

This year, Greece celebrates the 50th anniversary of its restored democracy following the fall of a seven-year military junta in 1974, triggered by Turkey's invasion of Cyprus. The period that followed, known as "Metapolitefsi," was marked by efforts to reinstate democratic governance and secure national independence. As many nations prepare for elections, Greece's half-century journey showcases the resilience and adaptability required to uphold democracy, rejuvenate an economy, and rebuild international alliances.

Greece's democratic path has been fraught with challenges. After a dictatorship characterized by repression and exclusion, the country embarked on a new democratic era, reestablishing the rule of law, legalizing all political parties, abolishing the monarchy, and drafting a new liberal constitution. In 1981, Greece joined the European Economic Community (EEC), the precursor to the European Union, and adopted the euro in 2001. The nation saw **dramatic improvements in living standards**, with educational and infrastructural advancements transforming the country by 2008.

However, the Great Recession of 2008 exposed Greece's unsustainable public debt, leading to a severe financial crisis and a 26 percent reduction in GDP. Through austerity measures, debt restructuring, bailouts, and budget rationalization, **Greece has emerged as one of the EU's fastest-growing economies**, though it remains among the least productive.

What can be gleaned from Greece's 50-year democratic experiment? Firstly, democracy can endure if populist temptations are resisted. Greece's initial democratic stability was built on bipartisanship and economic prosperity. Yet, the 2008 crisis saw a shift towards fringe parties, highlighting the dangers of populism. Despite the financial turmoil, Greece's commitment to the EU remained steadfast, preventing a potential exit and preserving democracy. By 2019, centrist governance returned, advocating for deep reforms and prudent spending.



Unsustainable growth inevitably leads to financial crises, but recovery is achievable with economic openness. Greece transitioned from an agriculture-based economy to one dominated by services and a large public sector, relying heavily on borrowed funds without achieving commensurate productivity. The subsequent crisis brought about high unemployment and poverty but underscored the necessity of private-sector-led growth. Under new leadership, Greece has increased foreign investments and exports, achieving a 5.6 percent GDP growth rate in 2022.

Greece's experience also underscores the importance of values-based alliances in the face of external threats. The military junta left Greece isolated, but democratic restoration intertwined with national independence solidified the country's Western alignment. Joining the EEC and fostering peace, even amid tensions with Turkey, Greece has become a strategic player, supporting supply routes for conflicts in Ukraine and Israel and enhancing regional energy security.

Forward-thinking governance remains crucial. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and his New Democracy party have steered Greece towards recovery, yet challenges persist. Political polarization is growing, and the political landscape must stabilize to enable effective governance. Economic reforms are necessary to boost high-value sectors, spur innovation, and improve education. Concurrently, constitutional revisions offer a chance to strengthen checks and balances, ensuring robust legislative and judicial oversight and a free press. Additionally, Greece should leverage its security situation to lead EU-wide security initiatives.

As global tensions rise and Western democracies face increasing threats, Greece's experience affirms that democracy and international cooperation are vital for addressing 21st-century challenges. The words of Pavlos Bakoyannis, a Greek lawmaker who sacrificed his life for democracy, remain poignant: "In democracy, there are no dead ends."