempted to bring about major changes, not only in the hierarchy of the civil service, but also in matters of personnel management. However, this was easier said than done. All incoming governments have had to establish a modus vivendi with public sector unions, which were staunch defenders of their privileges and interests. For instance, in Italy and in Greece bureaucratic resistance to reform has come from the unions rather than from elites of the civil service. In Southern Europe (with the exception of Spain), there is no equivalent to the British or the French higher officialdom, with its considerable political influence and social status.

NEW TRENDS IN SOUTH EUROPEAN BUREAUCRACIES

The four bureaucracies under study have shared the aforementioned characteristics for a long time, but they have not remained ‘frozen’. What changes have taken place in the bureaucracies of Southern Europe? After the transition to democracy, public expenditures, tax revenues and public
employment all rose significantly. Between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s, social rights were instituted, welfare policies were differentiated and expanded, administrative decentralisation progressed and new channels of social participation ‘from below’ were created (Maravall 1993: 102–3). In the 1990s, new ideas about the state were advanced in Southern Europe by international organisations (OECD, EU) and by the modernising factions of governing elites, consisting of foreign-trained pubic managers and advisors to ministers. An example was the ‘New Public Management’ (NPM). Some influences of NPM may be traced in the following instances: in the aborted efforts of Italian reformers to separate politics clearly from administration and to make public managers out of senior civil servants; and in the belated effort of all South European bureaucracies to imitate the new tendency of treating citizens and businesses as ‘clients’, the satisfaction of whom should be a top priority. However, these ideas did not add up to a recasting of South European bureaucracies. The chances are that in the last 30 years the most important administrative reforms in Southern Europe had little to do with NPM. For instance, in Spain, ‘the most important reform’ was not the introduction of such a form of management but ‘the territorial devolution of political power’ (Parrado 2000: 247). Also in Greece new management techniques were introduced very recently and implemented very slowly.

Instead of fully adopting new management styles, the ‘model’ of South European bureaucracy has evolved in three other directions, at an uneven pace. First, there was quite extensive decentralisation in Italy since the early 1970s and even more so in Spain since the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The devolution of power was the result of pressures from the EU and from nascent regional nationalisms. Spain has rather quickly become a ‘quasi-federal’ state, with 17 ‘Comunidades Autonomas’. However, decentralisation has not progressed in Portugal and has made comparatively little progress in Greece. In Portugal, the mainland has remained governed in a centralised fashion, while the archipelagos of Azores and Madeira have been endowed with a regional government. In Greece, it was only after the mid-1980s and under pressure to absorb funds from the Integrated Mediterranean Funds, that a law was passed to create 13 regions with very slim regional administrations. In the 1990s more competences were transferred from the Greek central administration to the regions as well as to the prefectures.

The second direction of evolution of the state in Southern Europe is towards state retrenchment, mostly through privatisation of parts of the public sector. In a typically formalist manner, privatisations were wholeheartedly adopted in theory by successive South European governments, but in practice they were implemented to a very limited extent until the beginning of the 1990s (Wright and Pagoulatos 2001: 234–6). In Greece, privatisation picked up only after the rise of Costas Simitis, the successor of Andreas Papandreou
to power (in 1996). In Italy, particularly in the second half of the 1990s, there was a pressure to trim the public sector by getting rid of public monopolies (Lewanski 1999: 112). In Portugal, a large wave of privatisations occurred in 1989–90 and again in 1995–96. In Spain, privatisation picked up after 1993. Generally in the second half of the 1990s the size of South European public sector was somewhat altered, but the relevant process is still not over.

The third direction of change was related to the effects of European integration on the public administrations of Southern Europe. The effects were not limited to the push for decentralisation but appeared also at the level of central government. The EU offered externally induced pressure on the South European bureaucracies, but also became a source of inspiration for domestic pressures for reform: the case of Italy, where technocratic elites have played a pivotal role in the country’s monetary integration with the EU, was typical in that respect (Dyson and Featherstone 1996). Generally, the effect of all this was the multiplication of administrative structures (and a corresponding new wave of statutes) which appeared in various forms: first, in the form of new units (secretariats, divisions or sections) responsible for relations with the EU inside ministries; second, in the form of task forces and ad hoc committees of experts entrusted with the tasks relevant to European integration; and third, in the form of new public agencies created alongside the ministries, in order to avoid the rigid hierarchy and cumbersome procedures of the central public administration. However, changes resulting from Europeanisation, without being cosmetic, have not been structural either. For instance, in Greece, the distance between formal adaptation to EU rules and procedures on the one hand and informal practices on the other has been retained (Spanou 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

The above trends notwithstanding, why have South European bureaucracies not changed on a par with West and North European bureaucracies? There are three complementary answers. The first is that while neo-liberalism was on the rise in the 1980s in the West, in Southern Europe socialist parties came to power. These parties used to be hostile to privatisation and still have a strong electoral base among public employees. They stayed in power until well into the 1990s (PSOE in Spain) or were returned to power during that decade (PS in Portugal, PASOK in Greece).

A second answer is that, in contrast to South European states, other Western states had adequate time to become democratic, to build modern and accountable bureaucracies, and to transform them in the direction of public management and European integration at successive stages over the span of the previous two centuries. This was not the case, for instance, with Greece,
Portugal and Spain, where the transition from authoritarianism was made in the mid-1970s. South European bureaucracies did not have the time to proceed in a stepwise fashion. They were simultaneously confronted with all the above challenges in the last quarter of the twentieth century, i.e., in a condensed time period.

A third answer lies in the kind of state–society relations characterising Southern Europe. South European states have served a plethora of social interests, including those of the capitalist classes. These classes have benefited the most from the development of ‘assisted’ capitalism in Southern Europe. Also certain middle strata, such as liberal professionals, small shopkeepers and public sector employees, have obtained benefits from the way the state either collected or distributed its revenue in society (Petmesidou 1996: 95, 98). None of these groups would have clearly benefited from a drastic reform of South European bureaucracies.

In this context, the bureaucracies of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain may be set apart from the rest of West European bureaucracies since until recently they were still characterised by a number of distinguishing interrelated characteristics. The four South European cases have been characterised by enduring party politicisation of the higher civil service; patronage patterns of personnel recruitment to the public sector; uneven distribution of human resources within the public sector; formalism and legalism, reflected in the over-production of laws, the frequent lack of their implementation and the lack of a traditional administrative elite in three out of the four cases studied. Some, but not all of these traits may be found in other European bureaucracies, as in the French or the Belgian bureaucracy. However, in South European bureaucracies the five traits coincided, were closely interrelated and extended, and showed remarkable endurance until the end of the twentieth century. Since then, the four bureaucracies under study have unevenly evolved towards decentralisation, privatisation of the public sector and – possibly – convergence of their administrative systems with the systems other EU member states. The advance of the EU’s integration, the end of the Cold War, the intensification of global competition among national economies, together with the spread of new technologies, have created a new political, economic and technological environment. How South European bureaucracies will adapt to the new environment remains an open question.

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