

The Greek New Right and the Eve of Conservative Populism

By Athanasios Grammenos*

The economic crisis in the Eurozone and its dire consequences for Greece terminated the post-1974 political consensus, which was based on a pro-European and democratic concord. The collapse of the social-democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in 2012 allowed space for the radical Left to become the new pole of the political system. To this advancement, the conservatives, being the other pole, responded with a prompt enlargement attempt to the populist right-wing, engulfing several elements of the New Right. This new political order had had evident effects on the party's social and economic agenda, escalating the political debate at the expense of established liberal principles. While in opposition (2015-2019), New Democracy (ND), member of the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament, voted against a series of liberal bills (gender issues, separation of Church and State, the Macedonian issue, etc.) giving out positions with authoritarian and populist essence.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the rise of the New Right in Greece (2012-2019) in both rhetoric and practice, and its consequences for law institutions, human rights and foreign affairs. It is argued that ND, currently holding office, has been occupied by deeply conservative elements as a response to the rise of the radical Left, adopting occasionally ultra-conservative positions in a wide range of social issues. Although the case of Greece is unlike to those in other European countries, nevertheless, to the extent to which the preservation of traditional hierarchies come into question, the political platform of the Greek New Right, which has embedded authoritarian attitudes cultivating an anti-liberal sub-culture to the party's voters, is in accordance with several European conservative movements like in Hungary, Austria or Czechia.

This paper seeks to expound the authoritarian side of the New Right in Greece and offer an assessment of whether liberalism has the capacity to stand its ground against the sharp increase of the right-wing populism. In an effort to produce a well informed and accurate analysis, the sources include the bibliography, official documents and announcements, and press clippings.

Key words: liberalism, New Right, populism, Greece, neo-conservatives.

Introduction and Methodology

In contemporary European public life and politics, “liberal” is an ambiguous term. Although the term reflects an old movement with certain values, such as protecting and enhancing individual freedom, market economy, human and civil rights, it is nowadays used not only frequently but also casually which results in confusion. In Greece, which is the focus of this paper, several individuals, parties, think tanks and even media define and name themselves as liberal, although it is questionable whether they comprehend the origin and suppositions of liberalism. For example, a recent survey has shown that an increasing number of Greeks identify as “liberal” or even “neo-liberal” (Dianeosis 2017). However, the same survey reveals that the interviewees consider enough a pro-market attitude, regardless of the position they hold towards human rights or civil liberties.

For the time being, many respondents are also influenced by the new leadership of ND, which made vague references to liberal values and holds a new privatization agenda. In the next pages of the paper, it will be shown that age, education and public image of politicians are not determinants of a liberal. Instead, there is a general research strategy in political science to outline the ideological framework in which they operate and define them. More precisely, the paper shows that ND is a typical conservative party with an increasing New Right inclination, in line with other EU and US political parties.

The paper begins with a concise discussion about liberalism, to provide a common understanding of the liberal concept across Europe and help the reader distinguish elements that may be falsely attributed to it. The New Right is discussed in the respective section, too, exploring its post-modern character along with certain populist aspects. The second part focuses on the Greek experience from the development of a New Right wave in and around the conservative party. The dominance of this wing, it is argued, has had significant repercussions to the political discourse, in and out of the Hellenic Parliament because some of its positions were so illiberal that made the authoritarian extremes look less unconventional. The last part of the paper attempts to evaluate the situation and its consequences for Greece and the European Union at the time with so much at stake, before making an attempt to answer whether liberalism is able to stand its ground against the backdrop of increasing populism. At this point, it must be stressed that this is not a partisan thesis; the analysis attempts a methodological approach to the phenomenon of populist Right in Greece and its implications for the rise of authoritarian policies.

The European liberalism

Liberalism is a political theory founded on the notion of freedom. Starting from the Aristotelian angle of individualism and popular government, liberal thinkers talk about a state of nature in which humans are free and equal (Benn 1988, Rawls 2001). A liberal believes in four fundamental values: democracy, human rights, civil rights and (social) market economy and they apply to all people without exception. Nevertheless, merely the abstract endorsement of these values is not enough to distinguish a moderate conservative or social democrat from a liberal. For this, there is a system of political parties and civil organizations that consolidate the liberal agenda translating the principle of freedom into politics, economics and all other social affairs.

In consequence, national liberal parties likely endorse the Stuttgart Declaration of 1976 and associate with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in the European Parliament. Besides, there are parties close to the political Centre, either to the Right or Left, that agree with selective liberal ideas, yet they belong to other European political families, such as the European People's Party (EPP) or Socialists & Democrats (S&D). Those parties cannot be considered liberal in the true sense, although they can all work together, in the good spirit of democracy, to advance society and provide sustainable development to all. The same applies to their supporters. It is misleading to call oneself "liberal" for being a free-market advocate while not supporting democracy; or, be someone who fights for human rights while favouring a collectivist economic model. For this paper, this is a critical clarification because it helps understand the situation in a country like Greece, where the absence of a liberal party allows some space for Right-centrists to present themselves as liberals. To follow, it will be analysed that the political prescriptions of the Greek conservatives have illiberal features, affected deeply by the New Right that rejects the liberal consensus.

The New Right and its origins

In the late 1960s, the United States witnessed a quiet but powerful revolution in American politics. The deadlock on the Vietnam War and the contradictions of domestic policies, gave rise to a neoconservative school of thought that would become the prevailing faction inside the Republican Party. As Heywood (2005, 157) explains, this movement held within two distant ideological concepts, neoliberalism and social conservatism where "neo-liberalism can be seen as a manifestation of the libertarian tradition." Fukuyama (2006, 38) adds that

"from the late 1970s on it became increasingly hard to disentangle neo-conservatism from other, more traditional varieties of American conservatism, whether based on small-government libertarianism, religious or social conservatism, or American nationalism. Even identifying who qualified as a neoconservative became difficult."

The neo-conservatives rejected liberal idealism, especially that of the 1960s (O'Sullivan 2008, 160), while they favoured American localism (Gottfried, 1999, 125). On economy, they were very critical of the welfare state, on both financial and ethical grounds (King 1987) supporting "the construction of asymmetric market freedoms" (Harley 2005, 195) beyond the control of the government. This theoretical approach generated a distinct political fashion within the conservative audience, be it politicians, think tanks and individuals, providing fertile soil for radical movements to grow, such as the New Right (Del Pero 2005) as economically neoliberal and socially authoritarian (Hamburger and Steinmetz-Jenkins 2018). The ideas of the New Right occupied a limited but significant part of the American conservatives but they crossed the Atlantic at a time when the neoliberal premise manifested a high degree of success with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher being in power in the US and the UK respectively.

That being said, continental Europe was not much affected by the diffusion of neoconservative ideas because the same time, the 1980s and the 1990s, it was absorbed by the project of European integration. Before the global financial crisis of 2008, nothing seemed capable of disturb-

ing the political status quo of stable political systems moving around the axis of Centre-Left and Centre-Right. However, the unpredictable events of 2007-2008 had severe consequences for many states and the axioms for sustainability of Western economies were challenged. Suspicion for the international and national institutions became apparent while the failed attempts to pass the European Constitution and to deepen integration among member states gave birth to a new wave of Left and Right populism and Euro-scepticism (De Vries 2018). Eventually, the conditions had become suitable for the New Right to communicate its views.

Berggren and Neergard (2015) argue that xenophobia (including anti-immigration feelings) and ethnopopulism are, in different ways, central elements in the ideologies, politics and practices of right-wing populist parties in Europe. Countries like France, Austria and the United Kingdom developed influential political parties, such as the UK Independence Party that set-in motion Brexit. The Greek case had its own features, although heavily influenced by the events mentioned above. The Right has always been strong in this country, with an illiberal and anti-communist (until the restoration of democracy in 1974) political tradition. This changed with the establishment of the two major poles in the 1980s, ND and PASOK, which established equilibrium between them that contained the radical elements within the respective parties (Clogg 1992).

The situation changed in the late 1990s and early 2000s because of frictions in the conservative party and the secession of some extreme members who formed the populist Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS). The party revived the political cleavage between the “real” Right and the “soft” Centre-Right, which, according to the populist narrative, yields to the demands of the Left and serves the “new world order.” Following the Eckstein’s classical typology (1966), it is argued that the schism between the mainstream and the populist politics in Greece, expressed a time-resistant social differentiation centred on collective attitudes and values and it could not anymore be constrained by the leadership of the leading political parties.

When the Greek crisis broke out in 2009, the Radical Left party of SYRIZA posed a new threat to the political system, absorbing a big part of PASOK, while striking ND from the left of the spectrum. In alliance with other European populist parties (e.g. Podemos in Spain), SYRIZA campaigned on an ideologically anti-capitalist platform, accusing the old parties of corruption and elitism. ND was thus pressured into the Right again, proposing conservative policies on a series of issues (the economy, migration, law and order) to safeguard its traditional voters who would be charmed by leftist populism. That electoral ascent of SYRIZA mobilized also the formation of a small libertarian initiative, as a coalition similar to the Tea Party movement in the United States; Recreate Greece (Greek: Dimiourgia Xana - DX), which partnered with former ALDE-associate member Drassi, called for a significant reduction in the size and scope of the government, voicing for immediate budget cuts. Politically, it refused to recognize SYRIZA and the Communist Party (KKE) as legitimate counterparts while raising historical claims to deny the value of the Greek resistance in WWII (according to the DX party president “the [communist] resistance guerrillas were the abettors of the Nazi crimes”) (Tzimeros 2017). With contentious and provocative interventions, DX also advocated for strong border security and anti-immigration measures (Tzimeros 2016).

The Greek conservatism in retrospect

The electoral rise of the Greek New Right started in the early 2000s when the conservative ND attempted a political shift toward the Center under the leadership of Kostas Karamanlis. Political antagonisms within ND turned to a mini crisis, which ended with the expulsion of several party members among whom were the journalist and former member of the Hellenic Parliament Georgios Karatzaferis. As already mentioned, a few months later, Karatzaferis formed his own party LAOS on a nationalist, xenophobic and homophobic agenda, which until then, it was contained within ND's lower ranks. Taking advantage of his small but nationwide TV station, Karatzaferis attacked ND from the right, expressing from very early an anti-Semitic, anti-globalization and anti-systemic rhetoric (For LAOS see Papadimitriou 2011).

In 2004, Karatzaferis was elected Member of the European Parliament (MEP) sitting with the Eurosceptic group of Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) and in 2007 his party entered the Hellenic Parliament with ten seats. Attracting many populists and opportunists, LAOS was aligned with parties like the French Front National and the Austrian Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). In 2011, amid the economic crisis in Greece, LAOS accepted to support the coalition government with ND and PASOK, on the basis of the EU-IMF "Rescue Package" and the implementation of the reform and austerity political platform. In exchange, four of their MPs received a position in the new government (Karatzaferis himself preferred to keep distance) with most notable Adonis Georgiadis, a TV-host and publisher, who became Vice-Minister for Shipping, and Makis Voridis, a lawyer, who became Minister for Infrastructure.

Georgiadis published and publicly advertised an anti-Semitic book, authored by Konstantinos Plevris, the neo-Nazi ideologue in Greece (and father to another LAOS MP, Thanos Plevris). Through his book-selling TV show at Karatzaferis' channel, he used to promote xenophobic views and conspiracy theories, especially on issues of foreign policy (The Times of Israel 2013). Voridis is a radical far-rightist, who in the 1980s was leading the youth branch of a political group founded by jailed dictator Georgios Papadopoulos that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. His position in that group was previously held by Nikos Michaloliakos, today leader of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (GD) party. In the 1990s, Voridis had founded a short-lived ultra-nationalist party named Greek Front on an anti-immigrant nationalist ticket (Wheeler 2000).

In the meanwhile, president of ND had become Antonis Samaras, a politician who just like Karatzaferis parted ways with ND in the 1990s founding his own party, Political Spring (Greek: Politikē Anoixi), on a nationalistic agenda over the Macedonian name issue (Tziampiris 2000). Having caused a political disaster to the ND government in 1993, Samaras returned to the party in 2004, when he was elected Member of the European Parliament (MEP). In 2010, he refused to support the first EU-IMF bailout because he rejected the "medicine" of austerity (Gemenis and Nezi 2016). His vague and unlikely political program not only received criticism that "he put personal ambition before national interest" (Jackson 2012) but furthermore fuelled speculation from the extremes, whose anti-austerity rhetoric alike gained some credibility.

Samaras was expected to put pressure on LAOS and indeed managed to garner a significant portion of its voters, leaving it out of Hellenic Parliament in the 2012 elections. Previously, he had secured the transfer of Adonis Georgiadis, Makis Voridis and Thanos Plevris to ND, setting upon a firm basis the new right profile of his party. One can argue that it was only a tactical manoeuvre at a time when the electoral ascend of the radical Left posed a threat to Greece's European membership with ill-informed promises. As discussed above, though, the rise of the populist Left was partly facilitated by Samaras' political choices at the beginning of the crisis. Yet, the most severe consequence was that, with a hard-core Right leader and an enlargement based on Right-wing populists, ND made room for radical-Right attitudes to enter the mainstream of Greek politics by the back door. The impact of this development was so profound that two extreme parties, the GD and the far-right Independent Greeks (Greek: ANEL), entered the Hellenic Parliament in 2012 on the anti-austerity agenda that Samaras has invented.

The party of New Democracy and the rise of right-wing populism: case studies

A conservative party ND was founded to help establish a sound democracy after the military dictatorship between 1967 and 1974. Konstantinos Karamanlis, founder and first ND party president, envisioned a modern party with strong European orientation, which could cover the entire political spectrum ranging from the center-right to the far-right. However, the ambitious targeting combined with the overriding personality of the leader did not allow for the consolidation of ideological identity. Karamanlis himself was the first "ideology" of ND, and he was focused on practice rather than on political theory. As one scholar puts it, in practice, ND remained attached to state-paternalist and interventionist policies and a "pseudo-progressive ideological and socio-economic approach" (Loulis 1981). It was Konstantinos Mitsotakis, elected president in 1985, who gave ND a clear political identification, described in his manifesto, "A new proposal for freedom" (Konstantinos Mitsotakis Foundation). Mitsotakis himself named his program "neoliberal" but Loulis (1981) argues that it was so only in theory.

The situation did not change over the years. In the 2000s, ND president Kostas Karamanlis (nephew of the party's founder) declared his will to cover the centrist space, rebranding his party as moderate, cooperating and open-minded. Again, it was a tactical move that helped ND to secure a parliamentary majority, but it was an apolitical one. The "centrist" approach was substituted by social liberalism from Samaras, who succeeded Karamanlis in 2010. Samaras interpreted social liberalism as the "via media" between the collective and the individual: "liberal" because it seeks a new production system and "social" because it aims to defend the welfare state. However, his actual performance left much to be desired. His circle of advisors consisted of hard Right individuals; during his tenure, he issued a vast number of ministerial decrees skipping the process through the Parliament, and he put pressure on the judiciary. The latter became evident when, in autumn of 2013, he decided to conduct legal proceedings against the GD party. GD, whose trial has not reached a decision yet, was accused of multiple crimes, including murder and paramilitary activities (Angouri and Wodak 2014), and there is no doubt that it should account for these indictments to justice. However, Samaras intervened in a questionable way to move the case faster. He claimed that although the judiciary had the legal framework to act,

“political will” was missing; with his statement, Samaras opened the Pandora’s Box, disturbing the separation of powers. With his own words:

“[All we achieved] it was with the existent legal framework. It was thus shown that there is sufficient legal framework from our democracy that allows the state to protect democracy and protect the democratic legality. What missing was Political will! And now, we displayed that there is *political will*. And this is a step forward” (Prime Minister of Greece 2013; emphasis added).

Soon afterward, an openly pro-ND journalist called the party to cooperate with the neo-Nazis to neutralize the opposition of SYRIZA. Babis Papadimitriou, who despite his views was elected MP with ND in July 2019, said:

“I know I will provoke both my friends and enemies but [...] if SYRIZA wants the Communist Party, let them work together. But, why not assume that a more serious Golden Dawn could support a more conservative coalition, as happens in many other European countries, such as Norway?” (Left.gr 2013)

Political scientist Pierre-André Taguieff (2012), writing about the European populist Right, argued that it had displayed indignation and rejection against the ruling elite. Indeed, Mitsotakis did not hesitate to use the motto “Go away!” (Greek: “Fygete!”) against the elected government, to encapsulate his doctrine. The New Right was already well established in and around the conservative party. The following paragraphs will discuss how much that evolution affected the engagement of critical challenges for the country.

The Macedonian name issue

For most Europeans, the dispute between Greece and the then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was a non-issue, an unthinkable inquiry that had to be resolved as soon as possible. Many officials in Brussels and other European capitals were not in a position to comprehend the Greek concerns and they charged Greece, a big player in the Balkans, for rigidity and stubbornness. The situation changed when both states elected centre-leftist governments with eagerness to engage in talks and find common ground for a viable relationship. The progress in bilateral negotiations became apparent at the beginning of 2018 and resulted in the final Agreement next June. The Greek conservative opposition was either sceptical or negative. ND, which in 2008 accepted in principle a compound name including the term “Macedonia” for its neighbour, rejected the agreement, sharpening the political discourse (Srdjan 2019).

Given a potential settlement, a small number of grassroots organizations and ultra-right movements organized several rallies, in Thessaloniki and Athens, to denounce any compromise vis-à-vis the name of Macedonia. In both cities, many cultural unions, military officers, Church leaders and other clergy members, as well as the Golden Dawn, ultra-orthodox supporters and far-right groups joined the gathering. Although none of these rallies exceeded the attendance of 150.000 people, ND found an opportunity to put pressure on the government on such a sensitive situation. Not only was it openly supportive of the demonstrations, but also it felt comfortable having some of its top members protesting among radical Right extremists. Antonis Samaras,

Adonis Georgiadis and other members of ND joined the rather diverse group of protesters. The agreement predicted that the state would provide an annual subsidy to the Church as an exchange. In principle, throughout this period, ND claimed that SYRIZA had “betrayed” the sacred values of the nation because it gave in to something like the new world order of transnationalism and multiculturalism.

On the other side, the solution to the Macedonian issue given with the Prespes Agreement (Grammenos 2018), gave rise to positive reactions in the European Union, NATO and the United Nations. The UN mediator Matthew Nimetz hailed the agreement as a model of problem-solving, and Federica Mogherini, the EU’s high representative for foreign affairs, marked the occasion as a “historic day for the Balkans and for Europe.” Simultaneously, the major European media welcomed the progress as historic and necessary. Domestically, it was rejected by the opposition as more or less an act of treason, not to mention reckless comments such the one by Adonis Georgiadis, who tweeted on June 17, 2018 that when ND was negotiating a compound name with a geographical prefix in 2008, it was only to eyewash the EU and NATO.

The situation became more intense when the Agreement was introduced to the Hellenic Parliament for ratification on 23 January 2019. The rhetoric of the ND party pandered people’s nationalist drives. An exemplary case was George Koumoutsakos, MP, head of the party’s foreign policy committee, who said that the Agreement does not respect that “a lot of Greek blood has been shed for Macedonia” (Hellenic Parliament 2019a, 2984). Makis Voridis, MP, the parliamentary spokesperson of ND, went far beyond his colleague. In his intervention, he called the Prespes Agreement “the blowout of Macedonia” and he called SYRIZA “a government of high treason.” To make his statement more intense, he turned to the MPs of SYRIZA with a derogatory tone and shouted: “Your argumentation is more Skopjan than the Skopjans!” (Hellenic Parliament 2019c, 3207). He then received the applause of his President Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who was sitting in the front row. The latter, in his speech, described the Agreement as a major catastrophe for Greece, a failure of the foreign policy and an “unacceptable retreat.” He suggested that Greece should blackmail North Macedonia with the power of veto for its EU candidacy until they abandon the name. In addition, he expressed his pessimism that the neighbouring country could exploit the provisions of the Agreement to pose a threat to Greece’s integrity, accusing his political opponents that they wanted to divide the Greeks to unite the “Skopjans” (Hellenic Parliament 2019b, 3153-54).

Separation of Church and State

A decades-long pending political issue with social and financial consequences has been the Church-State relations in Greece, or, in other words, the separation of Church and State. Although Greece is a secular state, the current situation creates political entanglements and requires further action (Molokotos-Liederman 2016). The Greek government and the Church of Greece reached a landmark agreement in November 2018, which was followed by a joint statement by Premier Alexis Tsipras and Archbishop Ieronymos II. The agreement was twofold and it concerned: (a) the salaries of approximately 10.000 priests who are considered civil servants and are registered to the government payroll; (b) the creation of a joint fund tasked with managing

Church property, a big part of which is used by the State. Simultaneously, the Church agreed not to have any further property claims and not to oppose moves to make the state (more) religion neutral. Although not progressive to pursue a full separation, partly because of legal peculiarities, the agreement had liberal orientation, complying with the situation as it is in most western states.

In the political arena, the reaction of the conservative party was inconsistent. On 6 November 2018, ND issued a short press release in which it hailed the agreement, asserting that SYRIZA plagiarized one of the party's political proposals (New Democracy 2018a). The statement also expressed the wish that the agreement would prove beneficial for both Church and State. The next day, nonetheless, a new press release condemned the agreement with the excuse that it would dismay the vocation and personal life of the clergy (New Democracy 2018b). By conjunction, a similar note was issued by the association of Greek clerics arguing that their new status, as predicted by the deal, would deny them certain rights (Kallergis 2018) while many local Bishops took a hard stance, albeit off the record (Kitsantonis 2018). To their support, Elena Rapti, a conservative MP for the first district of Thessaloniki, tweeted on June 18, 2019 that a conspiracy aiming to de-Christianize Greece is going on, but she suggested that "those who follow the God's plan will be rescued." Finally, ND rejected the proposed reform towards deeper secularization of the state, while failing to explain the reasons. As a leading news portal observed, Kyr-iakos Mitsotakis, despite his liberal references, arrogated to himself the "Lord's right hand," joining forces with the hierarchs and the clergy who were hooked to the previous benefits (In.gr 2019).

According to a recent Pew Institute survey, Greece is a country where religion plays a significant role (Pew Research Center 2018). Politicians and analysts use this argument frequently to explain the ways in which many lawmakers act and vote. However, it is supported here that this is a stereotypical assumption that decreases the responsibilities of politicians implying that they just satisfy the "will of the people." Politicians are not supposed to take orders but to vote independently and for the public good; and, this means that occasionally they have to turn to their constituents and offer clarifications on sensitive matters, without fear or prejudice. After all, blaming the Church every time the outcome is not desirable is an undertaking of giving politics into superstition; it also ignores that beyond the conservative clerics also stand progressive hierarchs who have defended human and civil rights (Grammenos 2016). This observation is leading to the last case study.

Human rights

Therefore, the perception that the Greek New Right flirts with the Church for political gains should not prevent someone from seeing the actual positions of this group and their consequences for Greece and Europe. Anti-Semitism, for example, as discussed above for the incumbent ND Vice President Georgiadis, is a political view. Nevertheless, Georgiadis is not the only one with such a record. Makis Voridis, his former colleague at LAOS, has a well-known pro-dictatorship past, but his anti-Semitic views became the central point of discussion only when he became Minister for Agriculture. A few days after his party won the snap elections of 7 July 2019, the Gov-

ernment of Israel stated that “it will not work with Greece’s new Agricultural Development and Food Minister Makis Voridis because of his anti-Semitic past” (Keinon 2019; Kathimerini 2019). The Greek Prime Minister’s office offered no comment, although the prime minister is considered a friend of Israel (World Jewish Congress 2019).

Equally controversial was the stance Mitsotakis took to issues of gender. ND refused to back the law that would legalize same-sex marriage because it was not clear whether adoption is allowed or not. Neither did they support the law that allows transgender citizens over the age of 15 to change their legal gender in official documents with a simplified procedure (Becatoros 2017). Mitsotakis himself exerted vociferous criticism of the bill because he did not trust the judgement of the people who would apply for the legal gender change without a psychiatric examination. Addressing the plenary of the Hellenic Parliament, he gave a rather unusual example: he said that a psychiatrist told him about an 18-year-old male who wanted to change legal gender because “he went up Mount Hymettus [at Athens] and an alien told him to” do it (Hellenic Parliament 2017, 420). One should add the controversial statement of journalist and ND MP Constantinos Bogdanos, that he has a problem with vegan lesbians because they want to impose their veganism violently (ONE TV 2019). Bogdanos, a self-determined “conservative patriot liberal and Orthodox,” has also tweeted on September 19, 2019 that Barack Obama was “the dispatcher of Arab Spring which gradually destroys Europe.”

The above views reflect a general understanding of human rights as optional. Regardless of the international declarations, which are the norm in most political parties in the EU, practice reveals ND’s increasing intolerance to diversity and attack on human rights. Factions or individual members in various levels of the party, adopt a hard stance on social issues with the leadership unable to respond convincingly for or against. This school of thought does not differ much from the Republican Party in The U.S. during Trump presidency or the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany. Similarly, an Athens University professor, quoted in French magazine *Slate*, underscored that the political footprint of ND combines “a form of authoritarianism in the management of the state, a very neoliberal agenda on the economic level and a nativist populism that highlights identity politics” (Kottis 2019). Considering the above facts, the last chapter will examine if and how liberalism can challenge this course and stand its ground to the rise of authoritarian tendencies.

Conclusions: liberalism in the era of the New Right

In the last decade, Greek society experienced not only harsh austerity but also a deep division. The leftist populism promised an unreasonably easy escape from the crisis, defending “the people” against “the corrupt elites.” Aggregating disappointed and undecided voters, it implemented aggressive activism and denied being part of the solution to the Greek problem. When SYRIZA took a chance to govern the country, ND reversed the paradigm of populism; it was no more *the people* against *the elites*; the conservative narrative had *the patriots* and those who love their country against *the traitors* and *the communist internationalists*. The role-playing between the two parties recalled old disputes, schisms and hatred; memories of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) and the illiberal democracy of the 1950s and 1960s revived poisoning the political life.

Greece has not managed yet to acquire a *rational minimum*, in the sense of a consensus for the country's political orientation (a Greek grand strategy) where the coexistence of the parties is based on mutual respect and open channels of communication. The German example, where the two main rivals, Christian Democrats Union (CDU) and Social Democrats Party (SPD), form a Große Koalition and they work together on a strategic agreement despite their differences, is still inconceivable in Athens. This is partly because of the absence of a cohesive, centrist and liberal party, with deep roots in society, standing in between the two major forces. A liberal force, although not yet visible, could stabilize the political discord to a new standard, because the voter transition because of extreme views would be easier, had it been towards the Centre.

Therefore, on the question of whether liberalism is able to stand its ground against the backdrop of increasingly present authoritarianism, this paper suggests that in principle, the liberal theory consolidated in political practice can get a new impetus. Nevertheless, recent developments, such as the rebranding of ALDE-Group to Renew Europe, pose questions about the scope and the political creed of the liberal representation in the European Parliament. Equally, it has been noticed that a limited number of individual members endorse or vote for non-ALDE parties. That being said, for liberal movements to bloom in political systems like Greece's, it is crucial to redefine liberalism or re-introduce it throughout Europe.

A more inclusive liberal family that rejects elitism is desirable together with a cohesive political platform. There is much work yet to do to defend values of freedom before populism and authoritarianism that place the European liberal order in peril and this work must start immediately.

* Athanasios Grammenos is the Project Manager of the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit in Greece. He holds his Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Macedonia and currently he is Fellow at the Sacramento State University Library.

References

Angouri, Jo, and Ruth Wodak. "They Became Big in the Shadow of the Crisis: The Greek Success Story and the Rise of the Far Right." *Discourse & Society* 25, no. 4 (2014): 540-665.

Becatoros, Elena. 2017. "Greek transgender community hopes new law will improve lives." *Kathimerini* (English Edition), October 10. <http://www.ekathimerini.com/222329/article/ekathimerini/community/greek-transgender-community-hopes-new-law-will-improve-lives>.

Benn, Stanley. 1988. *A Theory of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berggren, Erik, and Andres Neergard. 2015. "Populism: Protest, democratic challenge and right wing extremism." In *International Migration and Ethnic Relations: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Magnus Dahlstedt and Andres Neergard. New York: Routledge.

Bogdanos, Konstantinos. Twitter post, September 19, 2019, 4:22 p.m., <https://twitter.com/bogdanosk/status/1174826099727044608>.

Clogg, Richard. 1992. *A Concise History of Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Da Silva, Chantal. 2018. "What's In A Name: Macedonia Set to change its name, bringing a 27-year dispute with Greece to an end." *Newsweek*. June 17. <https://www.newsweek.com/whats-name-just-ask-greece-actually-quite-lot-980357>.

Dianeosis. 2017. *What Greeks believe in 2017*. <https://www.dianeosis.org/en/2017/04/greeks-believe-in-2017/>.

De Vries, Catherine. 2018. *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Del Pero, Mario. 2006. "The Historical and Ideological Roots of the Neoconservative Persuasion," in *The United States Contested. American Unilateralism and European Discontent*, edited by Sergio Fabbrini. London: Routledge.

Eckstein, Harry. 1966. *Division and Cohesion in Democracy: A study of Norway*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Edwards, Lee. 1999. *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*. New York: Free Press.

Fukuyama, Francis. 2006. *America at the Crossroads. Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gemenis, Kostas, and Roula Nezi. 2016. "Government-Opposition Dynamics during the Economic Crisis in Greece," in *Government-Opposition in Southern European Countries during the Economic Crisis*, edited by Elisabella de Giorgi and Catherine Moury. Abingdon: Routledge.

Georgiadis, Adonis. Twitter post, June 17, 2018, 2:12 a.m., <https://twitter.com/AdonisGeorgiadi/status/1008276066161610752>.

Grammenos, Athanasios. 2018. "The day after the Prespes Agreement." *Kathimerini* (English Edition). June 19. <http://www.ekathimerini.com/229780/opinion/ekathimerini/comment/the-day-after-the-prespes-agreement>.

Grammenos, Athanasios. 2016. "The African American Civil Rights Movement and Archbishop Iakovos of North and South America." *Journal of Religion & Society* 18: 1-19.

Hamburger, Jacob, and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins. 2018. "Why did neoconservatives join forces with neoliberals? Irving Kristol from critic to ally of free-market economics." *Global Intellectual History*. DOI: 10.1080/23801883.2018.1423740.

Harley, David. 2005 *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hellenic Parliament. 2019a. Plenary Sessions Minutes. January 23. <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/a08fc2dd-61a9-4a83-b09a-09f4c564609d/es20190123.pdf>.

_____. 2019b. Plenary Sessions Minutes. January 24. <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/a08fc2dd-61a9-4a83-b09a-09f4c564609d/es20190124.pdf>.

_____. 2019c. Plenary Sessions Minutes. January 25. <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/a08fc2dd-61a9-4a83-b09a-09f4c564609d/es20190125.pdf>.

_____. 2017. Plenary Sessions Minutes. October 10. <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/a08fc2dd-61a9-4a83-b09a-09f4c564609d/es20171010.pdf>

Heywood, Andrew. 2004. *Political Theory, an Introduction* (3rd edition). Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Jackson, Patrick. 2012. "Profile: Greek conservative leader Antonis Samaras." *BBC News*, June 20. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18410765>.
- In.gr. 2019. "Church-State: Kyriakos, Ieronymos and the pending issues." July 17. <https://www.in.gr/2019/07/17/politics/ekklisia-kratos-o-kyriakos-o-ieronimos-kai-ta-anoikta-metopa/>.
- Kallergis, Kostas. 2018. "Greece Church agreement to take 10,000 priests off payroll." *BBC News*, November 7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46122997>.
- Kathimerini. 2019. "Israeli official slams Vouridis' appointment." *Ekathimerini*, July 11. <http://www.ekathimerini.com/242484/article/ekathimerini/news/israeli-official-slams-vouridis-appointment>.
- Keinon, Herb. 2019. "Israel will shun new Greek minister with anti-Semitic past." *The Jerusalem Post*. July 11. <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Israel-will-shun-new-Greek-minister-with-antisemitic-past-595232>.
- King, D. S. 1987. *The New Right: Politics, Markets and Citizenship*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kitsantonis Niki. 2018. "Greek Leader's Efforts to Loosen Church-State Ties Are Met with Skepticism." *New York Times*, November 16. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/16/world/europe/greece-tsipras-orthodox-church.html>.
- Kottis, Alexandros. 2019. "L'extrême droite grecque ne disparaît pas, elle se recompose." *Slate*, July 19. <http://www.slate.fr/story/179859/chute-aube-doree-elections-legislatives-grece-extreme-droite-grecque-pas-morte>.
- Left.gr. 2013. "Babis Papadimitriou and the more serious Golden Dawn." YouTube Video, 0:44, September 11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBPDiYbxnsg>.
- Louis, John. 1981. "The Greek conservative movement in transition: From paternalism to neo-liberalism." In *The New Liberalism: The Future of Non-Collectivist Institutions in Europe and the U.S.* Athens: Centre for Political Research and Information, International Symposium.
- Micklethwait, John, and Adrian Wooldridge. 2004. *The Right Nation, Conservative Power in America*. New York: Penguin.
- Mitsotakis Konstantinos Foundation. *Biography of Konstantinos Mitsotakis*. <http://www.ikm.gr/1985-1989>.
- Molokotos-Liederman, Lina. 2016. "The impact of the crisis on the Orthodox Church of Greece: a moment of challenge and opportunity?" *Religion, State and Society* 44 (1): 32-50.
- New Democracy. *Ideology*. <https://nd.gr/i-nea-dimokratia#ideologia>.
- New Democracy. 2018a. *Statement for the Government's agreement with the Church*. November 6. <https://nd.gr/anakoinosi-toy-grafeioy-tytoy-tis-nd-gia-ti-symfonia-tis-kyvernis-me-tin-ekklisia>.
- _____. 2018b. *Clarification note for yesterday's announcement about the Church*. November 7. <https://nd.gr/enimerotiko-simeio-ma-tis-neas-dimokratias-gia-tis-hthesines-anakoinoseis-shetika-me-tin-ekklisia>.
- OPEN TV. 2019. "K. Bogdanos in ONE Channel: I am a data scavenger." YouTube Video, 34:16, August 28. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x4V1-PpRnw>.
- O'Sullivan Noel. 2003. "Conservatism," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, edited by Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Papadimitriou, Jannis. 2011. "Right-wing populists gain political ground in Greece." *Deutsche Welle*, November 16. <https://www.dw.com/en/right-wing-populists-gain-political-ground-in-greece/a-15534403>.

Pew Research Center. 2018. *Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues*. October 29. <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/>.

Prime Minister of Greece. 2013. *Speech at the Political Committee of New Democracy*. October 12. <https://primeminister.gr/2013/10/12/12418>.

Rapti, Elena. Twitter post, June 18, 2019, 12:43 a.m., https://twitter.com/Elena_Rapti/status/1140887674691170306.

Rawls, John. 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, edited by Erin Kelly. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rothbard, Murray. 1978. *For a New Liberty, The Libertarian Manifesto* (revised edition). New York: Libertarian Review Foundation.

Sloat, Amanda. 2018. *Diplomacy triumphs: Greece and Macedonia resolve name dispute*. June 12. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/12/diplomacy-triumphs-greece-and-macedonia-resolve-name-dispute/>.

Srdjan, Cvijic, ed. January 2019. *North Macedonia: What Is Next?* Open Society Foundations. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/24b3b83c-ed50-4dad-b00f-b1cdab4d700c/north-macedonia-what%27s-next-20190115.pdf>.

Taguieff, Pierre-André. 2012. *Le nouveau national-populisme*. Paris: CNRS.

The Times of Israel. 2013. "New Greek health minister has anti-Semitic past." *Times of Israel*, July 1. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/new-greek-health-minister-has-anti-semitic-past/>,

Tziampiris, Aristotelis. 2000. *Greece, European Political Cooperation and the Macedonian Question*. London: Routledge.

Tzimeros, Thanos. 2017. "To egklima pou baphtisame ethnikē antistasi." *Thessaloniki Press*, September 22. <https://www.thessalonikipress.gr/ethniko-egklima-pou-vaftisame-ethniki-antistasi-tou-thanou-tzimerou/>.

Tzimeros, Thanos. 2016. "War with Islam is Over." *Liberal.gr*. December 22. <https://www.liberal.gr/apopsi-o-polemos-me-to-islam-teleiose/102432>.

Wheeler, Shirin. 2000. "Greek elections focus on immigration." *BBC News*, April 6. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/703718.stm>.

World Jewish Congress. 2019. *World Jewish Congress welcomes results of Greek elections*. July 8. <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/world-jewish-congress-welcomes-results-of-greek-elections-7-1-2019>.

Zempi, Irene, and Imran Awan. 2019. *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia*. Abington: Routledge.