Right-Wing Radicalism in the Wake of the Economic Crisis in Greece

Considerations on the success of Chrysi Avgi, the upsurge of racial violence and parallels to the situation of Germany in the 1930s.

Working Paper

April 2013

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Preface

The sudden success of the “Naziparty” Chrysi Avgi Golden Dawn in the Greek double elections in Mai and June shocked the international public and most of Greeks alike. After having existed as an extra-parliamentary extremist grouping for 13 years, Golden Dawn was in 1993 finally registered as a political party. A quite sudden rise of the party, in the wake of the economic and political crisis in Greece culminated in the double elections of 2012, during which the party received over 6% in both turns. But, this sudden rise apparently did not leave the party enough time to break with its history of radical, and often violist activism. Due to the involvement of Golden Dawn party members in racist hate crimes as well as the ambiguity around the parties use of symbols and slogans that bear resemblance to the German national socialists the Greek case stands out as particularly perturbing from the general trend towards the “revival” of right-wing parties that can be witnessed in Europe and other western Democracies since the 1980s.

While there was a lot of sometimes frantic media attention, for the time being little scholarly research has been conducted on the specific characteristics, causes and potential consequences of this new, Greek right-wing phenomenon. This made it even more interesting and challenging for us to go to Greece to investigate this topic. Is the Greek case just another example of a general European trend? Is Golden Dawn just a temporary reaction to the extremely difficult situation the Greek nation is facing? Or is Golden Dawn really, as claimed by some, the consequential expression of a deep rooted consensus about xenophobia and the toleration of violence in Greek society? During the one-week research trip to Athens with BABEL initiative we met politicians from the highest ranks of Greek politics, journalists, professors and intellectuals but also, left-wing activists, taxi drivers and migrants in the infamous “Golden Dawn quarter” Agios Panteleimon. Our intensive exploration of the topic on the ground raised not just many new questions but also yielded important insights that we are eager to share with the public.

However, since we gathered in the last weeks after our return from Greece new information that requires more thorough research, we are planning to continue the work on this paper. Some of our most important contributions stem from ongoing consultations with academic professors. Therefore please be aware that what you are currently holding in your hands is a working-paper, meant to serve as a basis for debate that will then be integrated in the final draft of this version to be finished and published during summer 2013.
We would sincerely like to thank Alyette, Andrea, Gwendoline, Kawtar, Myriam, Pierre, Stefania and Tobias without whom this paper would never have been possible. We appreciate that we were allowed to conduct this research in the framework of Babel Initiative.
Introduction

In contradiction with two of the most renowned hypothesis of post-war political sociology, namely Lipset and Rokkan’s freezing hypothesis\(^1\) and Inglehart’s post-materialist theory\(^2\), the radical right had since the early 1980s reemerged in Western democracies. Illustrations of this phenomenon are to be found in nearly every European country, be it the French *Front National*, the Belgian *Vlaams Blok*, the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei* or many other parties that can be situated amongst the “new radical right”. However, while there are some general trends like the disenchantment with the established political parties, the expansion of the importance of the socio-cultural cleavage at the expense of the economic cleavage, after the end of the Cold War and the perceived loss of national identity through the effects of globalization, the causes for the success of right-wing parties across the Western world are as diverse as the parties themselves. While we find amongst the literature a nearly perfect unanimity about which parties are to be counted in this party family, we lack a consensus on the principle defining features and core characteristics of this heterogeneous group. Following Hans Betz we can distinguish, populist “instrumentalization of diffuse public sentiments of anxiety, envy, resentment, and disenchantment”, neo-liberal economic policy based on the primacy of individual achievement, and “opposition to the social integration of marginalized groups and the extension of democratic rights to them, and the promotion of xenophobia, if not overt racism”, as some common core characteristics.\(^3\)

However as the Greek case shows, while radical right parties can quite clearly be distinguished according to the socio-cultural cleavage including issues like national identity, citizenship models and migration their standpoint towards economic policies is more ambiguous. In the end their concrete ideological alignment on this point depends heavily on the political opportunity structure in their specific country, as well as the internal party configuration and external factors influencing the grievances of the population and its relationship towards the established parties. In the case of Golden Dawn for example the debate about the memorandum has narrowed the economic cleavage down to a simple separation between pro and contra-memorandum parties. This allowed the party to focus heavily on the anti-establishment as well as the socio-cultural, ethno-nationalistic part of their

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\(^3\) Hans-Georg Betz, „The Two Faces of Radical right-Wing Populism in Western Europe“, The Review of Politics, 4, (1993), 664
program. Golden Dawn was able to capitalize on the great political opportunity structure that existed in Greece thanks to many aspects like the decline of the established political parties, mismanagement in the migration issue, grievances caused by the economic crisis and many other aspects that will be discussed in this paper. However, due to its historically grown party structure, which makes it hard or even undesirable for the leadership to distance itself from ideological ballast that is not shared by a majority of the voters might prove to be a potential brake on the further success of the party. The same is true for the dual structure that splits Golden Dawn as an organization into a formal political part and a violent, radical activist part that seems to act outside the effective control of the party leadership.
A Crisis of the Economic

The sudden rise of Golden Dawn, in the wake of the sovereign debt crisis, which shock Greece from 2009 on, suggests a causal link between the two phenomena. Having started off as a sovereign debt crisis, the crisis soon unfolded a series of adverse economic and social consequences. The decline of GDP, surpassing the historical maximum for the post-war period unleashed a vicious circle of lower domestic demand and lower production finally culminating in the loss of thousands of jobs, causing further deterioration of purchasing power. Unemployment had already more than doubled within the first three years of austerity and scaled a new record of 27.2 percent in the beginning of 2013. 4

Since the 1980s, Greece had prospered based on cheap credit and structural adjustment programs from the EU which had stimulated the domestic demand. As George Prevelakis explained to us during his visit on our Campus, this reinvigorated a certain rent-seeking mentality that had existed in Greece since the days of the Marshall Plan. While the improvement of living standards and the development of a country should, ideally, go hand in hand, Greek governments in the past preferred to distribute the money through patronage systems. For example, for some selected occupational fields pensions could have been paid from an early age on, the public sector paid wages and gave benefits that were distinctly higher than the salaries in the private sector and self-employed were given pensions without having to set aside much of their current income. This created not only a large middle class that was completely dependent on the state for employment and generous social benefits but also led to a temporary economic boom based on domestic consumption. The high point of this era of optimism based on borrowed money, were the Olympic Games in 2004, an event meant to show Greeks reclaimed greatness while in reality contributing to its imminent downfall. When the crisis hit, after this period of optimism people were not just financially and economically affected but also psychologically shocked. The large number of people, that were dependent on the state for their income, was directly affected by the budget cuts. Others suffered from rising taxes or the general economic downturn. What was common to all of them was the deterioration of their economic situation with regards to the pre-crises era. The frustration caused by the feeling of relative deprivation, be it in terms of income or social status, is generally accepted in the literature on right-wing parties as one of the major contributory factors to the success of the radical right.

4 http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/04/11/uk-greece-unemployment-idUKBRE93A08220130411
Indeed, while it is generally rather difficult to give a comprehensive analysis of the sociological make-up of Golden dawn we know that the party was supported “by 8% of those reporting that ‘they found it difficult to make ends meet’ compared to 4% of those stating that ‘they got by / lived comfortably’”. The social decline was further exacerbated by the weakness of the Greek welfare system. While the system might not be particularly small in size its crippling problem is the influence of “political and clientelistic” relationships on the distribution of social benefits and pension that makes for an inefficient and unequal distribution. The tangible manifestation of this was the growing number of homeless people. Homelessness, even excluding the substantial, “hidden” immigrant homelessness, increased by 25 percent from 2009 to 2011. Many more were obliged to rummage through the garbage containers for food or visit the soup kitchens that were set up by voluntary organizations and to a great degree by the Orthodox Church. This social malaise is a fertile breeding ground for populist and extremist parties. Not only for the general sense of frustration and the anger towards the established parties that has it created, but also because the scarcity of resources might cause rising tensions between “nationals” and immigrants. Especially in times of crisis people start blaming migrants for draining the limited resources that should be absolutely restricted to nationals. This form of welfare- chauvinism is at the heart of the ethnic competition thesis which is another recurring theme in the right-wing literature. Matt Golder has shown in fact that as soon as the unemployment rate in a country exceeds 1,3% there is a clear positive relation between the number of immigrants in a country and the number of right-wing votes. Moreover the failure of the state to support its citizens left room for Golden Dawn to take its place and gain the favor of the population through the distributing of food to needy (ethnic-Greek) families and other basic services.

In addition to the relatively “rational” material fear of immigrants draining scarce resources, another aspect contributing to the xenophobic sentiments was the framing of migrants as the scapegoats for the general misère. In the aftermath of the crisis many Greeks realized that things had to change not only at the political level but also concerning their daily behavior. The head of the Konrad-Adenauer foundation in Athens, Susanna Vogt for example told us a telling anecdote about tax –evasion: While before the crisis restaurant owners had often refused to give out receipts so as to avoid the payment of taxes after the crisis “No receipt, no obligation to pay” signs in most

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6 Yfantopoulos, John Nic., „The Welfare State in Greece”, University of Athens
7 Markantonatou, Mariam. “Diagnosis, Treatment, and Effects of the Crisis in Greece”, Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung (2013)
8 Golder, Matt. „Explaining Variation in the Success of Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe“, New York University press
restaurants invite the visitor to insist on compliance to the law. However while these changes did take place in the minds of some Greeks others preferred to pin the blame either on the migrants or on other external actors like Troika consisting of IMF, EC, and ECB, as well as, international banks and foreign as politicians like Merkel. According to the referee for culture and press of the German Embassy in Athens, Mr. Rechenhofer (originally an economist) it was quite natural that reaction to the crisis would be rather emotional seeing that the purely economic level of the crisis is too complex to be accessible to everyone.

It has even been argued that Greeks have historically a tendency towards a certain scape-goat mentality. During the Nazi occupation there was no doubt the German occupation was to blame for all ills, but after the war during the civil war left and right continued to lay the blame on each other, and perhaps fatal, the attribution of the responsibility for the military dictatorship on the Americans spared the established parties, that largely already existed before the dictatorship from a reworking or their role in the rise of the junta. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the son of the former prime minister of Neo Democratia and in his own right an important party member seems to support this thesis when saying that: “we always felt that we have to blame somebody else for our problems.”

He continues to say that “in times of crises it is very convenient for populist parties to find scapegoats to put the blame on them”. This, of course, is the fundamental axiom of all forms of populism: any ills originate from outside ‘the people’, who are united in their interest. There are no major contradictions or issues to be resolved within this homogeneous entity. There is always an enemy exogenous to the people that must be expelled or demolished, so that prosperity can be attained.”

However, from the general discourse in the Greek media one could get the impression that while the populists on both sides capitalize on this scapegoat reflex more shamelessly than other parties, they all play on similar registers in fact.

Another macro-structural characteristic of the Greek society that might have contributed to the rise of the Right is fact the historic lack of a real class structure in what could be called a petit bourgeois society. This structure of society prevented a socialization of the working-class is into the traditional leftist channels and explains why some many voters from the working class, that might also have shown their discontent by supporting SYRIZA have instead voted for Golden Dawn. Working-class voters are in fact the group that is most likely to feel direct competition with immigrants on the labor- and housing-market, concerning their consumption and even dating patterns and might thus not agree with the active pro-immigrant standpoint of SYRIZA.


10 Ibid
A Crisis of the Political

After the military Junta that lasted for seven years, Greece established its Third Republic in 1974. The two main parties, New Democracy (ND) and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) were founded and one could argue that from then on a democratic political system consolidated itself\(^\text{11}\). However, the fact that both political formations have had pre-existing party structures dating from the period before the Junta entailed the danger that former clientelism\(^\text{12}\) would be reanimated. Indeed, each party relies only on its own party’s clientele, which on the macro-political scale leads to a true polarization\(^\text{13}\). To put it in practical terms, each time the power between the two main parties alternated, allocations favoring the winning party’s clientele were restructured\(^\text{14}\). This tradition caused on the long term what the professor Christos Lyrintzis (University of Athens) calls a “Partitocrazia”\(^\text{15}\). In other words, this populist culture that each party developed on its own, eventually produced a tradition of party centralism. Thus, it was a common belief that politicians in Greece equaled “large corporate employers” and “guarantors of income and of pensions”\(^\text{16}\). Importantly, with the economic crisis the accumulated political and economic failures were ascribed to this specific ND/PASOK alternance. A chronological analysis of this alternance may seem opportune at this point but this matter would largely reach beyond the scope of this paper.

Crisis of the Established Parties

Analysts of the Greek situation point out that due to the consequent political alienation, the 2000s exhibit rising political disenchantment and political apathy\(^\text{17}\). What accounts significantly for our analysis is the impact this general political fatigue had on the traditional cleavage between the center-right ND and the center-left PASOK. In fact, when PASOK came back to power in 2009, one could with a certain sense of surprise observe that the presumedly social-democratic party would

\(^{12}\) ibidem p. 3
\(^{13}\) ibidem, p. 4
\(^{14}\) ibidem
\(^{15}\) ibidem, p. 6
\(^{16}\) Doxiadis, Aristos, and Manos Matsaganis. "National Populism and Xenophobia in Greece." Counterpoint (2013). p. 43
\(^{17}\) Lyrintzis, op.cit. p. 10
implement “austerity policy of neo-liberal flavor”\textsuperscript{18}. This would strikingly contradict its ideological frame and political discourse previously held\textsuperscript{19}. Hence, in the Greek case, the former traditional cleavage opposing the two main parties has been substituted for the new “memorandum or default”\textsuperscript{20} line. This translated into the PASOK in power accepting the terms of the memorandum and the ND as opposition party thwarted it. However that reaction created a counter-intuitive and paradoxical situation since the presumably liberal ND would oppose a liberal project, namely the austerity measures included in the memorandum. To this paradox adds Antonis Samaras’ (ND) abandonment on June 13, 2012 - four days before the June 17 polls - of his opposition to the memorandum\textsuperscript{21}, for the sake of securing Greece’s membership in the Eurozone. One should not forget that this changing attitude was largely driven by the fear of dealing with Syriza’s leader Alexis Tsipras as Prime minister in the future government. The latter was one of the winners of the May 6th, 2012 polls with a share rising from 4, 6% (2009) to 16, 78%\textsuperscript{22}. Overall, we can deduce two important trends from these recent shifts: Firstly, prior to the May 6th, 2012 polls, the traditional ND/PASOK opposition was substituted by a “memorandum or default” line. Moreover the paradox of the acceptance of neo-liberal ideas by a center-left party (PASOK) and their simultaneous rejection by the center-right (ND) was part of the ND’s strategic move to oppose PASOK. We can argue that this initial was aiming at the maintenance of the traditional dualistic party system. But things changed drastically in the face of Syriza’s ascension. Thus secondly, shortly before the June polls, out of the priority to secure the dominant two party structure, ND decided to agree (partly) on the terms of the memorandum.

These dramatic shifts occurring in a very short period of time hint at troublesome months for Greece’s political establishment. Indeed, one can safely say its establishment is actually dealing with a crisis of the political. The parties’ inability to convey a concrete and coherent set of suggestions to the economic crisis adds major consequences other than those just discussed above. In fact, with the erosion of the traditionally dominant two party cleavage we should raise another issue, namely the issue of what the head of AFP (Agence France Presse) Athens, Isabelle Salles, called the lack of a “strate intermédiaire”. While we will discuss this point further in the next chapter (Crisis of the Social) in reference to the lack of an established civil society, it is important to

\textsuperscript{18} ibidem, p. 16
\textsuperscript{19} ibidem
\textsuperscript{20} ibidem, p. 17
\textsuperscript{22} Doxiadis and Matsaganis, op.cit., p. 15
note here that the supposed erosion of the traditional party structure might be followed by a
disintegration of the associations affiliated with these parties. The erosion has to be seen, according
to PASOK’s president, Evangelos Venizelos, as a crisis of legitimacy that has its main cause in the
lack of an “authentic” political system. One has to admit that it is not quite clear to what the
president of the party, which has shifted from the largest party in 2009 (44%) to a minor coalition
partner in the June 2012 elections (12, 3%)\(^\text{23}\), was concretely alluding. In addition, the fact that the
political system was about to explode when 21 parties ran for the elections in June 2012 doesn’t
seem to be a favorable factor to actually find a credible (authentic) consensus to the general
direction into which Greece should head in the future. In that sense, it is interesting to consider that
another “loser” of the June election, Georgios Karatzaferis (LAOS), who missed the 3% barrier in
the last election after having integrated the November 2011 coalition, believes that there is no such
thing as rightist or leftist parties. During the meeting with him on March 8th, in his office, he
pretends that one should rather consider a duality between patriotic parties on the one hand and
parties that align with globalization on the other hand. It goes without saying that he would put
himself in the first category and that the second one comprises “all the rest”.

After having exposed as brief as possible the complex political crisis that Greece is currently
undergoing, we are naturally wondering in to how far this erosion relates to Chrysi Avgi’s success.
Concretely, we can make out two tendencies at present.

Firstly, the previously discussed crisis of the political opens an electoral window of
opportunity to the party. This can happen in a two-fold manner. Either Chrysi Avgi’s electoral
success is mainly due to protest votes, meaning that they have been chosen by some electors solely
on the basis of voting against the current system (or the memorandum). Or, and this point would
still need further analysis from our side, new preferences emerge out of the political turmoil. In
other words, with the crisis of the political and the convergence of the political space previously
seen, new expanding political opportunities surface. Hence, new space (or niches) rises for parties
that address neglected or new issues. In the case of Chrysi Avgi, we can say that the immigrant
question that has not been properly dealt with under the PASOK government is one of these issues.

Secondly, the rise of Chrysi Avgi might influence the political landscape in two ways. On
the one hand, due to their 18 seats in parliament, the weak center might partly rely on their support
in the process of adopting a law. On the other hand, the political discourse potentially changes

greece.greekreporter.com/2012/10/19/golden-dawn-rising-pasok-vanishingpoll/>
through the absorption of pressures from the edges of the political spectrum. We will deal with an example of the latter in the section “crisis of the social” when we discuss how the pressure from the right has lead to a marginalization of a citizenship law.

We will now look at the electoral window of opportunity that is linked to Chrysi Avgi’s image of an anti-system party. After that, we will discuss the future potential of the party, which will allow us to give tentative answers to the second tendency.

**Anti-System Vote?**

In this general crisis of the old dualistic political system the main center parties have incrementally converged for the sake of securing the main parties’ domination and maintain Greek membership in the Eurozone. This evolution is multifaceted and the light at the end of the tunnel is difficult to grasp. As a matter of fact, the deputy of the region of Magnisia, Panagiotis Iliopoulos of the Chrysi Avgi party told us during the interview we had on March, 6th in the Athenian Parliament, that people are sick of the current situation. Hence they would approach anti-memorandum forces, namely Syriza and Chrysi Avgi. In fact, Chrysi Avgi appears to be “anti-system” or in other terms „anti-establishment“. As Pantelis Capsis, journalist of the Ethnos newspaper and former minister of Press put it during our meeting on March, 5th, even though the mainstream media coverage portrayed the party under a negative light, they didn’t loose of their attractiveness. One could even argue that the fact that the general media banned Chrysi Avgi from their programs since the June 7th 2012 éclat on the ANT1 channel even helped spreading that image. Again Panagiotis Iliopoulos agreed that the main channels no longer invite them to political debates, which is why they passed to smaller TV channels\(^24\). He continued his argument that Chrysi Avgi doesn’t necessarily regard this restriction as harmful. On the contrary, since the mainstream channels are according to him associated with corruption and a crisis of legitimacy, Chrysi Avgi can further rely on its anti-establishment image. Indeed, Pantelis Capsis insisted that Chrysi Avgi “cultivates the idea of being *violently* against the system”. The use of violence is undoubtedly an important characteristic of its party members and its anti-establishment agenda. Not only the TV scandal made the aggressive behavioral patterns of some members obvious. During an excursion to the infamous district of Athens, Aghios Panteleimon, famous for its large share of (il)legal immigrants from Asia and Africa; we had the opportunity to talk to an Albanian immigrant who has lived all his life since his arrival to Greece in

\(^{24}\) Unfortunately, he didn’t precise any names
this district. He explained the general course of events in his district: During the day, the police
would look after illegal immigrants and check regularly the passports of the inhabitants. At night,
from 7 pm onwards, members and partisans of the party would pursue this practice. In point of fact,
the limit between official party members, partisans and supporters is blurred. Thus we will not
propose a deep analysis of the electorate’s profile. The unclear link between supporters, aggressors
and official deputies can even be nuanced when we add to this the striking lack of mismatch
between electorates and elected deputies. Hence, we find it opportune to discuss in the following
section the future prospects of the party’s success.

**Future Prospects**

Certainly, Chrysi Avgi is one of the “winners” of the economic and political crisis. From 0.29% in
2009, it jumped to 6.97% in the May 2012 elections\(^\text{25}\). Nonetheless, only striking 40% of these June
2012 voters said to have an “‘ideologic affinity’ with the party”\(^\text{26}\), which is among the lowest shares
of all voters agreeing ideologically with the party they’ve voted for. Therefore it remains an open
question to what extent the voters chose Chrysi Avgi out of protest? If so, general electoral analysis
suggests that “protest voters tend to move back to their old parties after one or two deviant
elections”\(^\text{27}\). As a matter of fact, it is also shared in the literature that the “anti-establishment is one
of the most important tools for emerging radical right-wing parties”\(^\text{28}\). But what is special about
Chrysi Avgi is their very recent entry into Parliament and thus in an actually establishes political
structure. Before its recent electoral success, Chrysi Avgi was solely a nonparliamentary right-wing
group. That is amongst others a reason why today, it is not very clear yet into how far it will be
adaptable to a true Realpolitik. Given that some partisans or activists of the group are more radical
than a considerable share of its voters, it remains open how sustainable the electoral support will be.
The still inconsistent party structure has actually been addressed by the deputy Panagiotis Iliopoulos
himself: By saying that its members or partisans don’t officially take part in any demonstration as
an official party and by stressing that “our members can do whatever they want”, the member
structure and the use of violence don’t seem very organized yet. This can be again explained by the
fact that Chrysi Avgi has its roots in extraparliamentary right-wing extremism. Moreover, the

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\(^{25}\) Doxiadis and Matsaganis, op.cit., ibidem

\(^{26}\) Doxiadis and Matsaganis, op.cit., p. 63


\(^{28}\) ibidem, p. 256
activists have often supported older forms of right-wing radicalism before the Third Republic. For instance, the party’s president Nikolaos Michaloliakos served as a paratrooper and was already in 1973, at the age of 16 member of an extreme right-wing party 29.

Finally, after having put into question the viability and adaptability of Chrysi Avgi due to its unclear structure regarding the voters-partisans-members strata, we shall see that in view of the transnational perspective, the professor Jens Rydgren holds that the emergence of right-wing radicalism is “the consequence of a profound transformation of the socioeconomic and sociocultural structures of advanced Western European democracies” 30. Hence the generally shared discontent with the effects of the “rampant economic and cultural transformation processes” 31, which is in the Greek case even more striking due to its troublesome shifts in old party oppositions (ND/PASOK), may open up the political sphere for parties that address new issues. As we will see in the following section, Chrysi Avgi particularly addressed immigration issues. In fact, according to Pantelis Capsis, the erstwhile dominant PASOK party has not sufficiently addressed immigration questions, which is why Chyrsi Avgi could successfully make use of that default.

29 http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/57943 [11/04/2013] Special thanks to Mr. Rappas for suggesting the webpage and to Ester and Dimitris Tassos for translating it

30 Rydgren, op. cit, p. 248

31 ibidem
Crisis of the Social

The Role of Immigration and Immigration Mismanagement

Apart from the impacts of the crisis, it can hardly be denied that the rise of xenophobic populist parties is related to recent immigrant trends.\(^{32}\) We hold that attributing the success of Chrysi Avgi solely to the immigration problems the country faces would be a superficial conclusion to make. Nevertheless, the consequences of how immigration was managed in Greece has caused discontent amongst the Greek population; to be more specific, the way illegal immigration was dealt with by the state. Therefore, we argue, that mismanaged immigration can certainly be considered as a catalyst for the success of extreme right populism. In this paragraph we want to use the opportunity to highlight in what way immigration has been mismanaged and why this handling favours the success of a party like Chrysi Avgi.

Greece is, for many non-nationals originating from the Eastern part of the Eurasian continent, an access point to Europe. Unsurprisingly, Greece, like the UK, France and Sweden, is amongst the countries in the EU27 receiving most asylum requests each year.\(^{33}\) With respect to these three other countries, Greece, however, is issuing significantly less asylum decisions (negative or positive) than its counterparts.\(^{34}\) While for the UK, France and especially Sweden there is a significant margin between total asylum decisions and negative asylum decisions, for Greece this margin is practically inexistent.\(^{35}\)

While other major gateways to the European Union have alternated throughout the past years, Greece has remained a targeted entry point for irregular migration, with its land border experiencing the largest increase in detected illegal border crossing in 2010.\(^{36}\) In October 2010, Frontex declared that Greece now accounts for 90 percent of all detections of illegal border crossings to the EU.\(^{37}\) Greek authorities estimated that every day about 350 unauthorised migrant

\(^{32}\) Doxiadis, Aristos and Manos Matsaganis. National Populism and Xenophobia in Greece


cross the land border with Turkey. This would mean that every year about 130,000 irregular immigrants enter the country. Only a very small share of these immigrants end up filing a request for asylum.

What do these conditions and statistics suggest for the situation of immigration in Greece at the moment? A human rights watch report states that the Police Headquarter in Athens accepted only 20 asylum claims a week. It is one of the declared goals of the European Union to support asylum claims so that the immigrants have a possibility to integrate. The policy from the Greek government, however, has been denying most of the claims made, while leaving a fifth of the claims per year unanswered. From this we conclude that it is extremely difficult to enter the country legally. This could render an illegal entry more rational. Especially, with the perspective of filing an asylum request in another European state, now that Dublin II has been suspended. This policy has many implications, however the one which is relevant for this paper, is that it leads to a significant influx of illegal immigrants with little perspective to integrate. A European study suggests that currently there is an estimated average of 168,166 irregular immigrants living in Greece, a country with a population of 10.5 million people.

That the Greek border of the EU is major gateway to the EU has surely geographical reasons, however, not solely. After all, increased EU border control has managed before to significantly reduce irregular border crossings at other pressure points of the border of the Union. The Migration Policy Institute states, that such interventions have been effective, however that as a consequence illegal immigrants flows have shifted to other entry points. This leads us to inquiring the role and failures of the EU with regards to immigration to Greece. We will dedicate a later chapter of this paper to this question.

In recent years, Greek politics has been addressing the question of obtention of citizenship for non-nationals, which legally reside in the country. This trend has followed the success of Chrysi Avgi in

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40 What is Dublin II? This Regulation establishes the principle that only one Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application. The objective is to avoid asylum seekers from being sent from one country to another, and also to prevent abuse of the system by the submission of several applications for asylum by one person.
the 2009 elections. While the Chrysi Avgi success has led to the appearance of immigration on the agendas of the established parties, I want to insist here that such policy efforts are not necessarily an improvement in the management of immigration. When PASOK, changed the citizenship law from *jus sanguinis* to *jus soli*, this had the potential to make the obtention of citizenship easier for second generation immigrants. However, this law proposal is a continuing battlefield. The proposal of the current leadership of Samaras is tending towards the opposite: keeping *jus sanguinis* and adding extra conditions. Not only the issue of legal immigration, but also the question illegal immigration needs to be addressed with more effort: illegal immigration remains outside the public discourse and public policy. Ignoring illegal immigration through excluding them from policies, has created and continues to create a vacuum that provides a very fertile ground for actions taken by Chrysi Avgi and their rhetoric. Years of mismanaged migration and asylum policies and, most recently, the deep economic crisis, have changed the demographics of the entire country. The centre of Athens, in particular has a large immigrant population living in extreme poverty, occupying abandoned buildings, town squares and parks. Such structural changes cannot be left without public management and public discourse.

The negligence of management and discourse leaves space for unreflected debate instead: when complaining about the decay of districts like Agios Panteleimon, no one in the public discourse issues the argument that it is also the Greeks who have changed their urban behaviour during the seemingly prosperous years before the crisis and invested in real estate in the outskirts of Athens. Such trends had a major impact on the centre of Athens, already before immigration became an issue there, argues Petros Markaris. We argue that the failure of reacting to such trends and leaving the illegal immigration out of policy adjustments, has led to social developments like ghettoisation in the centre, which are of legitimate concern to the population and, which if undressed in the public discourse serve as a catalyst for anti-immigrant sentiments and render the public sensitive to anyone filling out this vacuum: for example, Chrysi Avgi.

**The Role of the Police**

The role of the handling of immigration on the state level for the rise of Chrysi Avgi is not only a question of policy and discourse, but also how other state actors cope with it. The representatives of the state that are more visible to the population and are as a abstract as politicians making decisions

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behind locked doors are also extremely relevant actors. We think that the police is an important body to analyse with regards to Chrysi Avgi because it is a state actor that interacts more with the public on a daily basis, and because of the claims that the medias have recently made about a Chrysi Avgi infiltrated Greek police force. After all, the behaviour and opinions of an institution like the police force can influence the public heavily. If such reports were true, wide support for Chrysi Avgi amongst the police could be a significant source of legitimacy of the party for its targeted electorate.

A much read report states that 50% of the police forces in Athens voted for the extreme right party Chrysi Avgi. Such numbers are quite dubious, since conducting such estimations are extremely difficult. However there are some factors that suggest that police men have a tendency to vote for the Chrysi Avgi. Although such tendencies do not account for sufficient proof for stating that half of the police men are in favour of Chrysi Avgi.44

Contrary to the promise of Samaras to not cut the payrolls of special jobs, like the police force and the firemen, in 2012 the government announced significant cuts in the pay of policemen. In a country where the minimum wages for public employees have already been considerably lowered, the frustration amongst policemen is significant, and certainly their trust in the traditional centre parties is small. In such a crisis-ridden context, there is reason to think that it might not be so surprising that a policemen has larger tendency to vote for Chrysi Avgi than a regular Greek voter. That’s not due to a general affiliation of police officers with Nazi symbols, values or ideals. Instead it is important to acknowledge the ideological and historical link between the institution of the police in Greece and the right side of the political spectrum. (This is not to say the right end of the spectrum). Traditionally for joining the police in Greece, you associated yourself with the membership of the rightwing party, Neo Demokrazia, in order to get access to the institution. Also while during the military dictatorship the Greek police was a much praised institution, the fall of the dictatorship led to a certain depreciation of the institution. How does this ideological link with the right-wing parties (which is a link that exists in many other democracies) lead to more support for Chrysi Avgi in the police force? The junta was brutal, but, like any police state, it was good to the police, and it made law and order a priority. That's not to say that police want a return to dictatorship, but as austerity worsens, a number of government workers could lose their jobs. When Chrysi Avgi leader Nikos Michaloliakos speaks fondly about the military regime that had made such an ally of police, that could appeal to policemen worried about feeding their families, whether they happen to believe in neo-Nazism or not. So if police men want to express their political

frustration through their votes it seems reasonable to assume that their protest votes tend towards the right end of the spectrum, rather then the left end of the spectrum.

However, what about those reports of police forces tolerating anti-immigrant violence. Victims of hate crimes have reported that police forces sometimes watch and let the Chrysi Avgi carry out their highly illegal attacks against immigrants or homosexuals.

From the informations accessible to us such reports do not represent a pattern and rather single cases, therefore we hold that it is wrong to essentialize the police on the basis of such reports. However such incidents are grave enough to be taken very seriously. On the one hand, they seems to go along with a pattern of a certain vigilantism and a culture of violence as a legitimate political tool, a concept we will explain below. On the other hand, it is one of the manifestations of a lacking response of the state with regards to hate crimes.

Human Rights Watch has issued a serious report in which it conducted a series of interviews with victims of such hate crimes and draws the conclusions that the police must develop more mechanisms to deal with such incidents both in the aftermath, and their prevention. Since lacking instruments, mechanisms and will for managing the situation of the hate crimes provides for a favourable climate for the emergence of non-state actors filling up this vacuum, we believe that improved management could lead to its reduction.

A Culture of Violence?

While hate crimes are an ugly reality, there is also another fact we need to state within the realm of criminality: there can be no doubt that the rise of immigration has coincided with a sharp increase in crime rates.45 The New York Times quotes Mr. Kokkalakis, the police spokesman: “The security problems in the city centre are largely linked to the problem of illegal immigration. Many migrants resort to petty crime, thefts, burglaries, prostitution and drug dealing to survive and pay off their supposed benefactors”, which are smugglers who bring migrants for a fee. The criminality statistics are indeed referred to by observers as legitimate sources of concern. The failure of state forces like the police of providing visible results during times when crime rates are on the rise, has problematic consequences. All this plays out to a situation, which Petros Markaris calls the loss of the monopoly of legitimate violence. With this reference to Max Weber’s definition of the state, the Greek-Turkish

The author intends to say that the state has lost its authority in the eyes of a relevant share of the population. As a consequence, it is no surprise if this share feels encouraged to vigilantism.

Over the past several years, “citizens’ groups” have formed in Athens’ neighbourhoods like Agios Panteleimon and Attiki, in the centre of the city, as self-appointed neighbourhood watch groups. These groups claim to fill the void left by financially-strapped police forces by patrolling the streets at night to protect residents and rid the streets and parks of migrants. In 2009, a group claiming to be local residents locked the gates of the playground next to the Agios Panteleimon church, to keep immigrants out. Graffiti in blue and white letters (the national colours) on the pavement reads “immigrants out of Greece” and “Greece our homeland.”

Such “ civic activity” is a remarkable example of vigilantism, especially since such groups are known for not refraining from violent behaviour. Those citizens groups and the fact that more than 10 percent of the Greek population votes for a party that is visibly associated with violence, is a striking particularity of the Greek case. We wonder how is it possible that more then a tenth of the Greek population is either in support, or indifferent to such interventions by affiliates of the party (including MPs)?

From our analysis of mismanaged (illegal) immigration we have understood that it has led to the creation of a vacuum, which has given rise to actors like Chrysi Avgi. However, we think that on a general note it has created a distrust in representatives of the state or in Marakis’ terms led to the loss of the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence and therefore creates room for vigilantism. This is not new to the current context of the crisis: In the past, state forces, like the police, have tolerated violence as a political mean of expression by not intervening in violent expression of opinions. A recent example is that of ten 2008 riots in Athens, which escalated with numerous rioters damaging property and engaging the riot police with Molotov cocktails, stones and other objects. Through indirectly tolerating such escalations in 2008 and in numerous previous instances of the modern history of Greece, the state has legitimised this destructive form of political expression, argues Petros Markaris. We believe that this is a valid explanation for why there is toleration for the violence of Chrysi Avgi. However, it has to be stated here that this also explains the violent behaviour of actors of the extreme left and anti-Chrysi Avgi activists, which have launched attacks on a number of Chrysi Avgi offices.

There might also be another reason for which violence enjoys such toleration in Greek society. This factor is historical. After the German occupation, which in itself is manifestation of extreme
violence at work, Greece drifted into a civil war. This civil war is characterised today as having been extremely brutal. Later Greek population also witnessed a military dictatorship, which was also based on the use of extreme force. All these fundamental historical experiences are closely tied to violence and it appears as if Greece never has experienced a clear cut from violence in politics, because these experiences are still in the memory of people, violence is a big theme in the books of school children and there have not been enough large scale state or civic activities to denounce violence. (This argument is in need of further analysis, which we will seek through further consultation of sources.)

The State of the Civil Society

However we want to expand on the notion of aggregate of civic activity: more widely understood as civil society. More importantly we aim at understanding whether or not the structure of the Greek civil society has favoured the rise of Chrysi Avgi and whether there is an absence of effective anti-fascist and anti-racist forces. Anti-violence, toleration, anti-fascism and anti-racism are often values in civil society, which is defined as the aggregate of non-governmental organisations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens. Such institutional actors surely exist in Greece, but can we speak of a strong Greek civil society?

Large institutionalised civil society organisations (CSOs) are few and are not influential in Greece. Most formal civil society organisations do not attract a significant number of members or a significant amount of funds, since they are rather young in their establishment. Also, the absence of effective umbrella bodies and the low organisational capacities and financial resources are important concerns when analysing civil society institutions in Greece. Most importantly, the state, the political parties and the family remain the strongest institutions within Greek society. Greek civil society is still influenced by the legacy of strong political party competition and a polarised political culture, which followed the fall of the dictatorship. Especially, labour unions, student associations and cultural associations have been under heavy influence of the polarised political party system since.

All of the above suggests a weak civil society in Greece. Petros Markaris has identified the historical lack of a bourgeoisie tradition as the reason for the lack of civil society culture, which in other European states has served as the fundament of civil society according to him. However, all this is not to say that civic activity does not flourish on the individual level. Especially during the crisis, civic involvement is very present. It is important to notice that most public manifestations of
Chrysi Avgi are followed by strong anti-fascist and anti-racist manifestations, which significantly outnumber those of the former. Chrysi Avgi doubtlessly faces a strong opposition in Greece, which makes their voices heard loudly, however their voices don’t reach the lands beyond the national borders of Greece. This form of public expression needs to be considered as a fundamental anti-fascist force, however it is reactional. We hold that this civic engagement needs to give way to more institutionalised civil society organisation, also for the sake of hindering the rise of violence and encouraging toleration in the first place.
Historical Analogy to Germany

Understanding the rise of the extreme right in contemporary Greece through an analogy with the situation in Germany in 1929/30.

Do parallels suggest a repetition of history or are the differences outweighing the similarities?

Before presenting parallels and differences between the situation of Germany in the 1930s and Greece after the 2008 crisis, it needs to be said that thanks to our research on the ground and our deepened knowledge of Greece’s particular changes, we believe that the differences finally outweigh the similarities. Rather, we realized that common patterns between the rise of Chrysi Avgi and other right wing parties in Europe should be investigated. The overhaul of traditional party oppositions analyzed in the section “Crisis of the Political” on the one hand and the transeuropean linkages that Chrysi Avgi is trying to establish on the other give sufficient incentives to research further on patterns that can be found on the general European level. Regarding the latter point, we can give the example of the opening of a Chrysi Avgi office in Nürnberg (South of Germany) on this January, 7th 2013\textsuperscript{46}. It is certainly not by accident, that the office was opened in the city that constituted historically the core of the German Nazi party before it gained power in Berlin. Hence, we can safely say that the party tries to play with analogies that could be established with the NSDAP. However, the term “play” needs to be underlined. During our interview with Panagiotis Iliopoulos, he held that the meander as their common party symbol is the most ancient Greek symbol and shall not be confused with the Nazi swastika. While we won’t go into further analysis of these ambiguous (conspiracy) theories, we can unhesitatingly say that the new radical right parties are “longing for ethnic purity, homogeneity and organic order” which places them in “the same tradition as fascism”\textsuperscript{47}. In fact, Panagiotis Iliopoulos asserted that the party’s aim would be to reach the “Golden Dawn (=Chrysi Avgi) of Hellenism”. Just as the NSDAP, Chrysi Avgi advocates favorable conditions to higher birth rates so as to save the Greek nation (Panagiotis Iliopoulos). In


\textsuperscript{47} Rydgren op.cit., p. 246
that sense we can also note the establishment of its female branch (“The Greek White Women’s
Front”), which spreads “women in ancient Sparta; the brave and virtuous”\textsuperscript{48}.

Before we finally turn towards the differences between the NSDAP and Chrysi Avgi, let us quickly
remind the atmosphere of Germany at the beginning of the 1930s. In January 2013, I consulted the
Federal Archives (section film) in Berlin in order to ask for visual material that conveys best the
reactions to the international economic crisis. In one of them, “Arbeit und Wehr (MAMVIS 37322)” a
member of the NSDAP explains that with seven million Germans on the street and 70 000 bankrupt
shops, the enunciator affirmed that the Nazis “knew which inheritance [they] would accept”. He
continues with “him [Der Führer] gave work, power and happiness through the immense opus” and
“everyone feels his equal value in the large German national community (Volksgemeinschaft)”. On
balance, the “gap that divided the German Volk has been bridged by the Führer”. Indeed, the
situation in Greece is a dramatic one. But already ideologically, a clear divide between the NSDAP
and Chrysi Avgi has to be drawn: “Whereas fascism was oriented towards the future, these [the new
radical parties] are rather oriented towards the past (or, in fact towards an idealized idea of the
past)\textsuperscript{49}. This we could already see in the meander symbol and the spartanic image of the Greek
woman. Hence these new parties favored the restauration of “a status quo ante”\textsuperscript{50} and don’t really
have the internal cohesion (as seen above) to launch a coherent national project. Admittedly, Chrysi
Avgi tries to communicate the image of an omni-present party “à l’Allemande” as the head of AFP,
Isabelle Salles put it. For instance, they have already organized classes on the Greek antiquity,
mythology and orthodoxy. They further plan to establish job agencies and kindergardens. Hence
Chrysi Avgi is particularly addressing young voters, which has been confirmed by Panagiotis
Iliopoulos. So yes indeed, it is a party meant to attract activists mainly from the young section of
society, particularly those who are the most severely touched by the crisis and don’t see any
perspective in their own country. Moreover, these young voters have not experienced the Junta. As
we have seen in the next section (Social crisis), the understanding of its national history is another
problem that needs to be addressed in the Greek national curriculum.

A second ideological difference concerns the dealing with the internal “Other”. “Whereas old
racism aimed at subordination, the new ethno-pluralist doctrine aims at expulsion”.\textsuperscript{51} In that sense
the deputy whom we spoke to suggested that all immigrants shall be immediately “put into planes

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\textsuperscript{49} Rydgren, op.cit. p. 246

\textsuperscript{50} ibidem

\textsuperscript{51} Doxiadis and Matsaganis, op.cit., p. 244
and be directed to their countries of origin. You fill all the airplanes. The plane to Pakistan with Pakistanis, Iraqis […]. If their state doesn’t accept them it’s their problem.” I argue that again the Nazi’s strategy was again much more complex and Chrysi Avgi’s proposal seems today neither acceptable nor feasible.

To put it bluntly, we argue that the differences outweigh the similarities. As a matter of fact, we wish to conclude this paper with a positive note. Hence, we will now propose three major differences with the aim to display the noncompliance of the two periods and phenomena.

(1) Contrary to the Weimar Republic, the Third Greek Republic shares a longer history of a consolidated democratic system

As already introduced in the „Political crisis“ section, Greece has at the current level experienced a longer democratic system with an established party structure than Germany of the Weimar Republic. Despite the troublesome crisis of the political analyzed in the aforementioned section, the Director General of the Ministry of Interior Affairs seemed to be convinced during the meeting on March, 6th, that to the present day Chrysi Avgi would not challenge the political establishment. He insisted that the current coalition would have sufficient maturity to resist and isolate the radical right wing phenomena. In this sense we might even shed a positive light on the shifts in coalitions and traditional party paradigms. Indeed, it is dangerous that New Democracy integrated defectors from the right-wing LAOS party (examples are Adonis Georgiadis and Thanos Plevris). It is also worrisome that the party agenda seems to be more and more adapted to right wing agendas so as to absorb the lost votes. But we can read this argument differently as well: The significant effort to secure the political center at any cost shows us the political maturity that has lacked in Weimar.

(2) Greece is a democracy within a democratic community of states

Without giving any judgement to the role of the Troika, we can hypothesize that the government and the society both are more mature towards austerity policies than it was the case in the Republic of Weimar. Moreover, Greece is despite the general polemic about its membership in the Eurozone part of a democratic community of states. This again is a major difference to the young Republic of war, which did not have reached this maturity yet and which moreover faced a much more hostile environment than it is the Greek case today.
Hence foundations and organizations inside and outside the county encourage discourse and promote a civil society.

Even though we did claim the lack of a “strate intermédiaire” and a strong civil society, we can still find civic activities (such as spontaneous soup kitchens that spread in the wake of the crisis). Moreover, the fact that European political foundations, such as the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung we met re-established their offices recently or already have their think tanks establish in the official discourse, gives hope to more bilateral dialogue. This might on the long term have a positive effect on this still lacking intermediary structure.
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