

The Rise of Extreme Right in Europe: The Case of Greece

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to elaborate and explain the developments in Greece while analyzing the causes of the rise of the extreme right throughout Europe with a comparative perspective. Extreme-right parties are gaining ground by means of their opposition to the current system within the changing political conditions. They adopt a populist terminology targeting the economic instability as well as social and political discontent, thus presenting an alternative to the mainstream parties which fail to fulfill the expectations of the voters. In this regard, the extreme-right demonstrates a solid structure and ideological coherence, putting constant emphasis on xenophobia and immigration issue.

Ethnic nationalism does not only threaten the immigrants in the EU member states, but also poses a threat on the co-existence of European societies by undermining the cultural roots of the European integration. The European Union which once had adopted the motto “unity in diversity” came to a point where diversity is considered as a threat towards social and economic welfare. The main concern regarding the rise of nationalist tendencies is not the mere nominal increase in the support to the extreme-right parties, but also the discourse shift of the central parties towards the right in order to receive support of this wave.

The Golden Dawn Party which entered the Greek parliament with a Nazi discourse and the political environment and other causes that mustered support to it. It is worth a thorough investigation that a political party using Nazi symbols and discourse received considerable amount of support out of the Greek society that had a giant struggle against Nazi ideology during the WW II. Thus, the Greek experience poses an interesting case study both in terms of its unique conditions and the general conditions such as economic crisis and immigration that breed racism throughout Europe.

Rise of Extreme Right in Europe: An Overview

Europe has witnessed a lot of turmoil based on ideologies, feeding on intolerance, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing, racism, chauvinism and anti-Semitism in history. Debates on this issue broadened after the 2nd World War as the Western European societies wanted to develop more tolerant political systems. After 1945, with the defeat of fascism and the victory of liberal democracy, increasingly stable political structures developed across Western Europe. Anti-fascist victory, economic growth, lower unemployment rates and the discrediting of racism all worked against the extreme right parties. However, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, new political movements managed to receive significant levels of support. (Hainsworth, 2008, p. 1) More recently, researchers have noticed that popular support for further European integration has decreased in many European countries. The right-wing political parties which initially had pro-European stances became increasingly Eurosceptic, especially after the enlargement waves towards the Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007. (Mudde, 2007, p. 160)

The contemporary extreme right has emerged in socio-political and historical circumstances that are very different from the emergence of fascist ideologies in the post-war period. In the contemporary incident, liberal democracy has become more established and the Cold War is over. (Hainsworth, 2008, p. 3) Like any other political group, the extreme right has been interpreting and adapting to globalization, European integration, migratory flows and multi-culturalism. It intends to fill the vacuum created by the growth in Western society of a certain post-materialism that has shifted the perspectives through which individuals approach politics and values in a post-industrial world. (Ignazi, 2003, p. 34)

Until 1980s, the literature on the radical right was concerned with the past experiences. However, with the rise of new radical parties in 1980s revived the debate and stimulated further contributions to the literature. Political parties such as “National Front” in France, “Republicans” in Germany and “Flemish Block” in Belgium suggested radical solutions that contradict the nature of liberal democracies on issues like immigration, citizenship and national identity. Xenophobia and skepticism towards other cultures were further stimulated as a part of these policies. (Vural, 2005, p. 23) In 1990s the phenomenon further developed and the radical right parties became consolidated as a frequently encountered pattern throughout Europe.

In spite of the abundance of literature on this matter, information is arguably disorganized and confusing due to research difficulties and terminological confusion. In this regard, one of the main problems is the lack of a widely accepted definition of the “extreme right”. Some scholars use the term to address an ideological framework, while others suggest that “coercion” should be an element if one has to name a movement as “extreme right”. Although the core elements of the phenomenon differ for each scholar, certain elements such as nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democratic tendencies and advocacy for strong state are associated with “extreme right” most frequently. (Vural, 2005, p. 23) The controversy on the definition leads to the usage of other terms such as neo-fascism, new radical right, ultra-nationalism, new populism etc. (Vural, 2005, p. 25)

Several theories intend to explain support for radical right parties. One of these theories is the “normal pathology thesis” that adopt the idea is that when the society transforms fundamentally and rapidly, this transformation leads to a detachment between those who benefit the change and those who are disadvantaged. (Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy*, 2010) According to this view, the second group tends to vote for populist parties where they perceive a remedy for their frustration. Another approach is Ignazi’s thesis which suggests that parties on the extreme right in Western Europe are post-materialist rather than fascist or neo-fascist. As such, they do not seek to revive the myth of fascism, but they attempt to respond to the needs and demands of post-industrial society. (Ignazi, 2003, pp. 2-3)

In order to develop a comprehensive perspective, the radical right parties of Europe can be classified according to their characteristics in reference to their particular political history. In countries such as France, Italy, Austria and Belgium, the extreme right has achieved a considerable amount of success both numerically and over a relatively long period of time – even entering government in some cases. Switzerland and the Netherlands are arguably the most noticeable incidents on the extreme or far right advancement. On the other hand, Scandinavia constitutes a special case where the relevant actors have emerged as right-wing populist movements, and later radicalized their discourse on issues of immigration and asylum seeking. Germany and Britain can be classified together, since the extreme right has been marginalized. Far right groups were absorbed by the mainstream right or reduced to the fringes of the political system with very limited voter support. (Ignazi, 2003, p. 196)

Finally, three Mediterranean countries (Greece, Portugal and Spain) constitute a special case, on common grounds such as extended experiences of state authoritarianism, late introduction of liberal democracy, delayed entry into the European Union and marginalization of the contemporary extreme right. These countries became democratic after having been ruled by right-authoritarian regimes for many decades: Portugal and Spain uninterruptedly since the 1930s, and Greece from 1967 to 1974, but with a ‘low intensity’ democratic regime in the post-war years until 1967. In the mid-1970s all three abandoned their fascist-like regimes. (Linz & Stephan, 1996) Notwithstanding, or because of this heritage, no sizeable extreme right party has ever emerged. (Ignazi, 2003, p. 187)

This article claims that the economic crisis in Europe hit Greece very heavily; this bottleneck led the rise of the extreme ideologies and the parties in and brought tremendous losses to mainstream parties. In order to understand the transformation of Greek politics from center to the extremism, this article aims to focus on the rise of Golden Dawn– fascist and racist organization in Greece as a result of the economic recession in the country. This rise will be pointed out by mentioning the traditionally marginal position of extreme right in Greek politics.

The Rise of Golden Dawn

Golden Dawn is a racist and neo-Nazi organization founded in the beginning of 1980s whose members are accused of carrying out acts of violence and hate crimes against the immigrants and their opponents. At the time of crisis when the Greek state lost its absolute control, the party members operated in certain 'troubled' areas of the capital city and offers security to local residents. Golden Dawn adopts a highly ethnocentric language with the motto "Greece belongs to Greeks". They benefited from the collapse of trust among the EU citizens when most of the Greeks lost their confidence in Europe. (Eurobarometer 78, 2012)

Since 1981 elections in Greek politics have been dominated by two major parties on the center left and on the center right (PASOK and the New Democracy). Since then, the Greek politics have been marked with populism, favoritism and corruption. Mismanagement of the country created the domestic factors of the most severe economic crisis in the history of modern Greece.

When the economic crisis in the US spread to Europe in 2008, it was clear that Greece was one of the first countries to get effected with its weak economy and high public debt. In its first years, the gravity of the crisis was underestimated domestically and internationally. Greece took the first bailout package in 2010 and the second in 2012, and faced with harsh austerity measures which require wage cuts, higher taxes, reforms and privatization.

The international supervisors of the Greek economy (Troika – European Commission, European Central Bank, and IMF) started to dictate economy policies to the Greek governments. This was humiliating for Greek public who started to suffer from austerity measures and harsh economic conditions. Thus, the mainstream parties which have dominated the Greek politics nearly for forty years with populist policies were punished by the Greek public in 2012. 2012 May elections brought the end of the old party system in Greece, on the grounds that the extreme parties both on the left and on the right gained significant support while the center parties lost their traditional dominant positions, as a reaction to their support to austerity measures and bailouts.

The most striking result was the rise of the far right party- Golden Dawn. A party that received merely 0.29 % of the vote (19,624 votes) in the 2009 elections rose to 6.97 % (441,018 votes) in May 2012. (Ellinas, 2003, p. 1) This was totally different from the voting pattern of the Greek society since post-authoritarian far right groups have been absorbed by the mainstream right or relegated to the fringes of the political system with very limited voter support. (Ellinas, 2003, p. 1) However, with the loosening of state authority in Greece as a result of economic crisis, the party found the grounds for getting steamed up.

The first electoral success was their 5.3% vote in Athens municipal elections and they succeeded to enter into Greek parliament in 2012 by getting 6.97 % of the total votes and securing 18 seats. (Triandafyllidou & Kouki, 2012, p. 2) This rise was the first and most

significant victory of the extreme right in Greek politics and created a new era which is worth exploring and therefore began to attract scholarly attention. Despite the fact that their members involved in violence and hate crimes against the immigrants, minorities, political opponents and LGBT people, the opinion polls indicate that the Golden Dawn would receive 11- 12 % of the votes if there was an election in the near future. (Ellinas, 2003, p. 2)

The most important reasons of this rise are:

1. **Economic Crisis** – Extreme ideologies and the movements tend to rise at times of economic crises and recessions. The rise of fascism in Europe in 1930s, after the Great Depression is the most significant evident of this tendency. As a result of the debt crisis in Greece, traditional central parties lost their positions and led the rise in right and left wing extremism.

Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2009, wages have fallen by a third and the official unemployment rate has reached 25% and half of Greece's young population is in search of a job to survive. The prices of basic commodities have risen dramatically and more than three million people in the country are left under 300 Euros per a month for a living. (Megaloudi, 2012)

People have lost hope for the future as a result of unemployment, poverty and deepening recessions. (Tzogopoulos, 2013) According to Eurobarometer 78 (2012), Greeks have one of the highest pessimism degree among Europeans. 78 % of the Greeks believe that the impact of the crisis on employment rates has not reached its peak yet, and the worst is still to come. (Eurobarometer 78, 2012, p. 6) Also, the rate of uncertainty is significantly high among the Greek population. 70 % of Greek population “live day by day” and believe that their current situation does not allow them to make future plans. 88 % of the Greeks believe that politics is not working out in their country. Having one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe, the Greeks started to question the existence of illegal immigrants and perceive them as a threat for ethnic Greeks. Unemployment is a phenomenon which is highly associated with the support for the extreme right.

2. **Xenophobia and the immigration** - Since 1990s, with the collapse of the communism and the emergence of new states in the Balkans, Greece has been transformed into a “country of immigrants” from a “country of emigrants”. Immigration did not start accidentally in 2012; it has been the reality of Greek state and the society since 1990. However, the economic recession and the high unemployment rates led a serious xenophobia and anti- immigrant discourse among the Greek public. Currently about 0.8 million of 11 million Greek population is of foreign origin. In addition to the Albanian immigrants in the first wave, Greece has been faced with immigrants coming from Asia and Africa by crossing Turkish- Greek border. (Triandafyllidou & Kouki, 2012, p. 2) Integration of immigrants became a tougher question with the effect ongoing financial

bottleneck. According to a survey, 75% of Greeks associate the rise of criminality with foreigners who they believe to damage the national identity and civilization of the country. (Tzogopoulos, 2013) Koronaiou & Sakellariou stated that the ‘urban myths’ have helped Golden Dawn to build its profile among the Greeks, as an organization which assists the Greek people, fights against the immigrants and substitutes for the increasingly absent Greek state. (2013, s. 333) the Golden Dawn is perceived by many as the defender of Greek nation, a helper of Greek people when it is needed, protecting ethnic Greeks from the threats of immigrants., this impression is further corroborated through urban legends and by the mainstream media.

Also, the party organizes “only for Greeks” events such as free food distribution and blood donation campaigns which attract attention of the public. Criticizing the government for providing free health services for immigrants, Golden Dawn initiated a blood donation campaign and their slogan was ‘Donate blood – Save a Greek Soul’, ‘Blood bank and bank for platelets, only for Greeks, who need our help’, (Koronaiou & Sakellariou, 2013, s. 333) Free food distribution to the ethnic Greeks is another event. Party members ask for identity cards before the delivery thus excluding immigrants from their service. Another concern of the Golden Dawn is to provide job for unemployed Greeks. They claim that each immigrant worker means an unemployed Greek; so in order to combat with unemployment, immigrants who “steal” jobs from Greeks must be sent from the country. Prominent figures of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn also advocate for ‘placing landmines along the border with Turkey’ in order to prevent migration and to ‘throw immigrants and their children out in the streets’ to open places for ethnic Greeks in schools and hospitals. They are not bothered to be called as racists. The leader of the party once commented that Greece belonged to Greeks and they were proud to be Greeks; and if it meant racism, then they would accept to be racists. (Swarts & Karakatsanis, 2013, s. 112)

3. **LAOS’ attitude towards austerity measures and support of LAOS for Papademos government** - The pro-austerity stance of LAOS helped Golden Dawn to attract the extreme right voters who are particularly against the austerity plans and bail-outs. By supporting the unity government headed by technocrat Lucas Papademos LAOS lost their electoral base and Golden Dawn succeeded to attract the LAOS voters who were in search of an alternative with its anti-austerity and anti-memorandum stance.
4. **The loss of credibility to Europe** - According to the latest Euro barometer results, Greeks have lost their confidence in the European Union. When the future of strong Europe is considered, Greeks have the lowest score of perception among the EU members. Besides, they have the highest score of ‘distrust in the EU’ with 88 %. Also, 63 % of the Greeks do not feel close to the other European nations, and this score is also the highest among all Europeans. Greeks do not regard the European Union as a ‘democratic’ ‘efficient’ and ‘protective’ organization. They blame the EU since the lack of crisis management in Euro

zone put Greece into an uncertain position. Especially, Austerity measures imposed by Troika worsened the economic condition of the Greek society and created discontent among the public. Therefore, Greek people punished pro-austerity and pro-European parties in May and June 2012 elections by voting for the extreme parties.

Concluding Remarks

Since 1981, Greek politics have been dominated by the mainstream parties – PASOK and New Democracy, leaving very little room for electoral victory of extreme parties. It can be stated that the extreme ideologies have been absorbed by those center parties. The far right political parties remained marginal by showing insufficient electoral success since the collapse of the dictatorship in 1974. Only in the times of national propaganda such as “Macedonia name issue”, they succeeded to attract more voters by using populist rhetoric.

The collapse of the communism and emergence of new states in the Balkans created new challenges for the Greek state. People from neighboring countries, especially from Albania started to pass the borders in search of a better life. This wave was followed by African and Asian immigrants who could pass Turkish- Greek border in order to reach Europe. This wave of immigration together with the economic crisis since 2009 made Greece a good ground for rise of extreme right.

Obviously, the vast majority of the Greek citizens are disturbed by the deeds of Golden Dawn. Recently, a campaign was initiated on twitter to boycott corporations that place advertisements on hate-speech promoting TV shows.

Rise of Golden Dawn and increasing hate crimes in Greece also arouse anxiety among the European Union organs. European Commissioner for Human Right Nils Muižnieks paid a visit to Greece on February 2013 and wrote a report on hate crimes and intolerance in Greece. The report states that urgent action has to be taken in order to avoid future abuses. The Commissioner calls on the authorities to condemn firmly and unequivocally all instances of hate speech and hate crime. According to the report, far-reaching and systematic anti-racism and human rights awareness-raising campaigns should also be implemented, targeting particularly young people and schools. (Muižnieks, 2013) Greek Ministry of Justice declared that they will take measures in order to prevent hate crimes. With these measures, the parliamentarians who are involved in hate speech and hate crime will lose their political rights. Further sanctions will be on the table if the leader of the party takes part in these actions.

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Cycles of Protest and the “Rise of the Extremes”: Political Violence in Greece in the Era of the Economic Crisis

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Abstract

This paper will outline the political violence in Greece in the post-crisis era, in order to deconstruct the theory of the “age of extremes” that currently dominates the country’s political discourse. Indeed, following the theory’s reasoning will examine both left-wing and right wing political violence, focusing on the recent upsurge of left-wing terrorism and the racist violence of Golden Dawn, respectively. Subsequently, through the assessment of the reasons behind its dominance, this paper will argue that although there is an evident rise of extremism in Greece nowadays, the “age of extremes” is not only just a narrative, but a dangerous one.

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Introduction

The end of the first decade of the 21st century was marked by the global economic crisis and its devastating effects, with European Union as one of the most affected regions, and Greece, in particular, as one of the states that have been hit harder. Actually, the facts today, as the country has entered the sixth consecutive year of recession, are rather staggering; indeed, the unemployment rate is at 27 percent in total and at 61 percent among those aged under 24; the one-third of Greek citizens have been already considered below the poverty line, and with another 27, 7 percent on the brink of poverty or social exclusion¹; the 20 percent total shrank of GDP that has been witnessed since 2008; and the largest internal devaluation of the country since the 1930's². Moreover, the adoption by the Greek government of the first Memorandum of Understanding in May 2010, as drafted by the “Troika” (IMF, European Commission, and European Central Bank), in order for Greece to avoid the bailout has prompted the application of some of the harshest austerity measures and policies ever implemented in the Eurozone. As a result, this exploding combination of the economic crisis and the neoliberal policies has triggered a large wave of protests, which can be seen nowadays as the most massive cycle of contention of modern Greece. Besides, it also caused the emergence and intensification of a number of different forms of political violence that currently coexist and interrelate. Thus, this paper will outline the post-crisis rise of political violence in Greece and the construction of the discourse of the “age of extremes” that it facilitated. Indeed, by the use of the above reasoning this paper will assess left-wing and right-wing violence in Greece, and then the state’s repression, in an attempt to deconstruct the current dominance of “the age of extremes” discourse in the country.

Left-wing violence

The last years, and especially after the December 2008 and the massive wave of protest and rioting that the murder of a teenager by a policeman caused, Greece has seen an unprecedented rise of left-wing terrorism. In fact, a number of new terrorist groups emerged from the sparks of the “revolt”. These groups are nowadays recognized as the “second generation” of Greek terrorist groups; that is, to name the most important, the Revolutionary Struggle (RS), the Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire (CCF), and the Sect of Revolutionaries (SR).

Nonetheless, left-wing terrorism has surprisingly been one of the main forms of political violence that Greece has confronted with for more than four decades. Indeed, Greece has witnessed the appearance of more than 250 terrorist groups since the first

¹ Frangouli-Argyris, J. (2013). “Les misérables of Greece”, *Huffington Post*, March 11.

² Douzinas, C. (2012). “What Now for Greece – Collapse or Resurrection”, *The Guardian*, March 5.

terrorist attack in the country in 1975³, hosting among others one of the most notorious groups in Europe; namely, the Revolutionary Organization November 17 (17N). Furthermore, the number of attacks in Greece claimed by left-wing terrorist groups has been continuously escalating: from 17 attacks in the 1970s (1968-1980) to 148 attacks in the 2000s (2001-2010)⁴. Specifically, the facts from the last decade (2001-2010) reveal that only in this period 68 different groups have claimed responsibility for terrorist attacks in Greece⁵, and that approximately the 82 per cent of the total attacks claimed by left wing terrorist organizations in Western are attributed to Greek groups⁶.

Consequently, from 1975 to the capture of the two most important groups of the “first generation” in 2002-2003 (17N and Revolutionary Armed Struggle), a vast number of terrorist attacks took place in the country, with the Greek state powerless to proceed to any arrest for almost three decades. Nonetheless, the final arrest of those two groups caused the temporary decline of terrorist attacks⁷; something that has utterly changed since the December of 2008. In fact, the emergence of the “second generation” of terrorist organizations, like the CCF and the SR have made it clear that terrorism in Greece has deeper roots than it was previously supposed. What is more, the latest findings of the Greek anti-terrorist agency are far from disquieting. Hence, the arrest of 20 individuals that have taken part in actions of CCF two years ago, with a number of different nuclei of radicals still escaping the arrest, and the substantial artillery that has already been seized in three towns in Greece and in 12 different hideouts have made it clear that dealing with this new generation of terrorism will be quite demanding⁸. Likewise, the recent appearance of more groups that have assumed responsibility for attacks in places like the tube station of Aigaleo (February 2012) and a popular mall in the northern suburbs of Athens (January 2013), as well as for targeting journalists and parties’ officers (January 2013), reveals a tendency towards escalating of terrorist action.

Right-wing violence

In contrast to the continuous presence of left-wing violence in Greek political scene of the post-dictatorial era, right-wing violence can be recognized as a fairly unusual phenomenon; in reality, instances of the latter were regular in the eras during and after

³ Karyotis, G. (2007). “Securitization of Greek Terrorism and Arrest of the ‘Revolutionary Organization November 17’”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42:3, 271.

⁴ RAND Corporation (2013), *RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI)*, Retrieved from <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) (2013), *Global Terrorism Database*, Retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

⁷ Xenakis, S. (2012). “A New Dawn? Change and Continuity in Political Violence in Greece”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24: 3, 437--64.

⁸ Marnelos, G. (2011). “Fear for new attacks from the CCF” [Φοβούνται νέες δράσεις από τους Πυρήνες], *Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia*, March 20.

the Civil war (1943-1950) and the Military Junta (1967-1974). Nonetheless, we should highlight the case of 1979, when a nucleus of extreme right was arrested for terrorist activity⁹. What is striking is that one of its prominent members was the founder and current leader (Nikolaos Michaloliakos) of a radical right-wing, frequently recognized also as neo-nazist, political party; that is, the Golden Dawn. In particular, the recent electoral success of the party in the consecutive national elections of May and June 2012, which had as a result the current presence of 18 MPs in the Greek parliament (and 7% nationally), was received as a shock by the largest part of the country. Founded in 1980, Golden Dawn has always been, along with the whole array of radical right-wing parties, a marginal political force in electoral terms. Currently, the fact that according to the most opinion polls, Golden Dawn, a party whose “violence is not merely theoretical or rhetorical, but enacted on the streets”¹⁰, is recognized as the third largest party in Greece makes its case rather worrying and thought-provoking.

Furthermore, group’s clandestine and street violence have become profoundly present the last five years, and especially since 2009 and the mobilizations against immigrants in the neighborhood of Agios Panteleimonas, in central Athens. Hence, by exploiting the rising xenophobia and the security void in the Greek capital, the party won a seat in Athens City Council in 2010¹¹. Moreover, there are several signs of an explosion in racist violence the last years and especially since June’s national elections, as according to rights groups the number of attacks against immigrants runs into hundreds¹². These findings vigorously demonstrate the reasons why “Golden Dawn represents a real rupture with the country’s democratic traditions and the most serious threat to it since 1974.”¹³ In fact, the group’s racialism, its paramilitary activity against the immigrants, its anti-Semitism, and its anti-communism brings more and more to mind the German Nazi ideology¹⁴. Indeed, attacks have been expanded in order to include also the gay and leftist communities. Besides, the group’s enmity has been also directed to what it has acknowledged as not ‘real Greeks’, as traitors of the nation¹⁵. What is more, facts such as the attempt to open a blood bank only for Greeks, the food banks only for Greeks in Syntagma square, and the inauguration of a programme of education for Greek children only, further underline the danger that Golden Dawn epitomizes for contemporary Greek society.

⁹ Xenakis, S. (2012). op. cit., 440.

¹⁰ Mazower, M. (2013). “A New Age of Extremism? Historical Reflections on the Politics of the Present Crisis”, unpublished paper, American College of Athens.

¹¹ Wheeler, W. (2012). “Europe’s New Fascists”, *The New York Times*, November 17.

¹² Becatoros, E. (2012). “Greece Racist Attacks Increase Amid Financial Crisis”, *Huffington Post*, December 11.

¹³ Mazower, M. (2013). op. cit.

¹⁴ Penny, L. (2012). “It’s not Rhetoric to Draw parallels with Nazism”, *The Independent*, August 30.

¹⁵ Psarras, N. (2012). *The Black Bible of Golden Dawn [Η Μαύρη Βίβλος της Χρυσής Αυγής]*. Athens: Polis.

State repression

In this point and in order to holistically depict the political violence in Greece during the economic crisis, someone has to refer, as well, to state's repression policies and practices. Primarily, it should be highlighted the role of state violence in the "rebellion" of December 2008, which has stigmatized the modern era, when the police officer shot and killed Alexandros Grigoropoulos. Nonetheless, the murder of the teenager "acted [more] as a catalyst for the expression of various forms of social discontent"¹⁶, than "simply as a reaction to police brutality"¹⁷. In addition, it should also be noted the historical hostility, distrust, and the feeling of civil disobedience towards the police authorities of a large part of the Greek society, as a result of the long period of state repression, especially towards the Left and its advocates, during the periods of the Civil war and the Military junta; which in fact, constituted the origin of the December events, according to a number of scholars¹⁸.

However, state repression has been evidently intensified since the aftermath of the Greek December; actually, the initial condemnation by the government of New Democracy of the police officer's action and the passive monitoring of the riots, quickly turned into a vehement support of repression and the framing of the event as an accident, mainly as a response to calls of "law and order" from the other parliamentary parties¹⁹. Similarly, when PASOK came to power, in October 2009, encouraged the construction of a discourse of "a war-like [...] financial emergency"²⁰, that exploited the ongoing crisis to interpret every protest and contentious action against the government as opposed to an imaginary common good. This narration of the crisis has been the dominant discourse of the post-memorandum era in general, and has been further utilized to enforce state repression and the Troika's drafted neoliberal policies.

Hence, the last years have been marked, not only by an upsurge of the level of left- and right-wing violence, but also of state's repression policy. In particular, according to Xenakis, an important source of radicalization and resentment has been the severely disproportionate use of violence by the armed riot police (the MAT), which co-exists with the weakness of the state to prevent or punish such violence²¹. A characteristic instance of police violence was the torture of fifteen anti-fascist

¹⁶ Sotiris, P. (2010). "Rebels with a Cause: The December 2008 Greek Youth Movement as the Condensation of Deeper Social and Political Contradictions", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34:1, 204.

¹⁷ Ibid, 206.

¹⁸ Kalyvas, S. (2008). "Why is Athens burning?", *International Herald Tribune*, December 11; Veremis, T. (2008). "Individual and Collective Responsibility" [Ατομική και Συλλογική Ευθύνη], *Kathimerini*, December 14.

¹⁹ Kanellopoulos, K. (2012). "The Accidental Eruption of an Anarchist Protest", in S. Seferiades, and H. Johnston (eds.), *Violent Protest, Contentious Politics, and the Neoliberal State*, Surrey: Ashgate, 176.

²⁰ Vradis, A., and D. Dalakoglou (2010). "After December: Spatial Legacies of the 2008 Athens Uprising", *Upping the Anti*, 10.

²¹ Xenakis, S. (2012). op. cit., 445.

protesters in the General Police Directorate in Athens (GADA) in October 2012, after their arrest during a clash with Golden Dawn's supporters²². More recent examples of the state's repression and the need of the current government to enforce in the society a "law and order" programme have been: the evacuation of occupied buildings associated with the anarchist movement of Athens (December 2012), the abuse and torture of four anarchists - wanted also for participating in CCF's terrorist actions - that were arrested for a double bank robbery in the city of Kozani (February 2013) (Baboulias, 2013), and lastly, the brutal intervention of the armed riot police in the village of Ierissos after the residents' opposition to a controversial gold mining project (March 2013)²³.

What is more, there has been a critical concern over the accusations that suggest a deep infiltration and influence of Golden Dawn in Greek police's apparatus²⁴. Actually, there have been instances that Golden Dawn assumed the role of law enforcement in the streets of Athens. Alas, there has also been a report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Nils Muiznieks, which argues that there have been strong evidence of police and Golden Dawn's collaboration; indeed, in a period of eight months (January – September 2012) there were documented 15 incidents (out of 87 total attacks), where police and racist violence were interlinked²⁵. Besides, with reference to the last national elections of June 2012, Golden Dawn polled 19-24 percent in the Athens' wards where the police voted in large numbers²⁶.

The "age of extremes"

This tremendous rise of Golden Dawn and its impact in the country's political life, along with the augmentation of left-wing violence, have induced some to claim that Greece experiences a new "age of extremism". The above concept was coined by Hobsbawm in his attempt to describe the interwar era of the great ideological and economic confrontations, primarily between fascism and communism, and in a second phase, between capitalism and communism²⁷. In the present day, the idea of the two extremes is also frequently employed to draw comparisons between the contemporary conditions in Greece and that in Weimar Republic in Germany.

²² Margaronis, M. (2012a). "Greek anti-Fascist Protesters 'Tortured by Police' After Golden Dawn Clash", *The Guardian*, October 9.

²³ Kathimerini (2013). "Skouries Mine Dispute Intensifies as Riot Police Move in on Nearby Village," March 7.

²⁴ Chatzistefanou, A. (2012). "Golden Dawn Has Infiltrated Greek Police, Claims Officer", *The Guardian*, October 26.

²⁵ Mason, P. (2012b). "Greek Police Accused Over Racism and Asylum Rights", *BBC*, October 24.

²⁶ Margaronis, M. (2012b). "Fear and Loathing in Athens: The Rise of Golden Dawn and the Far Right", *The Guardian*, October 26.

²⁷ Hobsbawm, E. (1994). *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*. London: Abacus.)

These attempts have been fabricated in order to present as similar as possible the two “extremes” of the political arc, especially in terms of the use of violence as their *modus operandi*. In fact, the first attempt to associate the contentious repertoires of the Left and the Right in Greece was made by the first government of Metapolitefsi in 1974, via the employment of the discourse of “anarcho-juntism”²⁸. Thus, this narrative aims to juxtapose the above violent extremes with a moderate and non-violent center, which is comprehended as the best possible scenario of a country’s governance²⁹; that has been the case currently in Greece too. In effect, the “age of extremes” discourse has been recurrently used by New Democracy, mainly, and PASOK, in order to delegitimize the parties of the Left, and especially SYRIZA, which is considered according to some opinion polls as the possible winner of the next national elections. In final analysis, this narration for the role of the far-left and its association with SYRIZA is an attempt of the coalition government to fortify its neoliberal policies, downgrade the widespread protest feeling and the various contentious actors, and devaluate the main opposition party through connecting it with violent phenomena, such as that of left-wing terrorism³⁰.

Conclusions

Through, the outline of the different forms of political violence and the actors involved in Greece in the post-crisis era, this paper attempted to review the tumultuous political scene of the country. Without a doubt, the unprecedented upsurge, on the one hand, of left-wing terrorism, and, on the other, of Golden Dawn’s racist violence, have severely stigmatized the period; in reality, the striking resemblance of the current phase of Greek politics with that of Italy’s in the 1970’s³¹, where the vicious antagonism of the left and right extremism culminated eventually in a spiral of terrorist violence between the two opposing camps, make its future seem quite ominous. Besides, the intensification of state’s repression practices has been another worrying trajectory of the recent period that further obfuscates the already perplexed, political and economic, situation of Greece. Nonetheless, in response to theory of the “age of extremes” and its dominance in the country’s current political discourse, we should unambiguously identify it more as a narrative, which was solidified in order to legitimize the EU’s and the Greek governments’ neoliberal policies and to downplay the oppositional and protest voices, and less as an actual fact.

²⁸ Ios (2012). “Historical Adaptations of the Theory of the ‘Two Extremes’”, *Efimerida ton Syntaktwn*, November 10.

²⁹ Kouki, H. (2011). “Who Is to Blame in Greece? The Two Extremes and the Gravity of the Centre,” Global Governance Programme, European University Institute.

³⁰ Mazower, M. (2013). *op. cit.*

³¹ Fritzsche, P. (1989). “Terrorism in the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy: Legacy of the ‘68 Movement or ‘burden of Fascism’?”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1:4, 466--81.

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