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The Far Right in Greece. Paramilitarism, Organized Crime and the Rise of 'Golden Dawn'

Abstract. The article unravels the ties between conservatism, the state, and the far right in Greece. It explores the complex social and political reasons which facilitated the emergence of far-right groups in Greece during the civil war and have allowed them to survive for seven decades and to flourish from time to time. The author pays particular attention to paramilitarism as a distinct component of the Greek far right. He follows the activities of 'Golden Dawn' and other far-right groups, in particular their paramilitary branches. To the wider public, among the most shocking aspects of the rise of 'Golden Dawn' was the use of violence by its paramilitary branch, *tagmata efodou*. The article examines the far right's relationship to the state and the security services, and explores its overall role in Greek politics and society. He demonstrates how an understanding of the decades following the civil war are indispensable to making sense of recent developments.

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In Greece's national elections of 2012 the openly neofascist 'Golden Dawn' party (*Xrysi Avgi*) won an unprecedented 7% of the vote and sent a total of 18 of its members to parliament (MPs). That success created a flurry among scholars, experts, and politicians who rushed to explain the meteoric rise of the far right in Greece. While such publications varied widely in quality and scope they were agreed on two points. First, they declared that 'Golden Dawn' was a completely novel phenomenon in Greek politics. If scholars saw 'Golden Dawn' as an aberration with attitudes and methods having no roots in Greek political tradition,[1] similar views were even more pronounced among the political class who rushed to characterize the actions and politics of 'Golden Dawn' as 'un-Greek'. Politicians and experts alike argued that people who had voted for 'Golden Dawn' were misguided citizens who had little or no idea of the party's

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[1] Sofia Vasilopoulou / Daphne Halkiopoulou, The Golden Dawn's Nationalist Solution. Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Greece, New York/NY 2015, 2.

true nature. The 'foreignness' of 'Golden Dawn' to Greek political culture was further underlined by references to the effective absence of a popular far-right party in the pre-crisis period.[2] That circumstance had led scholars to argue that Greece had been effectively 'devoid of any perceptible extreme right presence'. In fact the absence of a popular far-right party had been attributed to the 'legacy of the authoritarian regime' that 'had a counter-effect on the development of nostalgic political organizations […] [and] distanced the mass public from its traditional authoritarian and neo-fascist heritage'.[3]

The second point on which scholars and experts agreed was that each associated the profound economic crisis that hit Greece in 2010 with the rise of the far right. According to that narrative the crisis delegitimized the political status quo because it broke the social contract between the political establishment and civil society.[4] The 'breach of the social contract' was accompanied by 'declining levels of trust in state institutions, resulting in party system collapse'.[5] According to that argument the situation eventually led a significant segment of the population to question representative democracy itself and to opt for an authoritarian solution. Other accounts underscored additional factors such as the refugee crisis and the ghettoization of inner city areas, which too they saw as catalysts for the rise of 'Golden Dawn'.[6]

Such scholarly approaches to the far right are not confined to Greece, for as a recent study notes:

> 'The flurry of scholarly writing that has emerged in response to these political developments has been dominated by work in comparative politics, which has tended to focus on ideological taxonomies, comparative electoral performances, and the ability of far-right parties to mobilise popular opposition to immigration, European integration, economic restructuring and globalization.'[7]

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[2] Venizelos: Den einai fasistes oloi oi psifoforoi (Not all voters are fascists), *Politis*, 23 October 2014, http://politis.com.cy/article/benizelos-den-einai-fasistes-oloi-oi-psifoforoi. All internet references were accessed on 14 November 2018.

[3] Piero Ignazi, Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe, Oxford 2003, 197.

[4] Maik Fielitz, Beyond the Fringe. Unfolding the Dynamics of Golden Dawn's Rise, in: Johannes Gold / Sebastian Goll / Martin Mlinaric, eds, Minorities under Attack. Othering and Right Wing Extremism in Southeastern European Societies, Wiesbaden 2016, 259-260; Antonis Ellinas, Neo-Nazism in an Established Democracy. The Persistence of Golden Dawn in Greece, *South European Society and Politics* 20, no. 1 (2015), 1-20; Antonis Ellinas, The Rise of Golden Dawn. The New Face of the Far Right in Greece, *South European Society and Politics* 18, no. 4 (2013), 543-565.

[5] Daphne Halikiopoulou / Sofia Vasilopoulou, Breaching the Social Contract. Crises of Democratic Representation and Patterns of Extreme Right Party Support, *Government and Opposition* 53, no. 1 (2018), 26-50.

[6] Cf. the overview in Carlo Ruza, The Radical Right in Southern Europe, in: Jens Rydgren ed, Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right, Oxford 2018, 505-521.

[7] Richard Saull et al., The Longue Durée of the Far-Right. An Introduction, in: Richard Saull et al., eds, The Longue Durée of the Far-Right. An International Historical Sociology,

A number of scholars have criticized that approach and suggested that to explain the emergence of the far right more attention ought to be paid to the intersection between 'mainstream' and 'radical' politics.[8] Such scholars have called for more highlighting of 'the historical development, traditions, and political cultures of the far right parties'.[9] John E. Richardson for example noted that, 'by adopting the methods of political science and basing analysis on predominantly contemporaneous accounts of party materials, too many studies […] have stripped discourses from their historic contexts' and as a result, 'the contemporary far-right is, effectively, isolated or detached from history, such that the enduring structural connections between politics and economics and the far-right are obscured and the evolving character of the far-right not properly explained'.[10]

Until recently the study of the Greek far right had suffered from a similar set of ailments.[11] Newer studies have tried to address the lacuna and to shed light on the crooked paths of the postwar far right and its ties to the state.[12] The purpose of the present article is to build on and extend that earlier scholarship by evidentializing the 'longue durée' of the contemporary Greek far right and the tangled relationships among the state and the security services on the one side, and far-right groupings and paramilitary associations on the other, since the immediate postwar period.[13]

London 2015, 1-20, 3-4.

[8] Aristotle Kallis, When Fascism Became Mainstream. The Challenge of Extremism in Times of Crisis, *Fascism. Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015), 1-24, 23-24.

[9] Nigel Copsey, 'Fascism … But with an Open Mind.' Reflections on the Contemporary Far Right in (Western) Europe, *Fascism. Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013), 1-18, 1-7, 12.

[10] John E. Richardson, Racial Populism in British Fascist Discourse. The Case of COMBAT and the British National Party (1960-1967), in: Ruth Wodak / John E. Richardson, eds, Analysing Fascist Discourse. European Fascism in Talk and Text, London 2013, 181-201, 201.

[11] Antonis A. Ellinas, LAOS and the Greek Extreme Right since 1974, in: Andrea Mammone / Emmanuel Godin / Brian Jenkins, Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe. From Local to Transnational, London 2012, 124-140, 124.

[12] Stratos N. Dordanas, I Germaniki Stoli stin Nafthalini. Epivioseis tou Dosilogismou stin Makedonia 1945-1974 (The German uniform in the closet. Continuities of collaborationism in Macedonia 1945-1974), Athens 2011; Evi Gkotzaridis, A Pacifist's Life and Death. Grigorios Lambrakis and Greece in the Long Shadow of Civil War, Newcastle 2016; Evi Gkotzaridis, 'Who Really Rules this Country?' Collusion between State and Deep State in Post-Civil War Greece and the Murder of Independent MP Grigorios Lambrakis, 1958-1963, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 28, no. 2 (2017), 646-673; I Akrodexia sto Fos tis Istorias (The far right in the light of history), special issue, *Arheiotaxeio* 16 (2014); Dimitris Hristopoulos, ed, To vathi kratos stin simerini Ellada kai i akrodexia. Astinomia, dikaiosini, stratos, ekklisia (The deep state and the far right in contemporary Greece. Police, justice, army, church), Athens 2014.

[13] Greece has three intelligence agencies—one that is affiliated to the police, another affiliated to the army, and a third that is affiliated to the ministry of the interior. The three services are nominally independent from each other but retain back-door connections and political ties. That is a legacy of the civil war and politicians' incorrigible penchant for creating more and more public sector jobs for their protégés.

In the following I shall unravel and analyse the longstanding ties linking 'mainstream' conservatism, the state, and the far right and explore the complex social and political reasons which facilitated the emergence of small far-right groups. Such groups sprang up in the aftermath of the Second World War and the subsequent Greek civil war, and I shall examine what it is that has allowed them to survive and flourish periodically for more than 70 years. My particular focus is paramilitarism as a distinct component of the Greek far right, for paramilitary groups played a pivotal role in postwar politics. Such groups were first mobilized during the civil war (1946-49) as auxiliary forces that operated alongside the army. In the aftermath of the war the same groups were incorporated into the political and military structures of the country under the guise of National Guard Defence Battalions (*Tagmata Ethnofilakis Aminis*, TEA) and the various 'para-state' organizations that acted in conjunction with the police. Such groups were dissolved in the aftermath of the junta, and the whole TEA system was officially abolished in 1982. However, the impact of the paramilitary groups outlasted their institutional presence. The groups left a pernicious legacy of vigilantism, collusion with organized crime and a regressive mentality which sees the security services as the custodians of the nation. Operatives then feel entitled to act outside the law if they consider the country to be under threat. In fact, one of the most shocking aspects of 'Golden Dawn''s rise was its paramilitary branch's use of violence. The article follows the activities and tactics of such groups, examines their relationships with the state and with security services, and explores their role in recent Greek politics.

The Far Right from the Civil War to the Aftermath of the Junta

On 21 June 1945 a group of 'concerned citizens' interrupted a performance of a left-wing theatre troupe in Athens, shouting 'Down with the Bulgarians! Down with the communists!'.[14] They proceeded to attack the actors, savagely assault the director of the performance and wreck the theatre. The attack was part of the 'white terror', the name given to a period of organized violence against political left-wingers that occurred between March 1945 and April 1946.[15] Certain political conservatives saw the rise of the left as an existential threat. The postwar Greek state was profoundly weak and relied on British and American financial and military support. Yet, at the same time the country's foreign backers were unwilling to become involved in a full-blown civil war. Conservative elites

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[14] Ta aimatira gegonota ton theatron (The bloody events in the theatre), *Rizospastis*, 22 June 1945.

[15] David H. Close, The Reconstruction of the Right-Wing State, in: David H. Close, ed, The Greek Civil War 1943-1950. Studies of Polarization, London 1993, 156-89.

were therefore prompted to forge an unofficial, subrosa alliance with irregular non-state armed actors in the form of bandit gangs, criminal organizations, and paramilitary crews. The pacts between the government and such actors allowed the conservative faction to act against the left with relative impunity, while retaining plausible deniability in the face of mounting international pressures.[16]

Nonetheless the illegal organizations were not mere tools in the hands of the conservative faction. Such groups' outlook, motives and ideas were often radically different from those of the 'establishment' conservatives, as was their social composition. Far-right groups drew their members from the lower middle class and peasants. The majority of far-right activists in northern Greece were 'workmen, pensioners, shopkeepers […] who fund the organizations with their meagre income'.[17] The Italian and German occupation during the Second World War had eradicated huge swathes of the petit bourgeoisie and those who had survived were both haunted by the fear of proletarianization and distrustful of the new elites who had risen from the ranks of wartime profiteers and black marketeers. It was clear too that more conservatively minded peasants resented the left; during the occupation thousands of peasants had been armed by the axis powers to enable them to form anticommunist militias. The left responded by systematically attacking hostile peasant communities and executing thousands of militiamen.[18]

Such feelings of fear and insecurity were compounded by an almost complete absence of law and order and the inability of the government to address the protracted financial crisis, punish profiteers, and deal with the extreme left, with whom many came to believe a confrontation was inevitable. As a northern Greek paramilitary noted, 'the left […] is already preparing for the forthcoming struggle […]. I doubt that the present republican government will last more than seven months.' If an uprising took place the 'weary and lackluster republican leaders' would be unable to react.[19] The situation led conservative civilians and local elites to take the law into their own hands and form vigilante groups that were gradually transformed into fully fledged paramilitary organizations.

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[16] Genika Arheia tou Kratous (General State Archives, GAK), Arheio Vasilikon Anaktoron (Archive of the Royal House), File no. 439/36, Report to King George, 11 March 1946.

[17] Gennadeios Library Archive, F. Dragoumis Archive, File no. 69.2, Letter to F. Dragoumis, 30 October 1945.

[18] Stratos Dordanas, Ellines enadion Ellinon. O kosmos ton tagmaton asfaleias stin katohiki Thessaloniki 1941-1944 (Greek against Greek. The world of the security battalions in occupied Thessaloniki), Thessaloniki 2006; Nikos Marantzidis, ed, Oi Alloi Kapetanioi. Antikomounistes enoploi sta hronia tis katohis kai tou emfiliou (The other *kapetanioi*. Anticommunist fighters during the occupation), Athens 2006.

[19] Gennadeios Library Archive, F. Dragoumis Archive, File no. 69.2, Letter to F. Dragoumis, 30 October 1945.

Such groups often worked alongside the security forces and were helped by various right-wing politicians and business leaders. However, their rhetoric and practices were much more radical than those of the establishment right and often took on a distinctly anticapitalist, anti-business, and antiparliamentary tinge. Far-right newspapers regularly printed stories about profiteering and condemned the upper classes who stood by 'as the people shed their blood'.[20] Moreover, while the paramilitaries placed themselves firmly in the anti-Soviet camp, they were highly critical of the West's lack of spiritual values and rampant materialism, which they saw as threats to traditional Greek culture.[21] The paramilitary bands developed a distinct ideology that combined militarist and antimodernist elements with a deep distrust of the state and entrenched hostility to the West.[22]

Band leaders and their followers saw themselves as the custodians of the nation. They believed their activities and ideals placed them above the political class and entitled them to act determinedly if the nation was threatened by either internal or external opponents. Much more radical than their sponsors, few of the paramilitary leaders shied away from using violence even against state representatives if they considered them too lenient to the left. A senior military leader noted that paramilitaries often refused to follow orders and in some cases engaged in fire-fights with regular troops and private turf-wars and competition for resources.[23] A report from the governor general of Thrace described paramilitaries as 'an even greater danger than the guerrillas'.[24]

The situation now led the Greek government to re-examine its relationships with the paramilitary groups. It reduced funding, disarmed thousands of paramilitaries and incorporated the remaining bands into the formal military structure. However, that failed to reduce the paramilitaries' influence which remained pernicious. In fact, as they were increasingly starved of resources the paramilitaries were forced to embed themselves more and more deeply into local economies until many paramilitary bands slowly evolved into mafia-like groups. Paramilitary bosses in Peloponnese and Crete came to control the trade in olive oil and fresh fruit, fixing prices in central markets in conjunction with urban gang bosses in Piraeus and Athens. Meanwhile paramilitary leaders in

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[20] Spiros Papageorgiou, O Grivas, I X kai to Hameno Arheio (Grivas, X and the Lost Archive), Athens 2004, 610.

[21] Papageorgiou, O Grivas, I X kai to Hameno Arheio, 534-8, 594-5, 610.

[22] Benaki Museum Archive, Ventiris Archive, File no. 69/1, Epistoli tou T. Karatzeni ston G. Ventiri (Letter from T. Karatzenis to G. Ventiris), without date.

[23] GAK, Arheio Vasilikon Anaktoron (Archive of the Royal House), File no. 144A.130, Siskepsi gia to zitima tis dimosias asfaleias (Meeting on the issue of public order), 3 February 1947.

[24] GAK, (Rodopis) Arheio Genikis Dioikisis Anatolikis Makedonias Thrakis (Archive of the General Administration of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace), File no. 10.1/00031/02, Anafora, Genikos Dioikitis Thrakis (Report, Governor General of Thrace), 23 June 1949.

Macedonia controlled the wheat trade, fixed prices and wages and formed their own unions. Others engaged in money-lending and drug peddling.[25]

Such activities endowed the paramilitaries with an undue degree of power and influence. The civil war led to a rapid expansion of the state apparatus, and the newly emerging local elites drew their members from the ranks of the paramilitaries, ultra-conservative politicians, and intellectuals. For those seeking a public sector job or simply trying to establish new businesses such unofficial power-brokers became the first contacts when dealing with the government or the police. Their role as brokers and intermediaries rendered them invaluable to aspiring politicians too, since band leaders played key roles in mobilizing the rural and working class vote.[26] Such networks were particularly important in northern Greece where they helped mediate between a marginal peripheral area and the centre, thereby facilitating political influence for the peasantry.[27] The paramilitary networks continued after the war as financial insecurity, unemployment, and all-pervading fear made the presence and role of political patrons 'imperative and stronger, since the latter controlled access to social welfare, the labour market, and to various kinds of supplies and state services, even to justice'.[28]

Anticommunist networks provided access to good jobs, prestige and a chance for social advancement to otherwise marginalized individuals and constituencies. Communities took advantage of their ties to settle scores with neighbours, lay claim to land, and gain access to resources.[29] The unofficial networks also offered ambitious young men a quick route to social advancement. The expansion of the security apparatus had in fact created an entire substratum of professional anticommunists. There were informants, intellectuals, news editors, right-wing

[25] Athenaiki Zoi. Ta Narkotika (Athenian life. The Drugs), *Ebros*, 3 March 1949; GAK, (Rodopis) Arheio Genikis Dioikisis Anatolikis Makedonias Thrakis (Archive of the General Administration of Eastern Macedonia and Thrache), File no. 10.1/00031/02, Anafora, Genikos Dioikitis Thrakis (Report, Governor General of Thrace), 23 June 1949; Katelanos O Vasileus tou Athinaikou Ipokosmou (Nikos Katelanos king of the Athenian underworld); cf. Douglas Valentine, The Strength of the Wolf. The Secret History of America's War on Drugs, London 2004, 108; Giannis Kairofellas, I Athina Meta ton Polemo (Athens after the War), Athens 2012, 85.

[26] Ioannis Hritos Giannakenas / Grigoris Sourlas, O Kapetanios tis Thessalias (The Kapetanios of Thessaly), Athens 2016, 230-235.

[27] Anastasia Karakasidou, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood. Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990, Chicago/IL 2009, 206-215.

[28] Basil Gounaris, Social Aspects of Anticommunism in Northern Greece, 1945-1950 in: Philip Carabott / Thanasis D. Sfikas, eds, The Greek Civil War. Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences, London 2004, 186.

[29] Hans Vermeulen, To varos tou parelthodos. I exousia ton kapetanion sto horio tou Cain kai tou Abel (The weight of the past. The power of the *kapetans* in the village of Cain and Abel), in: Efthimios Papataxiarhis / Theodoros Paradellis, eds, Anthropologia kai Parelthon. Simvoles stin koinoniki istoria tis neoteris Elladas (Anthropology and the past. Contributions to the social history of modern Greece), Athens 1993, 113-133.

pamphleteers, security personnel, and foreign policy 'experts' of all stamps and hues. The networks were open to anyone who bore the security service's seal of approval. Such tactics were what helped to bolster social consent among many communities and created a significant cadre of far rightists. Unsurprisingly, both individuals and communities embraced a particularly intransigent form of politics, as their livelihoods and general prosperity were tied to the perpetuation of the state of emergency. The normalization of politics posed a direct threat to the paramilitary networks, as it would deprive them of their raison d'être.[30] Consequently, these networks were willing to go to great lengths to derail the democratization process and prevent their own fall from power.

The networks found eager allies among both junior and senior members of the security services. Even if the civil war had resulted in the crushing defeat of the left, many politicians and military leaders believed that it had merely been the first round which would be followed by a more 'clandestine' war waged in trade union halls, factories, schools, and on university campuses. Successive reports insisted that the Communist Party's network within the country was still actively working to subvert the state.[31] Fear of subversives was further increased by far-reaching social changes that were taking place in Greek society. The civil war was followed by rapid urbanization and the influx of thousands of peasants into the major urban centres. Given that rural areas were seen as the bedrock of royalism, the authorities feared that immigration would deprive the royalist cause of a valuable constituency and expose the population to left-wing agitators and anti-Greek values.[32]

Such fears reached hysterical proportions after the impressive performance of the left-wing United Democratic Left (*Eniea Dimokratiki Aristera*, EDA) in the 1958 elections. The left's electoral success prompted the security services, including the army and the newly minted Central Intelligence Service (*Kentriki Ipiresia Pliroforion*, KYP), to reach out to far-right politicians, activists and organizations. The security services provided such organizations with guns and funding in exchange for their help against the left.[33]

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[30] Napoleon Dokanaris, I metapolemiki Ellada (Postwar Greece), Ioannina 2004, 130.

[31] Cf. for example Benaki Museum, Sofoklis Venizelos Archive, File no. 028/015/Ekthesis tis Diefthinseos Ipiresion Pliroforion epi tis organoseos tis Ethnikis Asfaleias Esoterikou (Report of the Information Directorate Service on the organization of the National Internal Security), 14 November 1950.

[32] Kostadinos Svolopoulos, Arheio Kostadinou Karamanli. I Anodiki Poreia (The Archive of Kostadinos Karamanlis. The Rise to Power), vol. 5, Athens 1997, 71-74.

[33] Ioannis Stefanidis, I Dikomratia disheris. I anaptixi ton mihanismon tou 'antikommou-nistikou agonos' 1958-1961 (The ailing Democracy. Developing the mechanisms for the 'Anticommunist Struggle'), *Mnimon* 29 (2008), 215-216.

That proved to be an opportunity eagerly seized, as over forty paramilitary organizations were formed between 1959 and 1963.[34] While those groups relied on violence and the patronage of the state, they were not without popular support nor legitimacy. The ideology of wartime paramilitaries had seeped into society and legitimized authoritarian and militarist ideals. Certain of the organizations numbered over 5,000 members, although the rank and file were not always strongly ideologically motivated. Paramilitary organizations provided local societies with a series of services which the state was unable or unwilling to provide. That particular tactic allowed the groups to attract large followings among the working and lower middle classes. A roll-call of the *Antikommounistiki Stavroforia* (Anticommunist crusade)—the foremost paramilitary organization between 1959 and 1964—shows that almost 70% of its members around Piraeus came from the provinces. Most of those men worked in low-paid jobs, had no social ties and no access to the urban patronage networks that were crucial for any sort of upward mobility.[35]

For such men, many of them young, life in a poor urban environment was inclined to be daunting, and the paramilitary groups offered them a sense of safety and camaraderie. The charter of the northern Greek paramilitary organization noted that 'every member of our organization can expect the moral support of every single fellow-member on every aspect of his personal life'.[36] The organizations also offered incentives and opportunities to working class constituencies which the state had neglected:[37] 'The neofascist organizations promise benefits to the unemployed, food to the destitute, they provide jobs and medical assistance, they distribute clothes and provisions.'[38]

Paramilitary groups also played a major role in the nationalization of the northern areas bordering Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria. The northern Greek regions of Macedonia, Thrace, and Epirus were seen as bulwarks against communism. However, there was a perception too that the allophone populations of those regions were particularly susceptible to subversion and threats from

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[34] Mega parakratiko diktio sideirei I ERE (The ERE sustains a huge parastatal network), *Eleftheria*, 9 June 1963. The acronym ERE refers to the National Radical Union (*Ethniki Rizospastiki Enosis*), the conservative party that dominated Greek politics between 1956 and 1967.

[35] Elliniko Logotehniko kai Istoriko Arheio (Greek Archive of Literature and History), Nikitiadis Archive, File 1.1.1, 20 November 1958.

[36] Arheia Sinhronis Koinonikis Istorias (Archive for Modern Social History), EDA Archive, File 118.4: Ilika tis N.E Kavalas gia tin drastiriotita tis ethnikistikis organosis Kiani Falagx (Material of the Kavala Prefectural Committee on the nationalist organization *Kiani Falagx*), no date.

[37] Arheia Sinhronis Koinonikis Istorias, EDA Archive, File 118.4: Katastatiko tou En Athinais edrevodos somateio apo tin eponimian organoseos ethnikis koinonikis exormiseos (Charter of the Athens-based association known as Organization for the National and Social Campaign), 23 October 1962.

[38] Thaleia Koliva, Oi parakratikoi (The parastatals), *Eleftheria*, 9 June 1963.

foreigners. Top-level officials were afraid that in case of a military confrontation minorities would link with radical students and left-wing activists to attack the security forces.[39] The state pursued an aggressive policy of ethnic engineering which entailed the linguistic assimilation of the allophone population and the settling of trustworthy individuals in border communities. Veteran paramilitaries and anticommunist associations played a major role in the process, with people being pushed to re-settle especially on or near the borders with Albania, in towns such as Florina, Kastoria and Thesprotia. Paramilitary settlers assisted the state in policing the area, acted as informants, and helped to enforce the government's programme of linguistic and cultural assimilation.[40]

Funds for such activities were provided both by the security services and by illicit activities. In the Athenian 'underworld' some paramilitary bosses controlled prostitution, gambling and numerous protection rackets. Others specialized in the cultivation and smuggling of narcotics. In terms of a transit point, Greece had been involved in smuggling illegal narcotics for decades but after the crackdown on the drug trade in the Levant in the late 1950s Greece was transformed into a haven for the cultivation of narcotics, too.[41] In 1965 the police seized over half a million cannabis and poppy plants; nevertheless in many cases such activities were protected and even coordinated by leading politicians and paramilitaries.[42]

The steep rise in crime was further facilitated by the indifference of the state. The security services were used to suppress the left and supervised an ever-expanding surveillance apparatus. Crime was seen as a secondary concern. That created a situation which allowed criminal gangs to flourish and use even more violent means to settle feuds and turf-wars. Lacking both means and will to crack down on the gangs, the security services opted to co-manage crime with the help of the paramilitaries. Figures from the 'underworld' were allowed to continue their illicit activities provided they kept a lid on street-crime and kept their activities outside 'respectable' areas.[43] In return gangsters and para-

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[39] Gennadeios Library Archive, F. Dragoumis Archive, File 96.11: Ministry for National Defense, National Issues, Simeioma ebisteftiko dia tin esoterikin adimetopisi tis slavokommounistikis epivoulis kata tis voreias Ellados (A confidential note on dealing with the Slavic-communist threat against northern Greece), no date.

[40] Gennadeios Library Archive, F. Dragoumis Archive, File 94.4: Albania-Northern Epirus-Northern Greece, 22 October 1952.

[41] Sinexizetai in kalliergeia hashish ipo evnooumenon tis ERE eis pollas periohas tis Kritis (The involvement of ERE favourites in the cultivation of Hashish persists in many areas of Crete), *Makedonia*, 20 December 1960; Ekalliergoun hashish se evreia ektasi (They cultivated hashish in large scale), *Makedonia*, 21 August 1958.

[42] Apologismos tou agonos kata ton toxikomanon (An account of the fight against drug users), *Makedonia*, 31 March 1965.

[43] Nikos Gigourtakis, Aftoviografia (Autobiography), Athens 1993. Gigourtakis was the undisputed boss of the Athenian 'underworld' for more than thirty years. His autobiography is

militaries were expected to provide foot soldiers for 'black operations' such as targeted assassinations, strike-breaking and espionage. Many such figures actually worked as intelligence assets in the espionage campaigns carried on between Greece and its state socialist neighbours, while others provided hired muscle during strikes and demonstrations.[44]

Such activities reached their pinnacle in 1963 when members of a far-right group murdered left-wing MP Grigoris Labrakis in Thessaloniki. That atrocity resulted in the resignation of conservative premier Kostadinos Karamanlis who implied that the government was unable to control the security services and the host of far-right groupings that had mushroomed in the meantime.[45] The outcry over the murder of Labrakis created a crisis in the Conservative Party and increased support for the liberal Centre Union (*Enosi Kedrou*) among moderates and left-wing voters. Those events helped the *Enosi Kedrou*, a broad coalition of centrists, liberals and moderate social democrats created in 1961, to score a landslide victory. That party was led by Georgios Papandreou, a veteran liberal politician and former prime minister. The new administration managed to dismantle some of the more aggressive far-right groups, but the coalition could not complete its work because it collapsed after several months. Its successor was similarly unable to keep a lid on the alliance between the security services, the army, and the paramilitaries. Ultimately, the collapse of the centre and an almost hysterical fear of the left paved the way for the 1967 coup that brought the masterminds of the para-state into power.

The Wilderness Years

The dictatorship proved to be the heyday of the extreme right. The regime created its own paramilitary youth organization and made efforts to export its brand of authoritarianism by sponsoring the activities of a number of Italian neofascist groups. Such transnational ties and experience led to the formation of a new generation of ultra-violent neofascists, like Nikos Mihaloliakos, who would eventually become the leader of 'Golden Dawn', and Aristotelis

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a typical 'rags to riches' story, in which he sketches his transformation from night-club owner and enforcer to legitimate entrepreneur. He provides important insights into the relationships between the criminal underworld, the state, and the political parties.

[44] Dmitar Tasić, Violence as Cause and Consequence. Comparisons of Anti-Communist Armed Resistance in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria after the Second World War, CAS Working Paper Series 10, Sofia 2018, 16-20; Stavros Dagios, Ellada kai Alvania, 50 xronia amoivaias dispistias (1945-1991) (Greece and Albania, 50 years of mutual distrust), Athens 2014.

[45] Kostadinos Svolopoulos, Arheio Kostadinou Karamanli, Periodos Dokimasias (Kostadinos Karamanlis Archive. The time of trials and tribulations), vol. 6, Athens 1997, 36, 192-195.

Kalentzis, a convicted terrorist who was the guru of various violent Strasserist factions.[46]

However, the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 led to a major re-alignment of the far right. Prime minister Kostas Karamanlis, who was also the leader of the conservative party *Nea Dimokratia* (New Democracy), initiated a drive towards democratization. That effort entailed the legalization of the Communist Party which had been outlawed since 1947, as well as a plebiscite on the monarchy and a limited purge of pro-dictatorship officers and civil servants. The far right reacted fiercely to what they saw as a backlash and in 1977 formed the National Front (*Ethniki Parataxis*) as the first major far right party to appear within the parliamentary spectrum for more than twenty years. However, the establishment of the new party did not mean that the far-right remained confined to parliamentary politics.[47] Instead, young activists and disenchanted members of the security services unleashed a profound wave of terrorism. Over 100 bomb and arson attacks took place in Athens between 1977 and 1979 and there followed a rapid response.[48] In 1979 the police dismantled various terrorist cells and arrested a number of prominent far rightists, and during the same period political conservatives absorbed certain leading members of the *Ethniki Parataxi*—which ceased to operate two years later.[49]

While the number of far-right activities declined, the ideas that mobilized such groups had not lost their appeal, nor their social legitimacy. The government of *Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima* (Panhellenic Socialist Movement, PASOK) that succeeded the *Nea Demokratia* rule was deemed the herald of social change, what the Greeks call *allagi*. However, PASOK steered clear of class-based rhetoric and instead adopted a populist narrative that separated the Greek nation into two categories, the 'people' and the 'elites'. The latter social category was a vaguely defined catch-all term covering anyone from low-level conservative functionaries to shipping magnates. According to the PASOK narrative it had been 'the elites' who had sabotaged the Greek people's efforts to achieve their country's grandiosely expressed but deserved destiny since the inception of the Greek state in the early 19th century. What is more, after 1949 those elites

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[46] Nikos Kleitsikas / Andrea Speranzoni, Fainomena Tromokratias. O Ellinikos neofasismos mesa apo ta aporrita eggrafa ton mistikon ipiresion (Aspects of terrorism. The Greek neofascism in the classified documents of the secret services), Athens 2003, 67.

[47] Dimitris Hristopoulos, Astinomia (Police), in: Hristopoulos, ed, To vathi kratos stin simerini Ellada kai I akrodexia, 68-102.

[48] Ion Filippou, Xrysi Avgi. Politikos ododeiktis (Golden Dawn. Political roadmap), Athens 2013, 19.

[49] Vassiliki Georgiadou, Greece, in: Ralf Melzer / Sebastian Serafi, eds, Right-Wing Extremism in Europe. Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies, Berlin 2013, 75-101, 78.

had not acted independently but had been operating at the behest of 'foreign centres', namely Israel, the United States, and the European Union.[50]

PASOK's combination of Third World marxism and old-fashioned nationalism was a toxic brew. Antisemitic and anti-western outbursts became commonplace in both parliament and press. There was habitual abuse of Israel for sabotaging Greek national interests, with PASOK MPs attributing the advent of the dictatorship to 'the Jews, the Masons, the CIA and [former Israeli Defence Minister] Moshe Dayan'.[51] By the late 1980s PASOK's anti-occidentalism had become a matter of concern to Greece's European partners who were afraid the country was sliding towards authoritarianism.[52] The social democrats' espousal of radical nationalist and xenophobic slogans and their open flirtation with authoritarian regimes served to cultivate an insular and hyper-nationalist mind-set which sounded worryingly similar to the narratives employed by the postwar paramilitaries. However, now politics were marked not only by the rise of aggressive Third World-style nationalism but also by a gradual implosion marked by violence and anomie that cut across social and political lines.

The first years of PASOK were marked by a rapid increase in living standards. However, the effects were limited and did not last, as the government adopted austerity measures towards the end of the decade. Austerity in turn led to social unrest among a section of radical youth and students who felt that the promise of change had not come to fruition. Similar feelings were particularly prominent among those who belonged to countercultural groups such as punks, skinheads, and rockers. Such groups were treated with great hostility by both the government and broad swathes of the population. Radical youths were cast as hostile 'others' whose forms of expression subverted efforts for *allagi* and to strengthen Greek national culture. As 'others' such radicals became the targets of concerted media attacks calling for their ruthless suppression. Efforts to suppress them were duly made and reached a pinnacle with the so-called 'virtue operations' intended to remove 'antisocial elements' from central areas of Athens.[53]

The 'clearing operations' were marked by extensive police brutality which resulted in numerous serious injuries and in 1985 caused the death of a teen-

[50] Takis Pappas, To harismatiko komma. PASOK, Papandreou kai exousia (The charismatic party. PASOK, Papandreou and power), Athens 2009, 142; Richard Clogg, ed, Greece, 1981-1989. The Populist Decade, London 1993, 6; Kevin Featherstone, The Challenge of Modernisation. Politics and Policy in Greece, *West European Politics* 28, no. 2 (2005), 223-241.

[51] Yannis Loulis, Nekranastasti tou Antisimitismou sto katefthinomeno anti-Evraiko paralirima (Antisemitism Resurrected in the Deliberate Anti-Jewish Raving), *Mesimvrini*, 28 July 1982; Tobias Blumel, Antisemitism as Political Theology in Greece and Its Impact on Greek Jewry, 1967-1979, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, no. 2 (2017), 181-202.

[52] Panayote Dimitras, L'antioccidentalisme Grec, *Contacts* 128 (1984), 350-358.

[53] Giannis Kolovos, Koinonika apovlita. I istoria tis punki skinis stin Athina, 1979-2015 (Social waste. The history of the punk scene in Athens, 1979-2015), Athens 2015.

ager.[54] Police officers were not the only culprits, for hundreds of 'indignant civilians' were involved in the brutality, their job being to carry out some of the most violent and unsavoury policing tasks. There were illegal beatings, 'enhanced' interrogations, and simple torture. Many such civilian 'volunteers' were drawn from the ranks of the far right, while others were PASOK trade-unionists. However, although the fall of the junta and the triumph of PASOK had left the radical right reeling, it was far from a spent force. PASOK in fact failed to purge pro-junta elements from the security services and the police, nor did they change the modes and tactics of policing itself.[55]

The radical right performed decently in the 1984 elections and was gradually able to make its presence felt on the streets with the establishment of ultraviolent groups such as 'Golden Dawn' and the *Nazistiki Organosi Filon Panathinaikou* (Nazi Organization of the Friends of Panathinaikos), a racist soccer organisation that was a mixture of skinheads, hooligans, and admirers of the *Nouvelle Droite*. 'Golden Dawn' itself was founded as a circle of nationalist-socialist research in 1980 by Nikos Mihaloliakos, its activities limited at first to the publication of neo-nazi literature. However, the group changed its modus operandi in the mid-1980s and began instead to engage in street-level activities against left-wingers. The purpose of such activities was to wrest control of the streets from the left and impose right-wing hegemony in areas previously associated with left-wing activism.[56]

Thus, the advent of the social democrats had been hailed as heralding radical change, but in fact resulted in failure to make any effective change to the patronage-driven politics that had characterized Greece's political life for decades. Indeed, the years of PASOK rule were to set the stage for the ruin of the Greek economy during the financial crisis two decades later, while the party's deeply divisive and xenophobic discourse rather tended to re-polarize the country's political life. Under PASOK, intrinsic anomalies of policing were perpetuated, while the insidious nationalism that had dominated Greek political life for decades was only bolstered.

The Many-Headed Hydra

The collapse of the state socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the wars in Yugoslavia further radicalized Greek contexts. Between 1991 and 1994 more

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[54] Lefteris Arvanitis, Dolofonia Kalteza. I astinomia hanei ti maxi tis sinainesis (The murder of Kaltezas. The police loses the battle for consensus), in: Vasilis Vamvakas / Panagiotis Panagiotopoulos, eds, I Ellada sti dekaetia tou '80. Koinoniko, politico kai politismiko lexiko (Greece during the 80s. Social, political and cultural dictionary), Athens 2014, 122-123.

[55] Oi aoratoi nekroi tis dimokratias (Democracy's invisible dead), *Eleftherotypia*, 21 July 1996.

[56] Hristopoulos, Astinomia, 71-72.

than a quarter of a million immigrants entered Greece, most of them Albanians but with a smaller number from wider Eastern Europe. The Greek government did nothing to integrate them; in fact it saw immigration as a security problem:

> 'In the beginning virtually immigrants were illegal. The Greek state did not regulate labor immigration until 1997 when a system of residency permits was instituted. Up to that time all labor migrants were subject to immediate deportation if caught.'[57]

Accordingly, legislation was intended to deter immigrants and give the police unlimited freedom to achieve that end. For their part the police were ruthless; they made use of torture and extra-legal killings, while the ritual humiliation of immigrants became increasingly commonplace. The handful of organizations and political parties who chose to criticize such attitudes where torn apart by the media.[58]

Although civilians and far-right groups too played a pivotal role in the violence, more often than not the groups did not operate independently of each other. Many high-ranking officers in the police and security services had been junior members of the junta security apparatus, and had maintained their sympathy with and ties to the far right as well as nurturing a particularly nationalist and anticommunist mind-set. They continued to see themselves as the custodians of the nation whose task it was to act outside the law if they found it necessary. As a result they turned a blind eye to and sometimes collaborated with far-right gangs operating against what they perceived to be antinational and antisocial groups. Such attitudes were particularly prominent among members of the riot police and other special branches of the force.[59] Gangs comprised of 'Golden Dawn' members frequently set upon isolated immigrants and anyone who tried to defend them, such attacks becoming commonplace in Athens and other urban centres.[60] During the same period 'Golden Dawn' was able to spread its neofascist 'franchise' across Greece and recruit a small but exceedingly violent cadre of new activists. However, it was not only far rightists who engaged in such violence. An anthropologist who visited a number of villages in the southeastern Peloponnese during the period noted that racist and xenophobic attitudes were both common and socially acceptable. In many villages immigrants lived under conditions practically amounting to apartheid. Most immigrants worked illegally and therefore without access to legal help, while

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[57] Christopher Lawrence, To Hire an 'Albanian'. Household Economy and Immigration in Rural Greece, in: Donald C. Wood, ed, Choice in Economic Contexts. Ethnographic and Theoretical Enquiries, Amsterdam et al. 2007, 75-98, 75-77.

[58] Hristopoulos, Astinomia, 117.

[59] Idou ta stagonidia tis Thessalonikis (These are the far-right elements in Thessaloniki), *Eleftherotypia*, 10 November 1997; I akrodexia sinistosa (The far-right element), *To Vima*, 17 November 2018, https://www.tovima.gr/2012/09/17/vimagazino/i-akrodeksia-synistwsa/.

[60] 'Allaxte miala giati tha sas liosoume san skoulikia' ('Change your mind or we'll quash you like worms'), *Eleftherotypia*, 1 February 1998.

those who transgressed against the social norms established by the local society, for example by trying to form relationships with local women or trying to unionize, were almost bound to be severely beaten, and sometimes even killed.[61]

Anti-immigrant hysteria and nationalism were further fuelled by the outbreak during the 1990s of the Macedonian conflict and the Yugoslav wars. A 'Golden Dawn' activist noted in his memoir that the Macedonian conflict had pushed his organization out of the shadows into the daylight and thereby allowed them to reach a huge public.[62] The dispute over the name of the newly founded Republic of Macedonia soon escalated to a full blown diplomatic crisis as Greece became more and more aggressive in its refusal to recognize its neighbour. In the end there was a full trade blockade of Macedonia. The intransigence of the Greek state was not just a matter of high-politics, for the Macedonian question was used by various social and political actors to disseminate their own agendas. First there was the Church, for example, along with social and local associations, nationalist intellectuals, and far-right groups. Their mobilizations proved highly effective. In 1992 the Greek Orthodox Church and the various 'patriotic' associations managed to mobilize more than 1.5 million civilians in a series of demonstrations that took place across northern Greece.[63]

The Macedonian conflict triggered the xenophobic, anti-Slavic and anticommunist reflexes that dated, as explained above, to the civil war. That then paved the way for the far right to make an impressive comeback during which its proponents presented themselves as the true custodians of nationally important matters that had constantly been betrayed by the political establishment. However, anti-Macedonian feelings were not limited to the far right. Indeed, many saw the Macedonian conflict through the lens of PASOK's radical populism, which made 'the people' appear to be a sort of shorthand for Greece and the 'elites' a metaphor for the West, which was said to be conspiring against Greece. Slowly but surely these narratives that were associated with the postwar far right were enthusiastically adopted by a large number of MPs and rank and file members of PASOK, who were attracted by such aggressive forms of old-fashioned nationalism.[64]

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[61] Lawrence, To hire an 'Albanian', 92; cf. Ifigenia Kokkali, Being Albanian in Greece or Elsewhere. Negotiation of the (National) Self in a Migratory Context in Fotini Tsibiridou, in: Nikitas Palantzas, eds, Myths of the Others in the Balkans. Representations, Social Practices, Performances, Thessaloniki 2013, 197-210.

[62] Dimitris Psarras, I mavri vivlos tis Xrysis Avgis (The black book of 'Golden Dawn'), Athens 2012, 63-68.

[63] O Ianos tou ethnikismou kai I Elliniki Valkaniki politiki (The Janus of nationalism and Greece's Balkan policy), Athens 2007.

[64] Takis Mihas, Anieri Simmahia. I Ellada kai I Servia tou Milošević (Unholy alliance. Greece and Milošević's Serbia), Athens 2003, 46-47; Ioannis D. Stefanidis, Stirring the Greek Nation. Political Culture, Irredentism and Anti-Americanism in Post-War Greece, 1945-1967,

The Macedonian conflict popularized xenophobic and hyper-nationalist attitudes across an extremely wide social and political spectrum and helped to propagate more widely the sort of anti-western and anti-democratic views that would implode during the time of the crisis and which led to the formation of novel political actors with extremist agendas.

The best known and most effective network was the *Diktio 21* (Network 21), an ultra-conservative think tank formed by a coalition of journalists, conservative politicians, far-right intellectuals, and retired members of the security services.[65] The organization focused on national 'issues' and lobbied for a more 'vigorous' approach to the Macedonian question and to Greco-Turkish relations. The organization condemned the docility of the social democrats who according to a *Diktio* spokesman had been infiltrated by 'speculators and catamites'. The same spokesman warned about the pending 'Slavic danger' from the east.[66] *Diktio* personalities also fostered ties with retired special forces officers in the hope of forming a militia movement in the border areas. Although such practices were undoubtedly influenced by the activities of civil war paramilitaries, *Diktio*'s rhetoric borrowed heavily too from American far-right conspiracy theories and practices. *Diktio* spokesmen often alluded to the pernicious role of the 'New World Order' and some even questioned the legitimacy of the government implying that 'we live in a regime of internal occupation';[67] a direct allusion to the American Zionist-occupied government conspiracy theory.[68]

Their rhetoric found an eager audience among many segments of the political world. *Diktio* had strong ties with *Nea Dimokratia*, *Dimokratiko Koinoniko Kinima* (Democratic Social Movement, DIKKI), a splinter group of PASOK, and the security services. The Yugoslav succession wars, including the Kosovo conflict, only served to strengthen such attitudes. Greek politicians, experts, and opinion makers saw the wars as a conspiracy to build an 'Islamic arc' in the Balkans, a neo-Ottoman space that was intended to destroy the Orthodox Church. Such efforts were variously assumed to be coordinated by Israel, Turkey, the United States, and Germany. Immigration was seen as the Trojan horse of the conspiracy in Greece.[69] Such extreme opinions were widely shared by the public and helped

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Aldershot 2007; Emmanouil Tsatsanis, Hellenism under Siege. The National-Populist Logic of Antiglobalization Rhetoric in Greece, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 16, no. 1 (2011), 11-31.

[65] Yannis Stavrakakis, Religion and Populism in Contemporary Greece, in: Francisco Panizza, ed, Populism and the Mirror of Democracy, London 2005, 224-249.

[66] O McCarthy kai to Diktio 21 (McCarthy and *Diktio 21*), *O Ios*, 25 October 2018, http://www.iospress.gr/mikro1997/mikro19971220.htm.

[67] Ethnos, Psemmata kai Karieres (The nation, lies and careers), *O Ios*, 25 October 2018, http://www.iospress.gr/mikro2000/mikro20000401.htm.

[68] Martin Durham, The Christian Right, the Far Right and the Boundaries of American Conservatism, Manchester 2000, xii.

[69] Richard Clogg, A Concise History of Greece, Cambridge 2002, 209. On Greek foreign policy cf. also Sotiris Valnten, I Valkaniki Politiki tis Elladas. Kritikos Apologismos tis Meta-

to transform Greece into an ardent supporter of the Serb war effort, while also bolstering domestic religious fundamentalism and anti-occidentalism.[70] It was not long before a number of far rightists found their way onto the battlefields of Bosnia. Greek volunteers, many of them 'Golden Dawn' members, took part in some of the worst atrocities of the war, including the Srebrenica massacre. The Greek state not only failed to prosecute those men but upon their return to Greece they were feted and repeatedly invited by the media to share their experiences.[71]

If the advent of mass immigration, the Macedonian conflict, and the Yugoslav wars played a pivotal role in placing in the mainstream xenophobic and nationalist views in Greece that had been dormant since the fall of the dictatorship, it is not correct to maintain, as sometimes has been argued, that such attitudes were the sole preserve of the right. As shown, the social democratic PASOK years too were marked by a parochial and rapidly anti-western political discourse with distinct authoritarian and xenophobic features.[72] The successive political crises in the Balkans vindicated such ideas in the minds of a great part of the public who came to view them, not least, as an exemplification of the West's untrustworthiness. Anti-westernism was not the only outcome, however. The end of state socialism, the Yugoslav wars, and the mass immigration that those events triggered combined to resurrect and glorify a tradition of authoritarian paramilitarism and political violence. Gradually, political and xenophobic violence became acceptable to very broad swathes of the population:

> 'The support shown for the atrocities of the Milošević, Karadžić and Mladić regimes helped to inform a large segment of the Greek population about anti-occidentalist national socialism, […] anti-Europeanism, the blind acceptance of conspiracy theories as a means to interpret society and politics, and finally to the sanctification of an

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polemikis Periodou kai Prooptikes (The Balkan policy of Greece. A critical review of the postwar period and prospects), in: Panagiotis Tsakonas, ed, Syghroni Elliniki exoteriki politiki. Mia synoliki proseggisi (Modern Greek foreign policy. A complete approach), Athens 2003, 391-464; Christos Rozakis, I krisi sti Giougkoslavia. Enas apokaliptikos dialogos anamesa stin Elliniki exoteriki politiki kai stin politiki tis Evropaikis koinotitas (The crisis in Yugoslavia. A revealing dialogue between the Greek foreign policy and the policies of the European Community), in: Thanos Veremis, ed, Valkania. Apo ton dipolismo sti nea epohi (The Balkans. From polarization to a new era), Athens 1994, 27-71.

[70] Zinovia Lialiouti, Greek Anti-Americanism and the War in Kosovo, *National Identities* 13, no. 2 (2011), 127-156.

[71] Maria Psarra, Lefteris Bidelas, Egklima polemou me tin sfragida tis Xrysis Avgis. Ta Ellinika tagmta efodou pou matosan tin Srebrenica (A war crime bearing the Golden Dawn's seal. The Greek battalions that bloodied Srebrenica), *Ethnos*, 14 July 2015.

[72] Takis Papas, Laikismos kai krisi stin Ellada (Populism and crisis in Greece), Athens 2014, 78-79.

aggressive and murderous nationalism […]. The rise of 'Golden Dawn' is a direct by-product of these events. […] the crisis served only as a catalyst.'[73]

Indeed, at the end of the decade-long Yugoslav wars Greece not only scored highest in aggregate measures of xenophobia, but more than one in ten citizens believed that a dictatorship would be preferable to democracy.[74]

Yet, thanks to relative economic affluence, such forces were still kept at bay. Immigration gave a new lease on life to deeply problematic sectors such as agriculture and played a pivotal part in the construction and tourism booms. Both those sectors were able to survive thanks to cheap undeclared labour.[75] Undeclared labour allowed the state to extend its patronage to a series of violent and potentially disruptive social groups that might otherwise have posed serious threats to democracy. A senior 'Golden Dawn' cadre member admitted that his party and other similar groups thrived on the largesse of conservative politicians who used its rank and file members as canvassers and bodyguards, a pattern that replicated the relationship between paramilitary groups and politicians during and after the civil war. Cooperation between senior political figures in the social democratic camp and far rightists was particularly close in northern Greece. In general, the pact between politicians and far right was brokered by the National Intelligence Agency (*Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion*, EYP), which was essentially the old Central Intelligence Agency (KYP) in all but name. The agency had been re-organized during the 1980s but mentalities and attitudes had remained largely the same. During the Yugoslav wars the security services too had employed such groups extensively as intelligence assets and hired muscle to use against dissenting voices and even journalists. Such groups were further involved in gun-running and prostitution, and worked with organized crime groups from Yugoslavia.[76]

The Yugoslav wars and mass immigration in fact led to a 'boom' in organized crime. The crackdown on the paramilitary 'underworld' and the normalization of political life during the decade that followed the junta had been a massive blow to illegal operators. However, political volatility and social change facilitated their resurgence and subsequent expansion. Immigration led to a sharp rise in street crime and a resulting moral panic as immigrants were indiscriminately blamed for *introducing* organized crime in Greece. However, the main perpetrators and beneficiaries of such crimes were Greek gangs. Greek organized crime

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[73] Kleonas Ioannidis, I enoxi tou Karazic kai I sillogiki mas athootita (Karadžić's guilt and our collective innocence), *Books Journal*, 17 November 2018, http://booksjournal.gr/παρεμβά σεις/item/2162-η-ενοχή-του-κάρατζιτς-και-η-συλλογική-μας- αθωότητα.

[74] Christos Vernardakis, I Koini Gnomi stin Ellada 1999-2000. Erefnes kai Dimoskopiseis (Greek public opinion 1999-2000. Research and Opinion Polls), Athens 2000, 317.

[75] On the pre-crisis Greek economy see Papas, Laikismos kai krisi stin Ellada, 113-120.

[76] Dokanaris, I metapolemiki Ellada, 215-220.

was heavily involved in human trafficking, forgery of legal documents, and smuggling.[77] The gangs were also used to provide protection to construction firms and agro-businesses, who hired operatives to prevent immigrants from unionizing, and to provide for an uninterrupted flow of cheap, undeclared labour.[78]

Many gangs overlapped with and often recruited from far-right groups and hooligan organisations. The forging of such networks were undoubtedly helped by the ties between the police, senior politicians, and small groups of the far right. The security services chose to ignore the obvious significance of Greek gangs and instead presented crime as a novel threat introduced by foreigners. Instead, existing unofficial ties were used as a cheap and cost-effective way to regulate and control both immigration and the world of organized crime. Soon, with the help of Serbian and Russian far rightists similarly involved in organized crime, the unofficial groups began to expand their activities beyond Greece.[79] As a result many figures both junior and senior in the extreme right came to occupy leading roles in the Athenian underworld. In many cases they were even encouraged by the police who not only failed to prosecute them but repeatedly worked with them in their occasional anti-immigrant 'sweeping-up' operations.[80]

However, far-right activities were by no means limited to the underworld. The 'explosion' of private television and radio stations gradually made household names of far-right activists and 'intellectuals' such as the lawyer, politician, and author Kostas Plevris. Plevris, the 'godfather' of Greek neofascism, founded the '4th of August' party in 1963 and for a time even led the Junta youth organization. Immediately after the civil war Plevris had acted as mentor to a number of prominent neofascists and more than once sought political office. Most of the private television networks adopted hard-line nationalist rhetoric and used prominent far-right figures like Mihaloliakos and Plevris as commentators and foreign policy experts. Such exposure allowed the formerly marginalized

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[77] Sappho Xenaki, To Organomeno eglima stin Ellada. I oriothetisi kai I axiologisi tis apeilis (Organized crime in Greece. Delimitating and evaluating the threat), *Efarmoges Dimposiou Dikaiou* 24, no. 2 (2011), 137-145.

[78] Ioanna Sotirhou / Ares Hatzigeorgiou, Poso Makria Einai I Kalabria (How far is Calabria), *Eleftherotypia*, 23 January 2010; Makis Nodaras, Astinomia-Epihereimaties simmeteihan se ekfovismous gia spasimo tis apergias (Police and businessmen used coercion to break the strike), *Eleftherotypia*, 23 January 2010.

[79] XYZ contagion, 9+1 skines apo tin istoria tis Ellinikis akrodexias pou rixnoun fos stin agnostic Xrysi Avgi (9+1 scenes from the history of the Greek far right that shed light to the hidden side of the 'Golden Dawn'), Athens 2014, 100-105.

[80] XYZ contagion, 9+1 skines apo tin istoria tis Ellinikis akrodexias, 11.

neofascists to reach a much wider audience and gradually allowed their ideas to become politically mainstream.[81]

It is certainly true that extremist groups still depended on the state and were hardly able to claim an autonomous presence in the political landscape. However, growing radicalization of public opinion as well as intensified media exposure set the stage for the radical shift that took place a few years later. Those efforts bore fruit halfway through the first decade of the 21st century in the form of *Laikos Orthodoxos Sinagermos* (Popular Orthodox Rally, LAOS), a far-right party created by the disgraced *Nea Dimokratia* politician Georgios Karatzaferis who thereby managed to enter parliament. Karatzaferis had been forced out of the *Nea Dimokratia* after he had falsely accused senior party members of sexual misconduct and other types of scandalous or criminal behaviour.[82] LAOS' appeal was further augmented in the aftermath of the 2008 riots which broke out and lasted for weeks after 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos had been murdered by a rogue policeman in downtown Athens.[83]

The 2008 events became the catalyst for further radicalization of significant segments of the population. Police violence led a section of the youth to gravitate towards armed politics and gave rise to a new generation of left-wing terrorists while simultaneously creating a backlash among the more conservative element.[84] Fear of rioters led civilians to form self-defence committees and vigilante patrols. These groups were particularly conspicuous in small rural towns and provincial cities. The vigilantes patrolled provincial roads, imposed curfews and attacked suspicious individuals. Unsurprisingly, many of the committees were staffed and led by far-right figures. While the fear of an invasion by anarchist and leftist rioters proved to be unfounded, events like those demonstrated to many civilians the potential of violent mobilization and gradually legitimized vigilantism as well as militia-style politics.[85]

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[81] For the role of mass media in the emergence of the far right in Greece see Giorgos Pleios / Christos Frangkonikolopoulos, Ta ethnika themata sti dini ton MME. To Makedoniko, oi Ellinotourkikes scheseis kai to Kypriako stin tileorasi kai ton Typo (The national issues in the vortex of mass media. The Macedonian Issue, the Greco-Turkish relations, and the Cyprus question in television and the press), Athens 2010.

[82] Stathis Tsiras, I Nea Akra Dexia stin Ellada. Organotiki exelixi, eklogiki epirroi kai politikos logos tou Orthodoxou Laikou Sinagermou (The New Far Right in Greece. Organizational development, electoral influence and political narrative of the Orthodox Popular Rally), PhD thesis, University of Thessaloniki, 2011.

[83] Andrew Kalyvas, An Anomaly? Some Reflections on the Greek December 2008, *Constellations* 17, no. 2 (2010), 351-365; Stathis Kalyvas, Why Athens Is Burning, New York Times, 14 December 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/11/opinion/11iht-edkalyvas.1.18595110.html.

[84] George Kassimeris, Inside Greek Terrorism, London 2013, 77-95.

[85] O Neos Esoterikos Exthros (The new internal enemy), *O Ios*, 25 October 2018, http://www.iospress.gr/ios2009/ios20090201.htm.

The economic downturn and the advent of the refugee crisis played even further into the hands of far-right groups particularly in poorer working class areas where they presented themselves as a superior alternative to a benighted and corrupt state. Agios Panteleimonas, a lower middle-class district with a large presence of Asian immigrants is a case in point. The district was hit hard by the financial crisis and saw a rise in petty crime. 'Golden Dawn' militiamen proceeded to 'cleanse' the area by cordoning off public places, such as the local playground and cafes that had been initiated as meeting points for immigrants, and by attacking anyone who dared to support such initiatives. Gradually the area was turned into a veritable far-right fiefdom where 'Golden Dawn' militiamen extracted protection money from local shopkeepers and implemented their own version of law and order. Their 'success' encouraged similar actions against immigrants, radical students and all sorts of 'anti-Greek' and 'antisocial' groups. The state looked on as events unfolded, while there are strong indications that elements within the police collaborated directly with far-right groups.[86]

Violence escalated after the outbreak of the crisis, to reach a peak during the days of the *Aganaktismenoi* (the 'Indignant'), a Greek version of the so-called *Indignados* in the 2011/12 Spanish protests. The *Aganaktismenoi* proceeded to stage a series of protests in the centre of Thessaloniki and on the Syntagma square in Athens. Initially they were an apolitical grass roots movement but were gradually infiltrated by both left- and right-wing radicals who pushed it to an ever more radical position. The symbiotic right-left relationship that was based on a shared antisystemic rhetoric served further to legitimize the agendas of radical groups and the use of violence against political opponents of all hues. Politicians, journalists and experts became the targets of increasingly violent attacks that were lauded by many of the general public.[87] Violence against immigrants increased greatly too, with over 200 incidents being recorded between 2010 and 2011 as compared to barely 50 to 60 before 2008.[88] Sociologist Nikos Marantzidis noted how 'the national socialists managed […] to become one with the crowd in the upper piazza'; this cohabitation led to the formation of 'a far right, totalitarian agenda that entailed a general cleansing of "traitor" politicians and immigrants […]. The politics of the 'Golden Dawn' were legitimized thanks to its antisystemic rhetoric on Syntagma square.'[89]

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[86] George Kandylis / Karolos Iosif Kavoulakos, Framing Urban Inequalities. Racist Mobilization against Immigrants in Athens, *The Greek Review of Social Research* 136 (2011), 157-176, http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/grsr.48.

[87] Papas, Laikismos kai krisi stin Ellada, 157-161.

[88] Petros Pappasarodopoulos, Mithoi kai stereotipa tis Ellinikis krisis (Myths and stereotypes of the Greek crisis), Thessaloniki 2014, 219.

[89] Nikos Marantzidis, Oi Aganaktismenoi eisilthan sti Vouli! (The 'Indignant' are in the parliament!), *I Kathimerini*, 20 May 2012.

Step by step then, the far right created micro-fiefdoms where the local authorities were replaced by militiamen. However, while they wished to present themselves as defenders of law and order, 'Golden Dawn''s fiefdoms were hardly crime-free. Indeed, their main purpose was not to eradicate deviance but rather to control existing crime structures and use them for their own ends. 'Golden Dawn' did so by providing protection both to foreign and domestic petty criminals as well as shop-keepers and local residents. They therefore took advantage of the generalized social breakdown that had engulfed the area to impose themselves as major new players. A report by the National Intelligence Agency (EYP) noted that senior leaders and rank and file members of 'Golden Dawn' were involved in 'blackmail, protection rackets, human trafficking and prostitution'.[90]

Such activities were tolerated by the police who occasionally cooperated with 'Golden Dawn' militiamen. The cooperation had a twofold rationale. For a start, many police officers of all ranks were sympathetic to far-right ideals. Moreover, the activities of far-right vigilantes helped to push street crime out of public view thus allowing the police to appear in a better light. In fact however, street crime was far from eradicated but became more regulated and profitable under the direction of the far right militias. Details of the nuts and bolts of the cooperation between police and gangs are rather sketchy, but it is highly probable that they generated important revenue that enabled the far right to establish an autonomous presence.[91]

Far-right figures developed strong ties with their counterparts in the Russian Federation as well as with government-sponsored organizations. Many of the more visible 'Golden Dawn' members expressed support for Russia which they described as the main ally of Greece against the threat posed by the degenerate and heretical West and the 'Shylocks' who were responsible for imposing austerity on the country. Such virulent anti-occidentalism struck a cord both with conservative religious voters and with supporters of PASOK and other left-wing parties who for decades had been raised on a diet of anti-westernism.[92] Moreover, during the same period 'Golden Dawn' adopted increasingly anti-capitalist rhetoric. The foundation stone of modern and historical fascism was anticommunism, but as communism's importance began to decline both at home

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[90] Aporriti Ekthesis tis EYP gia ton Lago, o Xrysavgitis Arxontas tis Nyxtas (Classified report of EYP for Lagos, the 'Golden Dawn' godfather), *Ta Nea*, 10 January 2013.

[91] To Hroniko tis sigalispis tis eknomis drastiriotitas tou A.T. Ag. Padeleimona (The Chronicle of the cover up of the illegal activities in Ag. Padeleiomona's Police Department), *Avgi*, 3 October 2013.

[92] Antonis Klapsis, An Unholy Alliance. The European Far Right and Putin's Russia, Brussels 2015, 19, 22, 25, 27; Mihas, Anieri Simmahia. I Ellada kai I Servia tou Milošević, 226.

and abroad, 'Golden Dawn' like other neofascist movements came to identify neoliberalism and globalization as their main enemies.[93]

The new focus combined with increased financial power led 'Golden Dawn' to turn its attention to the more vulnerable members of society and present themselves as the true defenders of their interests. 'Golden Dawn' offered a series of welfare activities to local societies and people who had been hit hardest by the economic crisis. Such services ranged from providing security to offering loans to pay electricity bills or rent; creating soup kitchens and providing childcare, food and jobs to the unemployed—usually in construction or shipyards and with the help of sympathetic entrepreneurs. While such activities in Greece had a historical precedent in the undertakings of far-right groups during the Cold War, they reveal most clearly the influence of other European far-right movements such as the Italian *Casa Pound* and the French *Génération Identitaire* to which similar tactics and narratives were pivotal in the early 2000s.[94]

While it is difficult to estimate the success of such tactics, there is no doubt that they helped bolster support for 'Golden Dawn' in traditional working class constituencies such as Perama and Drapetsona in the Piraeus region.[95] Such actions were also helped by the profound tolerance of the police and political authorities. Indeed, while senior politicians publicly condemned the activities of 'Golden Dawn' it seems that conservatives of the *Nea Dimokratia* had opened a number of political back-doors through which they tried to control the activities of 'Golden Dawn'.[96]

There was nothing new in that approach; since the end of the civil war in the 1940s the policy of both the more moderate right and the security services had been to control the far right through a process of co-option and patronage. However, that policy was now in its death throes. Years of financial profligacy had forced Greece to accept a brutal austerity regime which severely limited the government's ability to provide for its numerous clients in sectors such as the security services, which had been a solid bastion of the far right.[97]

Despite their national socialist adherents groups like 'Golden Dawn' have avoided the usage of nazi terminology and instead couched their criticism in terms already familiar for decades. The narrative of 'Golden Dawn' separates Greeks into two opposing camps; 'the people' and the 'elites' who had betrayed

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[93] Halikiopoulou / Vasilopoulou Breaching the Social Contract, 48-50.

[94] Pietro Castelli Gattinara / Caterina Froio / Matteo Albanese, The Appeal of Neo-Fascism in Times of Crisis. The Experience of Casa Pound Italia, *Fascism* 2, no. 2 (2013), 248-249.

[95] Kleista stomata gia tin Xrysi Avgi (Sealed lips about 'Golden Dawn'), *I Kathimerini*, 26 April 2015.

[96] Oi Krifes sxeseis tou P. Baltakou me tin Xrysi Avgi (The hidden relations between P. Baltakos and 'Golden Dawn'), *To Vima*, 2 April 2014.

[97] Gabriella Lazaridis / Dimitris Skleparis, Securitization of Migration and the Far Right. The Case of Greek Security Professionals, *International Migration* 54 (2016), 176-192.

them in conjunction with their foreign backers. Accordingly, the organization was presented as the true custodian of popular will and Greek patriotism. As Giorgos Charalambous notes, that narrative was hardly new, as the representation of politics as a struggle between the virtuous people and 'the decadent, anti-Greek international and native elites who betrayed the country […] was familiar to most Greeks from the era of PASOK' during the 1980s.[98]

However, 'Golden Dawn' did take such rhetoric a step further when it argued that the only way to overcome the traditional antagonism and solve the crisis was the formation of a popular-authoritarian regime under its guidance. Such rhetoric found eager listeners among a cross-section of public opinion that had been radicalized since the 2008 riots and the advent of the crisis. It was only a matter of time before 'Golden Dawn' would succeed in realizing a dream that had eluded far rightists for decades: it established an autonomous political presence.

The Greek government had habitually responded rather meekly but the increase in violence pushed it to turn against 'Golden Dawn'. On 18 September 2013 'Golden Dawn' activists murdered the left-wing activist and singer Pavlos Fyssas. The murder was followed by an extensive crackdown on 'Golden Dawn's activities and the arrest of a number of its MPs. In the following weeks more details were revealed of the criminal activities of 'Golden Dawn' and its cadres. However, despite that and similar other setbacks which proved to be brief, 'Golden Dawn' has remained the third-largest party in the Greek parliament.

Indeed, it seems that the success of 'Golden Dawn' augmented the appeal of the far right, bringing into the fold groups with even more violent agendas. Those groups may be broadly divided into two categories. The first are sub-branches of 'Golden Dawn' and perform its 'dirty work'. The sanctions adopted by the state made the party more cautious, and while they have never disavowed their past rhetoric they are keen to dissociate their party actual violence. The most pertinent of the sub-branches are the *Patriotiki Politofilaki* (Patriotic Militia) and the *National Organization X*—its name a clear allusion to the civil war paramilitary organization. The declared purpose of these groups is to resist an 'internal uprising' during which 'organized armies (of illegal immigrants), criminal gangs and the black and red alliance' would rise against the state. The groups train their members to 'step up and avert the takeof of the state', as the 'Greek police will be unable to deal with the insurrection'.[99]

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[98] Giorgos Charalambous, Introduction to the Report, in: Giorgos Charalambous, ed, The European Far Right. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, Oslo 2015, 25.

[99] Parastratiotikes organoseis stratologoun kai ekpedevodai gia esoteriki katastoli (Paramilitary groups are recruiting and training to deal with internal unrest), *Rizospastis*, 12 March 2012; Ta tagmata asfaleias xanarhodai (The security battalions are returning), *Ethnos*, 11 March 2012.

Other far-right groups have gone even further in both their rhetoric and activities. 'Autonomous' national socialist gangs and groups like the neo-nazi organisation 'Combat 18' see 'Golden Dawn' as a bourgeois party and are critical both of its involvement with organized crime and its compromise with parliamentary politics. 'Combat 18', active in several European countries, in Greece was responsible for a series of violent attacks on left-wing activists, Roma individuals, and immigrants as well as over thirty cases of arson against pro-immigrant advocates, antifascists and left-wing political parties, among others.[100] Another equally violent group is the neofascist *Mavros Krinos* (Black Lily), a violent Strasserist group that is highly critical of 'Golden Dawn''s parliamentary activities and its ties with big businesses. *Mavros Krinos* has its own paramilitary branch while numbers of its members are allegedly fighting in Syria alongside Bashar Al-Assad's forces.[101] Not least, the even more radical groups have created loose alliances with hooligan organisations and criminal gangs in northern Greece and increasingly too in Athens and other towns.

While the ultra-right groups therefore mimic certain of 'Golden Dawn''s patterns of behaviour and ideas they differ in two fundamental aspects. The first is their complete rejection of parliamentary politics; the second their lack of ties to the state and security services. The ultra-right groups cast themselves as resistance fighters who are battling the cultural and social 'replacement' of the Greek 'people' by an 'alien' occupier in league with the Greek and international 'elites'. It is indicative that their pantheon includes both civil war paramilitaries such as Georgios Grivas and anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Zapatistas of southern Mexico. Those groups too have tried to address certain matters traditionally associated with the left, such as drug abuse, poverty, homelessness, social marginalization as well as police corruption and violence.[102]

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[100] Poios einai o arxigos ton neonazi tis combat 18 nees sullipseis (Who is the leader of Combat 18 new arrests), *The Times of Change*, 5 May 2018, http://www.thetoc.gr/koinvnia/article/poios-einai-o-arxigos-twn-neonazi-tis-combat-18-nees-sullipseis.

[101] Kato ta heria apo tous Ellines Ergates ton nafpigeion Skaramaga (Hands off the Greek workers at the Skaramaga shipyards), *Mavros Krinos Blog*, 17 November 2018, http://mavroskrinos.blogspot.com/2012/10/blog-post_6.html; Oi Ellines Ethelodes pou polemoun sti Sitia mazi me to strato tou Asad (The Greek volunteers who fight in Syria along Assad's army), *Dimokratia*, 21 July 2013.

[102] Apokalipsi Nazistikes Organozeis patoun podi stin Ditiki Attiki (Nazi organizations are establishing a foothold in Western Attica), *Eleftheros Typos*, 27 June 2017; I nea Xrysi Avgi ekollaptetai sto Menidi (A new 'Golden Dawn' emerges in Menidi), *Vice*, 28 June 2017, https://www.vice.com/gr/article/pay73y/h-nea-xrysh-aygh-ekkolaptetai-sto-menidi?site=vice&utm_campaign=vbp8aa&utm_source=stylizedembed_vice.com.

Conclusion

The perseverance of 'Golden Dawn' and the appearance of numerous other radical right-wing parties since 2012 are proof of both the potential and the deep roots of the far right in Greek society. While it is true that Greece lacked a far-right party for much of the postwar period, such groupings and associations have played a pivotal role in the country's political life and have been a distinct presence within the conservative camp. The modern far right in Greece emerged during the civil war. The convergence between the establishment conservatives and the far right was helped by the extreme polarization of Greek postwar politics and a powerful culture of political patronage. Fear of the left led conservatives to placate far-right groups in order to avoid splintering the nationalist camp. That relationship was strengthened by the precarious position of the Greek state in the western camp, by the advent of the Cold War, and by further developments within Greek society, as described above.

As a member of NATO and the western camp the Greek state was obliged to espouse a series of values, such as the rule of law, due process of law, and respect for human rights. However, that espousal had to be tempered by the need to forestall what many perceived as a dire communist threat. The Greek state possessed both the surveillance apparatus and the military power to deal with the 'internal communist enemy'; however, senior political leaders were wary that using the full force of the state would expose them to criticism both from their allies and their detractors in the socialist camp. The paramilitary associations therefore allowed Greek governments to operate outside the law while retaining plausible deniability. Paramilitary groups also provided valuable foot soldiers for black operations which were in fact a cornerstone of early containment policy in more than one European country.[103] During the 1950s Greece was one of the most fertile fields for black operations and paramilitary strikes against the so-called Eastern bloc. At the same time, the presence of the unofficial groups allowed the state to put a stop to illicit activities and then manage the organized crime organisations that had appeared during the civil war.

However, those possibilities came with numerous strings attached. Far rightists were rewarded with government positions, jobs and privileges for their

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[103] On the ties between security agencies, far-right paramilitaries, and the state in postwar Europe cf. Leopoldo Nuti, The Italian 'Stay-Behind' Network. The Origins of Operation 'Gladio', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007), 955-980; Charles Cogan, 'Stay-Behind' in France. Much Ado about Nothing?, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007), 937-954. On the importance of paramilitary operations during the Cold War John Prados, Safe for Democracy. The Secret Wars of the CIA, New York/NY 2009; Rory Cormac, Disrupt and Deny. Spies, Special Forces and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy, Oxford 2018; Piero Gleijeses, The CIA's Paramilitary Operations during the Cold War. An Assessment, *Cold War History* 16, no. 3 (2016), 291-306.

followers and almost complete immunity from prosecution, which allowed paramilitary groupings to emerge as autonomous actors and wield considerable political power. Ultimately the relationship had a devastating impact on the half-hearted attempts to democratize postwar Greece, as the paramilitary groups, their backers and the social groups who were aligned with them viewed democratization as a direct threat to their own social standing and political power. However, the paramilitaries did not simply rule by fear, but often provided social services and opportunities to marginalized constituencies. Such activities helped to build social consensus around their activities and spread their ideas among large segments of the population. Paramilitary networks and the security services saw themselves as the custodians of the nation who were entitled to act whenever they felt that the national interest was in danger. Such perceptions undermined the legitimacy of political institutions and gradually facilitated the advent of the junta.

The fall of the military junta and the consequent rise of the social democrats helped to disentangle the ties between the state, the security services and the far right. However, the social democrats stopped short of cleansing the security forces of their numerous far-right elements, nor did they change the patronage-driven model of politics that had dominated the country's social and political life for decades. Similarly, they made no revisions to the baleful treatment of minorities. The PASOK administration was responsible for a series of important judicial and social reforms, such as strengthening the position of women, legislation on divorce and on inheritance and the repatriation of civil war refugees. All the same PASOK failed to make a clean break with the pernicious nationalist rhetoric and clientelistic practices characteristic of previous administrations. Indeed, it was not long before they used analogous methods against the radical youth, countercultural groups, and immigrants, who became the new 'enemies of the nation'. That analogous onslaught under PASOK was carried out by paramilitary groups and criminal gangs employed to do the state's dirty work. In the end their activities helped to return extra-judicial violence, vigilantism, and extremist nationalist political views to positions of legitimacy among a large segment of the population.[104]

The regression accelerated after the outbreak of the 2008 riots and the financial crisis. The riots not only re-normalized political violence but also demonstrated the state's profound inability to deal with the looming social and economic problems that would implode a mere two years later. The crisis deprived the state of the main means it had used historically to control far-right groups in the postwar period, namely patronage and state funds. That situation led to the gradual establishment of islands of social breakdown where the state was forced

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[104] Mihas, Anieri Simmahia. I Ellada kai I Servia tou Milošević, 246.

to share control with far-right groups. However, 'Golden Dawn's figureheads did not appear as 'prophets' of a new era; indeed, there was very little new or even radical in the public narrative articulated by the far right. Rather, 'Golden Dawn' appeared as the 'purifier' of 'an ideology that had been betrayed or diluted by established parties'.[105] The rhetoric and practices of 'Golden Dawn' thus essentially correlate with ideas and attitudes that have been part of the political mainstream for many decades.

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[105] Cas Mudde, The Populist Radical Right. A Pathological Normalcy, *West European Politics* 33, no. 6 (2010), 1167-1186, 1179.