Legislation concerning natural environment in Greece. 
Historical overview — Existing situation

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Up to the end of the past century, only certain law decrees, referring to the State's will to establish a policy protecting forests, were enforced in Greece.

The first provisions for nature conservation in the framework of the "Forest Legislation" are: 

a) Law 4173/1929 — two crucial provisions are laid down in this law:
   (i) the institution for "the forests to be protected"
   (ii) the institution of "Forest Policy Provision". 

b) Law 5351/1932: "Law on Antiquities". Being still in force, it provides for the preservation of all kinds of archaeological monuments banning deterioration or alteration of the monuments themselves and of the area around them, within a radius of 50 m. (Article 50 of Law).

This Law has greatly contributed to natural heritage conservation, especially by its extension to "monuments of modern times", on the one hand, and on the other, by giving the possibility of declaring certain areas as "Landscapeces of Natural Beauty", under the supplementary Law 1469/1950, on the "protection of buildings and art works of a special category, (subsequent to 1830)" art. 1 and 23-4. Based on the provisions laid down in this law, about 300 areas are declared "build up areas" or "parts of build-up areas", "landscapes of special beauty". This law served as a breakwater against destruction of nature and man-made monuments.

The categories of the above mentioned 300 areas are: 1) Special Statutory protection; 2) Landscape of special natural beauty; 3) Historical landscape.

Meanwhile, the new organization of the Athens University with the Law 5343 put in force in March 23, 1923, under article 307-1, provided for the realization of excavations made for vertebrate fossils, etc.

d) Law 856/1937 provided for the establishment of up to five "National Parks" as areas of "special protective status", aiming at the protection of flora, etc., and conservation of geomorphologic formations. It is the first time that an Institution for "area under protection" is created in our country. The first national park to be protected under this law was Olympus, the mountain of ancient Gods, in 1938, and later on in the same year, Parnassos Mountain established as national park.

In 1969, the Law 856/37 incorporated into the "Forest Code (LD 86/1969 art. 79-80-81) and amended later on by the Law Decree 996/1971 (still in force) provided the possibility of establishing two more categories as protected areas besides "National Parks": The "Aesthetic Forests" and the "Natural monuments to be preserved". The application of this law resulted in the declaration of 10 National parks, 19 Aesthetic forests and 51 Natural monuments to be preserved. These areas are the only ones fully covered by national legislation concerning the areas called for protection. The Law 191/1974 (Gazette 3504) provides for natural deposits as well.

Constitutional establishment of Natural Environment Protection

The first constitutional Regulation for the protection of the natural environment is in the article 24/1975 of the Constitution of 1975. Consequently, there are voted:

a) Law 360/1976 about "the Physical Planning and Environment".
b) Law 998/1979 for the “protection of the forests and forestry areas”.

c) By the Law 1032/1980, the Ministry for the Environment and Physical Planning was established, renamed in 1985 as Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works.

Following that, the Legal Framework of the "Environment Protection" is adopted by the Law 1650/1986.

Legal framework for the environmental protection

It is given by several laws listed hereafter.

a) Law 1650/1986 (Gazette 160A), and especially by the Special chapter D (articles 18-19-21-22):

   Article 18: under this article, the areas to be protected are grouped into five new separate categories, and namely:
   (i) Areas of absolute nature protection; (ii) Nature protection area; (iii) National Parks; (iv) Natural formation, landscapes and landscape elements to be protected; (v) Area of eco-development.

   Article 19: describes the criteria for the characterization of the above mentioned categories.

   Article 21: declaration procedure (based on articles 18 and 19).

   Notice point in this article: “in every case the elaboration of a special environmental study is necessary for the justification of the importance of the subject to be protected; the procedure for the study drawing up is described in the Gazette.

   Article 22: Management of the new areas.

   Sanctions.

   Notes: 1) Article 20 refers to “Protection and Conservation of the nature fauna and flora species”.

   b) The Law decree 996/1976, providing for the declaration of the areas to be protected, still in effect, is not repealed under Law 1650/86.

   The article 31 par. 9 of L. 1650/86, provides that “the areas declared for protection by Law decree 996/71 as well as the landscapes of natural beauty are enlisted in article 18 of Law 1650, under the criteria of article 19, in accordance with the presidential decree adopts following a proposal put forward by the Ministers of Agriculture, Environment Physical Planning and Public Works and the authorized Minister” (art. 31 paragraph 9).

   So far, such a law decree has not been adopted, therefore, the existing provisions are still valid. Actually, there are two laws being equally valid for the areas under protection.

   Under the Law 1650/86, the bodies involved in the nature protection are enlarged.

   Articles 28-29-30; Sanctions.

   Settlements Based on Law 1650/86:

   1) Mutual decision of several Ministers — No 69269/5387 (Gazette T.B.- sh. 678), for the “classification of works and activities into categories, the content of the study on the Environmental Impacts (S.E.I.), definition of the aspect to be studied in terms of the Special Environmental Studies” etc. (this Decision was taken mainly for the adjustment to the corresponding directives of E.E.C.).

   Chapter E: Defines the content of the Special Environmental Studies (S.E.S. p. 8145).

   According to article 2 (p. 8142) set out in the mutual Decision, the Report of the Special Environmental studies aims: a) at justification and evaluation of the significance of the object to be protected and its enlistment, on the basis of the criteria laid down in article 19 of Law 1650 within the categories enlisted in article 18 of this law, b) at the wording of the proposals concerning the protection measures or/and the management of the object to be protected and/ or the management of the wider area; besides, justification and advisability of the measures to be taken are considered.

   The content of the Report of S.E.S. consists of the specifications, of these studies (815dβ-Table 4): they describe, justify and define the object to be protected of the assigned bodies-organisations, ways and procedure of assignment. (articles 12-13-14-15, p. 8145).

   2) The second regulation under the Law 1650, is quoted as paragraph 4, case c, of article 6 — Law 2052/1992 (Gazette 94A) “Measures for protection from air pollution and the town planning rules”: This provision (thought to be in contrast with the constitutional article 24), provides that: “the special development plans on the management of the area elements or nature ensembles characterized to be protected under article 21-law 1650, can be assigned to a body of the Wider Public Sector or the Public Establishment Private Law, which, has gained experience. the sector of environmental protection and own the necessary scientific and technical infrastructure. Assignment is implemented through a contract signed between the Minister of the Ministry for the Environment Physical Planning and Public Works and the concerned body.

International contracts

Special commitments have been undertaken by Greece within the frames of international contracts and agreements.
They are particularly important in respect to the Contract concerning the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage ratified under the Law 1126/1981. Some famous ancient monuments (Acropolis, Delphi, etc.) have been characterized as world-wide cultural monuments; besides, two appreciable areas (Meteora and Aghion Oros) are enlisted as both natural and cultural monuments.

The term natural heritage includes: natural landscapes or precisely determined natural areas of world value, in terms of science, necessity of conservation of natural beauty.

Articles 4-5-6, also describe the obligation of each State member to protect the cultural and natural heritage and the possibility to apply to the International Community for economic or any other assistance.

Another significant convention signed by Greece is “the Agreement of Wetlands of international interest” known as RAMSAR convention, ratified in 1974 by the law 191/1974 (Gazette 3504).

The Greek State is contributing also to the program “Man and Biosphere” of UNESCO in the framework of which two Greek area (Olympus and Samaria) have been characterized as “Biosphere Reserves”.

Another agreement concerning the countries around the Mediterranean Sea is the “Protocol for the protected areas of the Mediterranean” (Convention of Barcelona) signed in 1982. Eight areas (protected by national laws also) are enlisted in the network of Special protection zones of the Mediterranean sea, created in the framework of this convention.

Other conventions are: the Convention for the preservation of “Wildlife and Natural Environment of Europe” (Convention of Bern), ratified under the Law 1335/1983 (Gazette 3A); the Convention of Bonn for the migratory birds; the Convention for the international trade of threaten species known as CITES ratified under the national Law 2055/92 (Gazette 105A); the Convention of Biodiversity; the directive 79/409/EEC for the protection of wild birds, and finally the directive 92/43/EEC “for the protection of Habitats, wild fauna and flora”.

Greece participates also in the “European Network of Biogenetic Reserves” with 16 areas. Among them, the national park of Samaria has gained the national diploma of first degree from the European Council.

Bodies involved in Greek environmental policy

Many bodies are involved in different aspects concerning the environment.

Thus, the responsibility for the protection and the management of the special characteristics of the natural environment has undertaken historically the forester service of the Agriculture Ministry. The elements for protection are: indigenous flora, wild fauna, biotopes, special geomorphologic or physiographic formations, natural landscapes, etc. that constitute the natural heritage of the country. It is also responsible for the selection, nomination, protection and management of National Parks, Aesthetic Forests and Natural Monuments, according to the Law Decree 996/1971 and for the Protective Forests of the arts. 69, 70, 71 and 72 of the L.D. 86/1969 “About Forestry Code”. It’s responsibility extends also to the application of the forestry policy: Decrees of Forester Code, the fishing Code- L.D. 420/1970 (Gazette 27/A) for the research, selections, etc. of fauna and flora species (P.D. 67/1981) and for the protection of the special elements of the natural environment under the law 998/1979 “for the protection of forests and forestry areas of the country”. This law has resulted from the article 24 of the Constitution and provides “for the protection of the natural environment” in combination with the protection of forest and forestry areas.

This service is named today General Secretariat of Forests and Natural Environment with the P.D. 352/7.8.1991 (Gazette 124A). It is impossible for the Service as it is organized today to meet the needs for the protection and the management of the natural environment.

Besides this Service, other bodies are also involved in the natural environmental matters, and namely:

(i) the Ministry of Civilization, now responsible for the Historical Sites;
(ii) the responsibility for the protection of “Landscapes of Special Natural Beauty” and the co-ordination of general policy of the natural Environment has the Ministry of Environment Planning and Public Work, after its foundation in 1980.

Non-governmental organizations are also playing an important role in the protection of nature, and namely: 1) The Greek Society for

Conclusions

As it is evident from the above mentioned legislation, geology and landform are not directly mentioned. The only references concern mainly landscapes of special natural beauty. Evidently, the concept of geotopes is much wider, and refers also to localities not necessarily attractive but which require to be given emphasis because of the significance for the geological history, the geological science and for Science as a whole.

Regarding the state of art of geoconservation in Greece, in terms of awareness of the geological community, the former Director of IGME Dr Bornovas helped by geologists of IGME prepared thirteen years ago for the Ministry of Civilization a list of sites to be protected as geological monuments (see paper in the same issue). This work has not been perpetuated, and it is renewed only now. On the other hand, we try to define and enlarge the texts relative to the geoenvironment in the legislation.

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