

The Rise of the Far Right in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Case of *ELAM*

ABSTRACT: Over the past decade the appeal and success on political grounds of far-right populist parties throughout Europe has been multiplying at alarming rates. Their ability to shape modern democratic governance by shaking liberal values and mainstream politics on both national and transnational levels, makes studying the causes of their rise exceedingly relevant. This paper investigates the social factors and conditions that paved the way for the rise of the far-right in Cyprus, Greece and Italy. Through a political economic framework, the paper aims to explore the appeal of far-right populist parties in these three EU countries and more specifically the appeal of ELAM's legitimacy as a strong political player in Cyprus. Due to shortcomings from liberal democratic governance in 2008-2013 and accusations of party corruption between 2013-2023 ELAM claims to stand as an anticorruption people's party aiming to safeguard the future of Cypriots. By comparing and contrasting with Giorgia Meloni's success in Italy and the failure of Greece's Golden Dawn Party, this paper will aim to tease out why ELAM is effectively witnessing an increase in its public support.

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INTRODUCTION

A spectre is haunting Europe. Not unprecedented, the far right is marching to victories all over the European continent, both in individual states and in the European Parliament. Favourable conditions have made the ascendance of such parties into power. During the interwar period in Italy, fascism prevailed through the organizationally fragmented political and social elite. Lack of strong political parties enabled the far right to portray itself the people's choice, leading to the mobilization of civil society. Oligarchic liberalism seriously discredited liberal institutions as civil society became more organised. Political elites were isolating themselves. Political systems lacked a well-defined conservative pole.¹ Political forces broadly pushing for democracy remained fragmented. To summarize, the rise of far right and fascist movements during the inter-war period were tightly linked to a crisis of politics due to the failure of democratic powers and social elite establishing a united order that would rally civil society in its support. As of October of 2022, a century later, Italy has a far-right Prime Minister in Giorgia Meloni. The Brothers of Italy party (*Fratelli d'Italia* or FdI) have been defined as Right Wing nationalist, populist and even neofascist.² Italy is not the only nation to have similar trends. During the past decade we have seen the increase of far-right political parties throughout Europe, the Netherlands with the Party for Freedom (PVV), Germany with the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and as this paper will attest to, Cyprus with the National People's Front (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο, ELAM).

Few can doubt that one of the major events in European politics in the last decade is the rise of right-wing populism. Starting in the early 2010s, 'a series of political movements have gained momentum by appealing to a considerable part of the electorate concerned with issues around economic precariousness, immigration and sociocultural transformations that are considered disruptive, thereby challenging not only conservative parties but also, and to a lesser degree, other political forces.'³ A huge concern regarding this shift, and one which is a major bulwark even to this analysis which will center on the rise and projection of the Cypriot ELAM party, is that experts on the field have trouble naming this phenomena. As Wendy Brown notes: "we even have trouble with the naming: is this authoritarianism, illiberal democracy, fascism, populism, undemocratic liberalism, right-wing plutocracy?"⁴ In turn, I want to argue that fascism and right-wing populism, in the case of Cyprus, have intersected. How does fascism and right-wing populism intersect in the smooth running and political ascendancy of ELAM?

ELAM: A Background

The formation of the party came in 2008 but was not recognized as a legally entitled political party until 2011 and it debuted in the 2011 Parliamentary elections where it gained a meagre 1%.⁵ The party, prior to its official recognition as a political entity, was a violent vigilante group with strong ties to the Greek Golden Dawn Party and even went under the name *Golden Dawn Cyprus Branch*.⁶ The party is led by Christos Christou, a former active member of Golden Dawn, which indicate the party's political and ideological affiliations to

¹ Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe*, (London, 2019), p.194-197.

² Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*, (Cambridge, 2015), p.22.

³ Daniel Rueda, *The Rise of Nationalist Populism: Comparing Western European Right-Wing Political Parties*, (New York, 2025), p. 1.

⁴ Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism. The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*, (Columbia, 2019), p.2.

⁵ Parliamentary Elections 2011, *Parliamentary Elections 2011: Official Results*, http://results.elections.moi.gov.cy/English/PARLIAMENTARY_ELECTIONS_2011/Islandwide (Accessed 2nd April 2025).

⁶ Yiannos Katsourides, "Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism and the Crystallisation of Greek Cypriot Nationalist Party Politics", *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 51 (4), 2013, pp.503-523.

Greece's now dissolved neo-Nazi party, albeit the lack of evidence of their financial linkages.⁷ In fact, the party's agenda was dictated by Golden Dawn's ideological declaration in a unidirectional manner but accustomed to the Cypriot context. ELAM has directly transferred its ideology from that of their Greek brethren which is premised on an imagined ethnic community based on Greek nationalism and the of a pure Greek race.⁸ Though ELAM has as of late retained a rather politically mature stance and has not officially involved itself in vigilantism, their xenophobia and racist behavior to anything non-Greek remains a fixture of its supporters.

However, the emphasis of this research paper is not on the formation of ELAM but more on its recent surge, hence my focus being laid on the period 2018-2024, whereby the far-right has been ascending into a major political player on the island. Akin to overall alarming western European trends, Cyprus too has fallen on the trend of right-wing populism. Since 2011, when it first appeared in the Republic's political landscape, ELAM's rise has been both steady and striking considering the rate by which its voter base grew, as well as the extremity and vulgarity of its actions and rhetoric. Today, ELAM's penetration into the Greek-Cypriot society is greater and stronger than ever. Its appeal is likely to keep growing, potentially achieving the goal of its leader, Christos Christou: to reach the executive office of the President.⁹ Its continuous success in electoral processes poses a mounting threat to the Republic's political, economic, and social stability, and this is precisely the reason for which its rise should be subject to greater academic research.¹⁰ The voting trends do demonstrate that ELAM is successfully riding the populist wave of Europe. In 2013 ELAM ranked as the 4th party in the presidential elections of Cyprus. However, the voter growth is demonstrative of their rise as a key political party in Cyprus. In 2013 they amassed 0.88% (3,899 votes), but by 2018 this went up to 5.65% (21,846 votes) and in 2023 6.04% (23,988 votes). In the House of Representatives, a similar trend ensues. In 2011 they had 1.1% of the votes, 2016 3.7% and in 2021 6.8%. In 2024 they successfully announced their first ever elected Member of the European Parliament (MEP) with 41,215 votes fitting the hazardous trend of the entirety of the EU's shift to the far right.¹¹ Though ELAM has not yet found a solid position of power in Cyprus, its meteoric rise will be examined via the confines of fascism as an intra-class broker.¹²

This paper will assess and analyze the meteoric rise of ELAM in three ways. Firstly, we will investigate the impact of its distancing from the Golden Dawn party and wide-ranging vigilantism. Secondly, by assessing how the far-right party followed by example from the Brothers of Italy party, which gained political success. Finally, what will be examined is how it found widespread and popular success by presenting itself as an uncorrupted, non-elitist, peoples' party in Cyprus.

⁷ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, (London, 2015), p.193.

⁸ Giorgos Charalambous and Panos Christoforou, "Far Right Extremism and Populist Rhetoric: Greece and Cyprus during an Era of Crisis", *South European Society and Politics*, 23 (4), (2018), pp. 451-477.

⁹ M. Kividiotis, (2019) Χρίστος Χρίστου: Στόχος μας είναι η εξουσία (BINTEO) [Christos Christou: Our goal is power (Video)], *Alpha News*, 18 September. [online]. Available at: <https://www.alphanews.live/politics/hristos-hristoy-stohos-mas-einai-i-exoysia-binteo> (Accessed: 27 February 2025).

¹⁰ Melissa Philippou, "The Rise of Far Right Populism in Cyprus: The Case of ELAM, *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Populism*, Issue 4, 2024, pp.38-63.

¹¹ TRT World, "Neo-Nazi party doubles vote share in Greek Cypriot Elections" (June, 2021) retrieved 23rd March 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/neo-nazi-party-doubles-vote-share-in-greek-cypriot-elections-47136>, see also, European Election Results, (23rd July 2024), retrieved 23rd March 2025, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/cyprus/> and, Cyprus Mail, "Slight rise for far-right Elam, (5th February 2023), retrieved 23rd March 2025.

¹² See, http://results.elections.moi.gov.cy/English/PARLIAMENTARY_ELECTIONS_2011/Islandwide and adjust for each year accordingly.

LITERATURE REVIEW: *Right-Wing Populism and Fascism*

Populism is one of the most studied topics in the field of political science today. The first conceptualisations of populism tended to treat it as a vague set of ideas with little assigned space on the political spectrum.¹³ Richard Hofstadter, one of the first to try and define populism in 1955, presented it as an “undercurrent of provincial resentments, popular and democratic rebelliousness and suspiciousness, and nativism.”¹⁴ Though vague and applicable to both left-wing and right-wing populism, due to the rise of European far-right parties in the 1990s (most prominently Jean-Marie Le Pen’s Front National), right wing populism took the lead in analyses. However, today left-wing populism is also a common feature as it has been gaining momentum in several European countries.¹⁵ Both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders have been labelled as populists, although Trump is clearly a staunch figure for the right and Sanders quietly resides on the left. In Europe for example, Marie Le Penn and Geert Wilders are commonly referred to as populists, but so is the Greek SYRIZA party. The former are both figures of the far right whereas the latter is a left-wing alliance which was in power in Greece between 2015 and 2019. Populism is undoubtedly rather complex to define in a brief description. One thing is certain, the lack of definition for populism makes it a dangerous political actor, and in our times, especially far-right populism poses a significant threat to our democracies. Jan Werner Müller has earmarked populism as a “danger”, and both Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner have denounced populism as a spectre haunting the world.¹⁶ Without falling off the tracks, populism is an increasingly key player in Europe today and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

In aiming to streamline right-wing populism, in this paper I suggest the following definition of populism which I believe suits the ELAM party’s rhetoric and appeals to the Cypriot civil society. “Populism is an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale*, (of the people).”¹⁷ In the case of ELAM, I will aim to demonstrate that its political prestige has come to prominence, temporary permanence and respectability by portraying themselves as a party which shies away from corruption and does not boast the political elitism found in the other three main parties of the island, DISY, DIKO and AKEL. Hence, when referring to right wing populism, in this paper, the understood definition is the aforementioned one, highlighting the distinction between the corrupt elite and the pure people, which far right parties claim to represent.

Fascism also has a similar role to play when it comes to representing, preserving and protecting the “pure people.” Returning to Dylan Riley, he claims that fascism is a result of intra-class struggle. Speaking of interwar Italy and Germany, he states the following: “Fascist regimes arose in a context of serious intra-class conflict. One such conflict arose between export orientated and globally competitive industries, and less internationally competitive industries requiring state support.”¹⁸ This is demonstrative that like the chosen definition of right-wing populism, fascism too emerges out of an intra-class conflict. Though he emphasises that European populism and American Trumpism do not fall under the same auspices, and instead look more like modern Bonapartism, I will aim to demonstrate that

¹³ Daniel Rueda, *The Rise of Nationalist Populism: Comparing Western European Right-Wing Political Parties*, (New York, 2025), p. 11.

¹⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform, From Bryan to FDR*, (New York, 1956), p. 5.

¹⁵ For left-wing populism see Chantal Mouffe, *Towards a Green Democratic Revolution: Left Populism and the Power of Affects*, (London, 2022).

¹⁶ Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism*, (Pennsylvania, 2016), p.6, see also, Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, *Populism: Its Meaning and National Character*, (London, 1969), p.12.

¹⁷ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition* 39.4 (2004), pp.541–563.

¹⁸ Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe*, (London, 2019), see introduction.

ELAM'S fascism against Turks (and Turkey) finds its roots in the failure of the political elite to solve the Cyprus Problem. In addition, their fascism is tightly knitted to the belief that corruption within the ruling elite is one of the reasons as to why there is no solution to the Cyprus Problem. Most importantly, Riley touches upon the fact that neither the NSDAP (Nazi Party) nor the PNF (Italy's National Fascist Party) won governmental power by winning the majority of the vote.¹⁹ Similarly, in contemporary Cypriot politics the ELAM party has not won any majority stake in the government nor the parliament, but its continuous ascendancy is demonstrative of gradual political power, as demonstrated in the introduction.

In this paper therefore, right-wing populism and fascism will be examined through the auspices of the ELAM party. I will also draw parallels with the Brothers of Italy party and the disbanded Golden Dawn party, (both of whom ELAM is, and has been, politically linked to). By challenging the long-standing dominance of mainstream parties on the island ELAM has successfully rooted itself in contemporary politics, although its racist rhetoric has not tethered, its anti-establishment rhetoric has found popular support. In 2013, ELAM expressed its widespread distrust of the Greek-Cypriot political establishment by exposing corrupt politicians (of mainstream parties) who were center-stage in the collapse of Laiki Bank and has continued to do so on matters of corruption, the Cyprus Problem and failure of classical party politics. Since then it has managed to maintain an image of a party that can truly represent and protect the people.²⁰ Hence, as defined above, with the theory of both populism and fascism dichotomizing civil society between "the people" and the "corrupt elite", I will aim to assess the success of ELAM between 2018 and 2024.

SECTION ONE: ELAM AND GOLDEN DAWN: *A Political Divorce*

Arguably, Golden Dawn and ELAM are as similar as one would expect any two far-right parties to be. However, the uniqueness of their case comes in the fact that ELAM was born out of the Greek far-right, initially as a branch of the Golden Dawn in Cyprus and later as a close ally. In Greece, Golden Dawn, had a strong and visible paramilitary organisation that systematically attacked immigrants and leftists and had been under prosecution for constituting a criminal organisation, a trial which has been widely considered the biggest Nazi trial since Nuremberg.²¹ In the autumn of 2020, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, the Athens court (which had also declared the party as a criminal organization) convicted 38 of the 50 people belonging to the crime syndicate with only 12 – including five former MPs – getting the suspensions they had requested.²² The political execution of Golden Dawn did not mean the end of far right politics in Greece. Grassroots extremism transcended the political decapitation of Golden Dawn and found a home in other parties. New Democracy, for example, has opened its doors to a number of far-right politicians, who ran successful campaigns in the recent election. Additionally, Kyriakos Velopoulos' ultranationalist party Greek Solution has been politically active since then and Golden Dawn's spokesperson Ilias Kasidiaris formed a new movement called Greeks for the Fatherland – from jail.

Similarly, in Cyprus, ELAM followed the same precedent up until 2020: that precedent was vigilantism. Though vulgar in action, the little brothers of Golden Dawn never

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Giorgos Charalambous and Panos Christoforou, "Far Right Extremism and Populist Rhetoric: Greece and Cyprus during an Era of Crisis", *South European Society and Politics*, 23 (4), (2018), pp. 451-477.

²¹ Ibid. See also, The Conversation, "The End of Golden Dawn: has Greece shown us how to deal with neo-Nazis?" (2020), <https://theconversation.com/the-end-of-golden-dawn-has-greece-shown-us-how-to-deal-with-neo-nazis-150239> (accessed 4th November 2024).

²² Ioanna Mandrou, "Golden Dawn leaders go to jail," *Kathimerini*, (2020), <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/258402/golden-dawn-leaders-go-to-jail/> (accessed 4th November 2024).

reached the vile extents of their Greek counterparts. During the height of Europe's refugee crisis a few years ago, the party took an extreme stance. With the arrest of Golden Dawn's politicians in 2013, ELAM's leadership protested outside the Greek embassy in Cyprus claiming that the actions against the party were "unfair and unconstitutional."²³ On the 5th Birthday of the party in 2013, the president, Christos Christou, in his speech stated "when we are called terrorists, we will answer back that we are Greek nationalists and will do whatever it takes to help the country. Our ideas are like fire and will spread."²⁴ More of the same can be found when, on the 18th of September 2013, a day after the murder of Pavlos Fissas by the Golden Dawn in Athens, Christos Christou was interviewed by the Greek Cypriot channel Sigma. When asked if his party was the Cypriot version of Golden Dawn, his response was proudly recorded as: "Yes, we are the Golden Dawn of Cyprus. For your information, when we initially went to enlist ELAM as a party, we designated our name as Golden Dawn only to be denied that name by the Ministry of Internal Affairs."²⁵ ELAM had been both officially and unofficially involved in similar acts of violence against migrants and opposition figures, namely Antifa members on the island, however, we will need to bypass the details of this as there is a lack of empirical evidence which can stand to definitively prove this. Instead we must stand on the ground that up until the period that Golden Dawn still functioned as a political entity in Greece, and most importantly prior to its judicial battles, the ELAM party's hierarchy stood firmly in support. The aforementioned speeches of members of the party's leader are demonstrative of the party's actions and would therefore classify it as a more extreme variant of far-right parties that do not distance themselves from violence.²⁶ In spite of never reaching the grandeur of violence that Golden Dawn had, the Cypriot associates never wavered in their support of such activities.

Moving forward, to the 2020s, ELAM remained branded as a sister party of the now outlawed Golden Dawn party. However, in 2021 the Cypriot government, under the presidency of Nicos Anastasiades, recognized that the far-right party had a voice in the governance of the country given their parliamentary election success in 2021. On the 30th of May 2021 ELAM became the fourth political force, doubling its percentage from 2016.²⁷ Accepting that Cyprus was now shifting in the direction of most of its European counterparts, the president opted to meet with Christou and establish a political tie which led to the party chairing the newly established parliamentary committee responsible for the demographic issue.²⁸ Despite backlash from other political parties, ELAM gradually began establishing itself as a mainstay in the politics of the island.

²³ The Conversation, "Cyprus: what is Elam, the far-right nationalist party seeking success after the demise of Golden Dawn?", (2021), <https://theconversation.com/cyprus-what-is-elam-the-far-right-nationalist-party-seeking-success-after-the-demise-of-golden-dawn-165639> (accessed 13th December 2024).

²⁴ The author of the article was in attendance at the event. See, Nigel O'Connor, "I Went to the Cypriot Golden Dawn's Fifth Birthday Party", *Vice*, (2013), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/the-cypriot-golden-dawn-just-celebrated-their-fifth-anniversary/> (accessed 13th December 2024).

²⁵ Thanasis Fotiou, "Christos Christou: The Leader's Unknown Minion", *Philenews*, (23 May 2021), <https://www.philenews.com/apopsis/article/688705/christos-christou-to-agnomon-tsiraki-tou-archigou/> (accessed 1st December 2024).

²⁶ Cas Mudde, "The Populist radical right: A Pathological Normalcy," *West European Politics*, (2010), vol.33, no.6, pp.1167-1186.

²⁷ DW, "Cyprus: DISY wins, rise for the far right, (31st May 2021), (accessed 12 January 2025).

²⁸ Official website of the Government of Cyprus, *Ad Hoc Committee on the Study of the Demographic Problem*, is responsible for the reviewing the "Report of the House Standing Committee on Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance on the report submitted by the Subcommittee for the Study of the Demographic Problem and Methods for its Management", dated April 11th, 2016. The Ad Hoc Committee is competent for the examination of bills, proposals and issues relate to the demographic problem. <https://www.parliament.cy/en/general-information/composition/parliamentary-committees> (accessed 12 January 2025).

Despite the adamant stance of the party in the early 2010s that they are the Golden Dawn of Cyprus, the dissolution of the Greek party brought a change in ELAM's stance towards the now criminal organization. Christou now declares that cooperation between the two parties had been interrupted. Similarly, through its spokesperson ELAM tried to completely distance itself from Golden Dawn's actions stating that "it is not possible for ELAM to be responsible for the actions and behaviours of parties in other countries."²⁹ Clearly the Cypriot far-right began moving in a different political direction which eventually resulted in greater political legitimacy. How and why did this shift come about?

I would suggest that the gradual shift began as the Covid-19 Pandemic emerged. Unlike other far-right parties, it has avoided taking a clear position on whether it accepts the scientific consensus, or whether it sides with those who invoke conspiracy theories. Instead, ELAM has focused its attention on criticizing the government's policy. In this context, it has characterized this policy as divisive, arguing that it leads to polarization between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated, which had the effect of exacerbating the problem rather than finding a solution.³⁰ The pandemic allowed the party to rally the support through the frustration of the public. One way they achieved this was voicing against the governments high fines for those and subsequently criticized them for various measures as they claimed that they favoured the few.³¹ Adopting such political stances, allowed them to rapidly gain traction from the civil society at an unprecedented time. In a recent study Yiannos Katsourides and Elena Pachita concluded that 'the party's electoral rise came from other right-wing parties such as DISY and DIKO which in turn points to a degree of dissatisfaction towards mainstream parties of the centre-right.³² As history tells us, economic crises provide conditions favourable to the rise of right wing populism. The pandemic proved an opportune moment for the far-right party of Cyprus as it amassed a great deal of support due to portraying themselves as the people's party, something which became vastly evident in the parliamentary elections of 2021. During their electoral campaign they decorated the island with their slogan "Cyprus First", arguably imitating Donald Trump's "America First." Since this does not start from a xenophobic position, but from the somewhat more subtle, positive message that love for our homeland is above all, this slogan misleads the world by disguising the party's far-right politics as patriotic. This new stance is also reflected in the party's economic positions, which are now increasingly aligned with the mainstream, while at the same time maintaining in some cases a somewhat labour-oriented vocabulary and profile; for example, it has called for an end to evictions of people from their homes when they cannot pay their loans. The party is in favour of a market economy, but one that must be regulated, a position that is much closer to what one might expect from a centre-left party. It supports foreign direct investment and is not by definition opposed to the citizenship-linked investment program, but to the version implemented in Cyprus over the past decade.³³

Under the scope of Mudde's definition of populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure

²⁹ Loukianos Lyritsas, "Cyprus: Political deals with far-right" *DW*, (20th June 2021), <https://www.dw.com/el/> (accessed 12 January 2025).

³⁰ ELAM, "ELAM warns about tomorrow's health measures!" (29 July 2021), <https://elamcy.com/ta-katachristika-metra-tis-kyvernisis-kataferan-na-dichasoun-ton-lao/> (Accessed 14 April 2025).

³¹ ELAM, "Measures for all and not for a few – ELAM demands a pro-people policy against the coronavirus", <https://ela9mcy.com/metra-gia-olous-kai-ochi-gia-ligous-to-elam-apaitei-filolaiki-politiki-apenanti-ston-koronoio/> (27 March 2020), (Accessed 13 April 2025).

³² Yiannos Katsourides and Elena Pachita, "Normalizing far right party rhetoric: the impact of media populist frames and coverage on the electoral prospects of far-right parties in the case of Cyprus," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol.31, (2023), pp.132-150.

³³ Yiannos Katsourides and Leandros Savvidis, "The political evolution of ELAM: secular politics for the pandemic and electoral success", *Epoch*, (2022).

people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and politics should be an expression of the people, what can be ascertained by ELAM's recent political actions is that they opted to establish themselves as the anti-corruption political option for the people. Evident is the fact that even those who once supported mainstream parties such as DIKO or DISY were swayed in the direction of the far right during trying times. Under the definition of fascism which was assigned to this paper we can discern more of the same as one tentacle of fascism looks to protect and represent the pure people and not the elite. There is little doubt that under these auspices ELAM is both a far-right and a fascist party, however, their surge in popularity as an anti-corrupt force will be better analysed in the final section. Of most importance in this section is the stern shift away from Golden Dawn. As their Greek counterpart was disintegrating into no more than a mere unit of thugs, the Cypriot party smartly opted to distance themselves, instead focusing on their own political image as a legitimate political entity which voters could trust. Although Golden Dawn also followed a people-centrist approach, it remained significantly less potent than ELAM.³⁴ As the Greek party designed a path for the Cypriot far right to follow, (otherisation, anti-corruption, blaming immigration policies and people centrism), the fact that ELAM did not engage in high level violence nor did it invoke a sense of fear in the civil society allowed it to shapeshift into a successful political entity. Although the party remains a fascist and far-right party it is gaining its support from the public through its seeming political maturity, its people-centric stance with slogans such as "Cyprus First", and most importantly by means of standing against the mainstream party system that has nurtured corruption and disappointment.

SECTION TWO: BROTHERS OF ITALY: *An Archetype*

Looking at Giorgia Meloni's far-right party she too had to re-image and move away from fascism and vigilantism, much like ELAM and Golden Dawn. In August of 2022, she issued a video, spoken in English, French and Spanish, in which she said, "fascism has been consigned to history."³⁵ Yet, how does the Brothers of Italy party tie in with ELAM's recent electoral success? Before moving to analyse this, I will briefly outline the recent success of the Italian far-right party.

Italy has a long record of successful populist parties. One such example is the *Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque* (The Common Man Front), a party which became active for a brief stretch in 1945 right after the return of democracy, and since 1992 populism has been flourishing in the country.³⁶ First, the emergence of Umberto Bossi's Northern League and Berlusconi's FI marked the last stages of the so-called 'First Republic' and the birth of a totally new party system. The Italia dei Valori (Italy of Values), led by the anti-corruption judge Antonio Di Pietro, the M5S, and the reincarnation of the League led by Salvini, turned from a regional into a nationwide party, were further instances of different variants of populism.³⁷ And yet, for a party that was born 10 years ago, it is crucial to recall where it comes from and how its consolidation came about. While leadership is very important to understand the success of the party, the organisational, cultural, and ideological traditions are

³⁴ Giorgos Charalambous and Panos Christoforou, "Far Right Extremism and Populist Rhetoric: Greece and Cyprus during an Era of Crisis", *South European Society and Politics*, 23 (4), (2018), pp. 451-477.

³⁵ Angela Giuffrida, "God, family, fatherland – how Giorgia Meloni has taken Italy's far right to the brink of power, *The Guardian*, (2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/17/giorgia-meloni-brothers-of-italy-leader-far-right-elections-alliance-> (Accessed 23rd March 2025).

³⁶ Marco Tarchi, "Italy: the promised land of populism?" *Contemporary Italian Politics*, vol.23, no.1, pp. 147-162.

³⁷ Gianfranco Baldini, Filippo Tronconi and Davide Angelucci, "Yet Another Populist Party? Understanding the rise of Brothers of Italy", *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 27, pp.285-405.

at least as important.³⁸ However, unlike ELAM, the Brothers of Italy, can be described as rooted newcomers as they can always count on pre-existing organisational resources building their appeal, an appeal which was known to the electorate when the party was formed.³⁹ In the case of the Brothers the obvious point of reference is the MSI (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*—Italian Social Movement), a neo-fascist party always represented in parliament between 1948 and 1992, with around 5 per cent of the seats. The cultural legacy of the MSI is easily recognisable in the Brothers of Italy and has never been denied, starting from the party symbol (still including the tri-coloured flame in 2022), and the composition of its parliamentary class and inner circle of leaders.⁴⁰

We instantly see that in Italy the nascent Brothers of Italy party had a strong base which provided it with voters, unlike ELAM, which simply rooted its inaugural political journey in the hands of the Golden Dawn. However, the similarities of the two parties come in more recent narratives whereby both parties have been scoring high on populism, as assessed via the three traditional indicators of appeals to the people, the attack on the elites, and the ostracism of others.⁴¹ Much about the same time period, (roughly between 2014–2018), the ELAM party too began to use different tools in their arsenal, whilst also moving away from the Golden Dawn. As it will be highlighted in the following section, the most significant factor for their advance was their ostracising from the political and “corrupt” elite, their attack on these elites and their demonstrated ability to announce themselves as the peoples’ party, not dissimilar to Meloni. It could be discerned that ELAM was following in the footsteps of the Italian populists at the time. In January 2024, during an invitation by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) in Rome, Christou highlighted the pressing need for conservative and patriotic forces to redefine policies in favour of the common people and also declared that the example his party follows is set by Ms Meloni and serves as an inspiration for ELAM’s fight.⁴² Evidently ELAM draws inspiration by the Italian nascent far right party. In their 2013 manifesto the Brothers of Italy claimed that Italy is “the only western democracy with a government that has not been chosen by its citizens.”⁴³ Their manifesto referred to Mario Monti’s technocratic government which was in power at the time. The typical populist juxtaposition between virtuous people and a vicious elite is present in the same document, denouncing the corruption of politicians and public servants and calling for a “blast on the cupola (the highest governing body of the criminal organisation known as Cosa Nostra) of the privileged, the state super-managers, the anachronistic bureaucrats that no reform has ever managed to dent.”⁴⁴ Moving to 2022, the manifesto reiterated the pledge to presidential reform (with no further details) is presented as necessary

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ A rooted newcomer party is a new formation which at its breakthrough elections is supported by a societal group that antedated the party. See, David Arter, “When new party X has the X Factor: on resilient entrepreneurial parties”, *Party Politics*, vol. 22, no.1, pp. 15–26.

⁴⁰ Gianfranco Baldini, Filippo Tronconi and Davide Angelucci, “Yet Another Populist Party? Understanding the rise of Brothers of Italy”, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 27, pp.285–405.

⁴¹ Giuliano Bobba and Franca Roncarolo, “The likeability of populism on social media in the 2018 Italian general election”, *Italian Political Science*, Vol.13, pp. 51–62.

⁴² Phileleftheros, “Cypriot far-right eyes Italian inspiration for political ascent”, (22 January 2024), <https://in-cyprus.phileleftheros.com/local/cypriot-far-right-eyes-italian-inspiration-for-political-ascent/> (accessed 1 April 2025).

⁴³ FdI, “Manifest for a populist Europe – A confederation of free and sovereign nation's” (2013), <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/> (Accessed 2 April 2025).

⁴⁴ Giuliano Bobba and Franca Roncarolo, “The likeability of populism on social media in the 2018 Italian general election”, *Italian Political Science*, Vol.13, pp. 51–62.

“to guarantee governmental stability and a direct link between the citizens and the government leadership”⁴⁵

In its first decade of life, the Brothers of Italy has moved from a marginal position (at least until 2018–19), to centre stage in 2022. While no single factor can explain this rise, we have singled out a combination of political circumstances related to the decline of competitors in the same political camp (Berlusconi and Salvini) and agency related elements. With regard to the latter, particularly important has been Meloni’s leadership, decisively supported by a pre-existing organisational network and ideological identities that are well established, while also divisive. Also important has been a context marked by high volatility. The party has succeeded in preserving the core of its long-term electorate, while also gaining votes from the disappointed supporters of the two successful parties of the 2018 general elections, the M5S and the League.⁴⁶ ELAM, on the other hand, had no traditional voter base to depend on, however, the shift away from Golden Dawn’s violent existence and move towards following the footsteps of their Italian counterparts began the sharp upward trajectory of their voter base. Though in Italy the party focuses on immigration much more than ELAM does in Cyprus, they both have a similar strata, that of moving away from elite corruption and technocratic clientelism and establishing themselves as the party for the common man, something that has been earmarked early on as astute definitions of both far-right populism and fascism, elements that are present in both camps.

The Cypriot far-right group restrain of extreme behaviours amongst its members and its active seeking of political alliances with like-minded movements across Europe seemingly strengthens its political standing. As mentioned above, Christou’s speech in Rome mentioned Meloni as a form of guiding light for his party. Arguably this was a deliberate mention as she is viewed as a role model for Cyprus’s far right, principally through her rise to power in 2022. ELAM’s transformation is lucratively shredding the shadow of Golden Dawn and establishing them well within the Cypriot Parliament in 2021 and well within the European Parliament in 2024 as members of the ECR. As rightly pointed out by an article in the Cypriot *Phileleftheros* newspaper, ‘with an augmented presence in the Cyprus House of Representatives, ELAM strategically positioned itself as a regulatory force, earning recognition and the symbolic moniker of the “other right.” A pivotal moment during the inaugural session of the new Parliament in May 2021 was marked by the then-President of DISY, Averof Neophytou, signalling towards ELAM’s seats for support. This solidified their political standing and tacitly anointed them as the “other Right” on the political stage.’⁴⁷ The shift of ELAM’s policies have made it not only popular with voters, but have also cemented it within the political framework of the island, whereby their political support is needed for passing legislations. I would argue that this was something taken from their Italian counterparts and betraying Golden Dawn’s aggressive attitude was necessary in order to start gaining political legitimacy.

When interpreting similarities between the Italian and the Cypriot far-right, one very important element is evident and that is the element highlighted earlier on as the definition of

⁴⁵ FdI, “Manifest for a populist Europe – A confederation of free and sovereign nation's” (2022), <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/> (Accessed 2 April 2025).

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Mannoni, “Electoral flows between 2018 and 2022 policies: Lega and M5S fuel FdI, *Centre for Italian Electoral Studies*, (26 September 2022), <https://cise.luiss.it/2022/09/26/i-flussi-elettorali-tra-politiche-2018-e-politiche-2022/> (Accessed 29 March 2025). See also, Salvatore Vassalo and Rinaldo Vignati, “Elezioni 2022. I flussi di voto rispetto alle politiche del 2018 e alle europee del 2019”, *Istituto Cattaneo*, (2022). Also see, Giuliano Bobba and Franca Roncarolo, “The likeability of populism on social media in the 2018 Italian general election”, *Italian Political Science*, Vol.13, pp. 51-62.

⁴⁷ Phileleftheros, “Cypriot far-right eyes Italian inspiration for political ascent”, (22 January 2024), <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/local/cypriot-far-right-eyes-italian-inspiration-for-political-ascent/> (accessed 1 April 2025).

populism; that is an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite.’ Both ELAM and the Brothers of Italy carry such a sentiment, however, the Italians began using it in their 2013 manifesto and in the case of Cyprus such evidence does not emerge up until 2016. With the apparent political admiration that the Cypriot far-right carries for Meloni’s party one could assert that when distancing themselves from the Golden Dawn, Christou found inspiration in the more mature far-right, and the path set by the Brothers of Italy is seemingly one that ELAM is strictly on the trails of.

SECTION THREE: ELAM: *The People’s Choice*

I will begin this final section by stating that in the past ten years ELAM has primarily otherised the government, the establishment and external elites, much more so that immigration policies and immigrants themselves. This is suggestive that the traditional far-right anti-immigrant sentiment can be overshadowed by more strategically important enemies and events that shift attention away from immigration issues.⁴⁸ I emphasise that these shifts attention away from anti-immigrant rhetoric, it does not exterminate it. ELAM witnessed the widespread disappointment towards the government which began with the 2013 economic collapse followed by the unending corruption scandals and strategically placed itself as a people-centric party. ELAM’s communication strategy is to mark a clear distance from traditional, establishment politics, parties and politicians, conveying a message of novelty and change which is substantiated by generational proximity and turnover with the people.⁴⁹ The far right party has blended together issues of cultural and economic resentment against those they deem at fault for the people’s desolation and misery, all in the same time marking a now clear distinction with the Greek Golden Dawn.

In the study carried out by Katsourides and Pachita in the majority of the cases, interviewees mentioned both recent events and more general traits – ranging from the economic crisis to the Cyprus problem and the practice of clientelism – as prompting them to change their minds about the party to which they previously voted. In a specific case one of their interviewees stated: “They have destroyed everything. I trust no party anymore.” Similarly, another individual claimed that: “After they (the party) won the presidency, they did nothing to honour their campaign promises...they were taking decisions based on the interests of the party or themselves.”⁵⁰ Therefore the ELAM party found themselves a political vacuum which no other party maintained, that of a new party which preserved and protected the Cypriots and spoke the language of the common man. As political corruption became dominant in the aftermath of the bail-in, the establishment parties were identified as the main actors responsible for these practices as well as the previous president Nicos Anastasiades. The MPs and the parliament were also blamed. As the people were continuously bombarded with media coverage that proved the implication of certain political figures in clientelism, such as the Al Jazeera scandals that emerged in 2020, the ground was being prepared for political outsiders such as ELAM to take on the political establishment.

When examining the videos of ELAM one thing is pertinent: they put the entire blame on the corrupted political and economic elites and more broadly on the traditional party establishment. In the meantime, they surgically remove themselves from this establishment. In 2016, speaking of the bail-in the parties, ELAM’s spokesperson stated: “the bail-in was a

⁴⁸ Hans-Georg Betz and Carol Johnson, “Against the current – stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the of the contemporary radical populist right” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol.9, no.3, pp.311-327

⁴⁹ Yiannos Katsourides and Elena Pachita, “Normalizing far right party rhetoric: the impact of media populist frames and coverage on the electoral prospects of far-right parties in the case of Cyprus,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol.31, (2023), pp.132-150.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

crime against the Greek Cypriot people and as the elites enforced the bail-in they secured their money beforehand, committing a pure robbery of the people.”⁵¹ Christou cleverly puts his party on the one side (that of the public) and all the other parties on the opposing side. The innuendo here is that all other parties are against ELAM and thus against the citizens and therefore anti-patriotic. The party leader frequently stated that the members of his party “are people with loans like you and our hands are clean” or how most of them came “from the lower social strata...we are on the same side of the poor people.”⁵² As the situation on the island kept worsening vis-à-vis the corruption, the pandemic also took a toll on the economy, but this allowed ELAM to utilize welfare chauvinism in order to side with the people. As mentioned in the first section, ELAM stood against the various positions when it came to the strict measures of the coronavirus pandemic. They used economic anxiety and cultural backlash to their advantage in a stunning and successful manner.⁵³ What they do extremely well as a party is portray themselves as knowledgeable, saviours, problem solvers and crisis managers which may lead part of the electorate to have more confidence in their efficacy.⁵⁴

Corruption and the coronavirus pandemic opened a path for ELAM to stand as a voice of strength to those who have been extremely disappointed and have been thrown into an economic anxiety. Unlike Golden Dawn who appealed followers through violence and neo-fascist racist rhetoric, ELAM emerged as the non-corrupt, people-centric party of Cyprus.⁵⁵ More recently ELAM has been gloating increased electoral success, most recently electing their first Member of the European Parliament, Geadis Geadis, who just a month before his election, on the night of Holy Saturday whilst carrying the Holy Fire to Nicosia’s children’s hospital was followed by men performing Nazi salutes.⁵⁶ The people centric populism has managed to shake the establishment. I would therefore come to argue that ELAM has blended right wing populism and fascism in a manner that can be deemed as successful. Populism is often deemed a slippery slope to fascism, and in the early parts of the twenty first century its emergency in contemporary politics, especially in the west is nothing less than alarming.⁵⁷ The Cypriot case is one that needs further examination as its success rate is alarming. When observing early Nazis they did not speak of totalitarianism, they instead sought a radical breakdown of the private sphere.⁵⁸ Therefore when examining ELAM’s policies and speeches, evidence directs us towards (a) a far right populist rhetoric, and (b) one that stems from early fascism. This paper has not delved into racist ideology, but has opted to demonstrated how the Cypriot far-right has devoted its efforts to portraying itself as the people’s saviour, much like Meloni’s coalition in Italy and much unlike the chauvinist vigilantism of Golden Dawn, however, it is evident that ELAM maintains a dangerous far-right rhetoric and it’s continuous growth as a party could lead to presidential victory in the next elections as they continue to expand a dichotomy between civil society and government and by placing themselves in the middle of that chasm as “protectors” of the people.

⁵¹ ELAM, “Christos Christou at Radio PROTO” (23rd August 2016), <https://elamcy.com/ta-katachristika-metritis-kyvernisis-kataferan-na-dichasoun-ton-lao/> (Accessed 22nd March 2025).

⁵² ELAM, “Christou’s Campaign Speech in Famagusta”, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S22LXI_36isF (2016), (Accessed 22nd March 2025).

⁵³ For the use of welfare chauvinism see, Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, (Cambridge, 2019), p. 101.

⁵⁴ Yiannos Katsourides and Elena Pachita, “Normalizing far right party rhetoric: the impact of media populist frames and coverage on the electoral prospects of far-right parties in the case of Cyprus,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol.31, (2023), pp.132-150.

⁵⁵ Ulrike Vieten and Scott Poynting, “Contemporary Far Right Racist Populism in Europe”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 2016 vol.37, pp.533-540.

⁵⁶ Chrystalla Hadjidemetriou, “Elam is running rampant and Makarios is resurrected”, *Phileleftheros*, (10 May 2024), (Accessed 22nd March 2025).

⁵⁷ Roger Eatwell and Mathew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, (London, 2018), p.42.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.63.

CONCLUSION: *ELAM in a Far-right Utopia*

The spectre haunting Cyprus, that of far-right populism and fascism in the form of ELAM's rise to political prominence, deserves further examination. This paper aimed to briefly demonstrate how the party managed to distance itself from vigilantism and move towards the New Right, which today encompasses doctrines of far-right populism and fascism. Most significantly for this paper; the notion of the corrupt government and political elite versus the people. The New Right which was spearheaded in the 1970s by Margaret Thatcher has finally led us to a period in the western world where the rise of populist, right-wing, nationalist, xenophobic, people-centric movement have come as reactions to insecurities and displacement of neoliberalism mostly under the confined auspices of global financial crisis.⁵⁹ Still, when we consider the foundations of fascism and populism, it is clear that the likes of Donald Trump, Marie Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni and Gert Wilders do not signal a return to traditional fascism, nor do they look to instil authoritarian governments which prohibit democracy. They work within the democratic frameworks which have a strong and tested framework of checks and balances. On the contrary, 'many speak positively about wanting to give more power back to the people through a Swiss-style model of democracy, a system of popular initiatives and referendums linked to representative government.'⁶⁰

This analysis has aimed to briefly outline the ongoing successful political romp of the Cypriot far-right party under the auspices of an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and politics should be an expression of the people. Throughout this paper ELAM's rise has been analysed under the spectrum of popular vote and increased popularity due to their various positions against corruption and traditional party politics in Cyprus. Here I must emphasise that Cyprus is like no other political arena in Europe. Corruption is evident in politics and key political figures who have been involved in scandals, mostly surrounding the troika bail-in and clientelism during the past two decades have become known to the public, yet these figures still remain in their respective posts within the governmental framework. This is where ELAM found a unique opportunity to position itself politically. Moving away from Golden Dawn's violent rhetoric whereby they allured support through fear and anti-immigration policies (and to a lesser extent anti-government rhetoric), and instead moving closer to the more politically mature actions of the Brothers of Italy party, who looked to tackle corruption and political elitism and present themselves as a party for the people. The Cypriot far-right party is doing exactly that and is finding a great deal of success in doing so, as is evident throughout their electoral growth over the past decade or so. Though still undoubtedly a far-right populist party, elements of fascism are evident within ELAM, especially when it comes to presenting themselves as the saviours of the people, something reminiscing of European inter-war fascism. Nevertheless, lack of violent chauvinistic attitudes coupled with strong campaigning with slogans such as "Cyprus First" managed to elevate their electoral base. This came due to two great opportunities; (a) corruption and economic anxiety (b) the coronavirus pandemic.

Arguably, ELAM is only heading upwards in the next presidential elections (2028), and should their trajectory continue in such a manner and should far-right populism remain a mainstay in European politics the path looks prosperous for the Cypriot far-right party.

⁵⁹ Ulrike Vieten and Scott Poynting, "Contemporary Far Right Racist Populism in Europe", *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 2016 vol.37, pp.533-540.

⁶⁰ Roger Eatwell and Mathew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, (London, 2018), p.65.

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