

The Political and Religious Landscape of Greece

Christian, Far Right, but Not Christian Far Right

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Introduction

The Greek political system has recently come under the microscope of researchers, especially since the 2009 economic crisis. However, most approaches undermine the Greek Orthodox Church's (GOC's) importance regarding the Greek state's function. The historical origins of the GOC's relationship with the Greek state were established after the 1821 Revolution, as the Church gained a prominent role in the everyday life of the newborn state. Through a historical retrospect, we can observe the GOC's crucial position during the different periods of the Greek state. The current article focuses on the Greek political scene's last two decades, during which the first populist radical-right party entered the Greek Parliament. My research questions the relationship between the Church—both the official Church and its religious organizations—and the far right, instead presenting the Greek Church as a potential influencer of the electoral body favoring far-right political parties. The article's structure is as follows: after introducing the framework, I briefly review the Greek political system and landscape before summarizing the Greek religious landscape, acknowledging the significance of the Church–state relationship. Moreover, as the pandemic has triggered various social and political transformations, I draw certain conclusions regarding the relationship between the Church and the Greek far right in the last two decades. Finally, I emphasize the opportunistic character of the religious issue for the Greek far right.

The political and religious landscape in Greece since 2001

The political landscape

The current article's timeline covers Greece's last two decades, which have been characterized by an established duopoly (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014). Until 2012, the political system was dominated by the social democratic party PASOK (Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinema [Panhellenic Socialist Movement]), which has mainly governed the country since 1981, and the right-wing party Nea Dimokratia (ND; New Democracy). In the 2009 elections, these two parties gained more than 75% of the votes (YPES 2022).

PASOK's governments were linked with Greek society's economic modernization (Moschonas 2020), the return of the Olympic Games to Athens (2004), and the first post-transition clash with the Church, which took place in 2000 regarding the inclusion of religion on identity cards. People were mandated to declare their religion on their identity cards until 1986, when PASOK made this optional. ND then changed this back to mandatory before shifting to an optional solution. While the EU favored deleting this reference to religion, the Greek Orthodox Church increased its pressure, declaring a referendum in 2000 and collecting three million signatures in favor of the declaration of religion on identity cards (Molokotos-Liederman 2003, 296). ND governments took the friendliest stand toward the Church's positions (Michailidis, Vlasidis, and Karekla 2021), and ND was also most connected with the outbreak of the Greek economic crisis in 2009, as the party won the 2004 and 2007 national elections.

Amid the rather monotonous political scene of 2000, Giwrgos Karatzaferis, an ND parliamentary member, was expelled from his party. Thus, Karatzaferis formed LAOS, a populist radical-right party (Psarras 2010; Georgiadou 2019, 151–152). The party's name was framed with two meanings: the Greek word *laos* describes the *people* (Georgiadou 2020), while the acronym refers to the forming of Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos (Popular Orthodox Rally), highlighting religion's significance for the newly created party (Psarras 2010).

In terms of its electoral support, voting for LAOS was acknowledged as a "choice of protest" (Georgiadou 2019, 164–165). Anti-political and anti-systemic criteria directed such a protest vote, and the party's ideology was openly anti-immigrant and prone to conspiracy theories (Georgiadou 2019, 168). The party entered the electoral competition for the first time in the 2004 double election (National and European Parliament elections). LAOS entered the Greek Parlia-

ment after the 2007 national election (with 3.8% of the vote), and its anti-systemic policies boosted the party to its electoral peak in the 2009 election (5.6% of the vote). Nevertheless, the party's decision to support the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)¹ in 2010 and participate—with PASOK and ND—in the coalition government under Loukas Papadimos resulted in LAOS's electoral defeat in the 2012 double election (2.89% in May 2012 and 1.58% in June 2012), leading to its vanishment from the Greek political scene (Georgiadou 2014).

The absence of significant national crises until their outbreak in 2009 emphasizes the significance of these crises for comprehending the radical transformations that the political and social landscape experienced. In particular, the 2009 economic crisis hit the old political system badly, with PASOK being heavily defeated in the 2012 national election. Therefore, a political opportunity occurred for challenger parties to take advantage of the frustrated electoral body. The political landscape was reshuffled, and the extreme-left party of SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) replaced PASOK (Voulgaris and Nikolakopoulos 2014). At the same time, LAOS suffered a heavy defeat, helping to strengthen the neo-Nazi party Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn; GD), which received 6.92% of the electoral vote, and the populist radical-right party Anexartitoi Ellines (Independent Greeks), which gained 7.51% of the electoral vote (Georgiadou 2014, 199). Notwithstanding the economic crisis, Greece had to deal with the refugee and migration crisis in 2014, and the Greek political scene reached a high level of polarization.

The Greek far right's transformation—a continuing process since 1974's democratic transition (Georgiadou 2019)—has consisted of two phases. The first phase followed the extreme right's appearance. Specifically, with GD as its leading actor, the Greek extreme right adopted nativist and racist positions, acting like a fascist militia, even after entering the Greek Parliament in 2012. GD appeared in 1980, publishing a journal under the same name and then transforming into a political movement in 1983 (Georgiadou 2019, 172). Even though it remained on the margins of political life until 1994, the party never hid its extremist nature and Nazi ideology (Georgiadou 2019, 173). GD repeatedly mentioned its paganistic beliefs, and since the early 1990s, it has extended its activities by attacking extreme-left supporters, attempting to provoke clashes in the streets. As a result of the reshuffling of the Greek

1 The first MoU was signed on May 2010 between the Greek government and the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund in order to cope with the Greek government-debt crisis.

political system following the outbreak of the 2009 economic crisis, GD found fertile ground for escalating its violent attacks against migrants and extreme-left supporters. As polarization became the main characteristic of the Greek political scene after 2009, the party's violent attacks resulted in the murder of Pavlos Fyssas (an extreme-left rap singer) by GD members in September 2013 (Verousi and Allen 2021b, 24–25). The outcry that this triggered pushed the Greek government to examine the party's activities. After years of trials, the party was finally convicted as a criminal organization in 2020.

The Greek far right's second transformation phase coincided with the strengthening of populist radical-right parties across Europe. Mudde (2007) has provided a framework of major and minor definitions for understanding the new balances inside the far-right family, revealing that nativism, authoritarianism, and populism are core characteristics of the populist radical-right family (Mudde 2007). LAOS was the first electorally successful representative of the populist radical right in Greece,² as it corresponded to Mudde's major definition (Georgiadou 2019, 159–160). Later, we explain how its alliance with the Greek Church benefited both sides and boosted nativism and populism in Greek society. The Independent Greeks and the Greek Solution, the party's heirs, can also be placed in the populist radical-right family. However, they distance themselves from a very close collaboration with the Church, instead favoring Euroscepticism and the acceptance of the Christian religion as aspects of their nativism.

The religious landscape

The Church's intervention in Greek politics is legitimized by the Greek Constitution, which specifies a privileged position for the Greek Orthodox Church as the representative of the prevailing religion in Greece (Fokas 2020). This is a kind of a “trade off,” as Papastathis (2015, 9) points out, referring to the Church's function as an interest group. The Church contributed to democratic decline by diffusing nationalist ideas across the country and demonizing the Greek communists between 1949 and 1967, the period known as *stunted*

2 The party failed to pass the electoral threshold of 3% in the 2004 national elections; however, it gained visibility and reached 4.1% in the 2004 European elections. In the 2007 national elections, it entered Parliament, gaining 3.8% of the national vote. Its electoral peak happened in the 2009 national elections (5.6%), while it achieved 7.1% of the national vote in the 2009 European Parliament elections (Georgiadou 2019, 163).

democracy (Nikolakopoulos 2001). Specifically, the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) divided Greek society among pro- and anti-communists, with the latter of whom the GOC was positioned. To better diffuse its ideology and propagandize against anti-communist danger, the Church organized fraternities that promoted the Church's support for family and country while framing communists as the common enemy (Makrides 2004). Among these fraternities were Zoi (Zoe), Sotir (Savior), and Chrysopigi (Golden Font), whose differences were mainly dogmatic (Ladouceur 2019). They were involved in propagandist activities, such as publishing journals, organizing social events, and supporting the Greek state's actions to protect children from communists. This period ended with the Church acknowledging the importance of the Greek Dictatorship (1967–1974) for the country (Roudometof 2011). However, after the democratic transition, these fraternities' power declined, although those involved remained prominent figures in the functions of the Greek Church (Papastathis 2015, 16).

The transition to democracy after 1974 and the social democratic PASOK's electoral triumphs during the 1980s contributed to the Church's democratization and Greek society's modernization. The GOC's interference in the political scene was weakened in what seemed to be the first period of an improved Church–state relationship. However, this transition was not followed by the Church's democratization, as many members, notorious for their pro-junta beliefs, remained active. Such was the case of Christodoulos Paraskevaïdhs, who, during the Greek junta, was the chief secretary of the Holy Synod (“1969 m.Ch. meta chountas” 2000), a position that offered him the opportunity to network, later becoming the Metropolitan of Dimitriada and Almyros.

Christodoulos's nomination as the head of the GOC in 1998 restored the Greek Church's prominent role in political life. While his predecessor, Serafeim, had followed a more moderate strategy, avoiding any clashes with political leaders, Christodoulos reimported the GOC into the public sphere, claiming the right to interfere in the general political agenda. Under Christodoulos, the Church supported the first electorally successful populist radical-right party in Greece, LAOS (Roudometof 2011, 106). Karatzaferis often referred to his relationship with Christodoulos, claiming that they had discussed the national situation and agreed on a common policy (Psarras 2010, 88). Furthermore, Christodoulos openly manipulated the part of the electoral body that was under his influence, stating that “the voters of Mr. Karatzaferis are not far-right supporters, they are good Christians” (Psarras 2010, 125–126). The GOC also clashed with Costas Simitis's social democratic

government regarding the identity cards issue. The GOC's sensitivity regarding the declaration of religion on identity cards resulted in a clash with the PASOK government. Its most characteristic episode was the declaration of a national referendum and the collection of three million signatures in favor of the Church's position (Molokotos-Liederman 2003, 296).

Soon after his death, Ieronymos, Christodoulos's successor, adopted a lower profile (Papastathis 2011, 403). Nonetheless, after GD's electoral gains, the Greek Church became sympathetic to the party's positions in a *peculiar flirtation* (Zoumpoulakis 2013, 62–72). Despite its ethno-nationalist profile and promotion of paganistic and satanic beliefs (Psarras 2012, 218–221), three Metropolitans favored GD: Serafeim of Piraeus, Amvrosios of Kalavryta, and Andreas of Pogoniani and Konitsa (Psarras 2012, 213; Zoumpoulakis 2013, 52).

In particular, Serafeim—along with GD members—was the main protagonist of the protest against the Chytyrion Theatre in autumn 2012, accusing a play of blasphemy against Christ (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2015, 84–85). Although he was supported by GD members, in April 2013, he accused the party of paganism (Sakellariou 2014, 305–306). Serafeim expressed his Islamophobia, opposing the foundation of a Department of Islamic Studies at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki on the grounds that it threatened national security and social peace (“Peiraeus Serafeim” 2014). Amvrosios is better known for his past, as he was the leader of the Religious Services in the Royal Military Police during the junta. As he did not hide his political ideology (Papastathis 2015, 14), Amvrosios also organized a rally in favor of Macedonia, in which he was photographed with GD MPs (“Amvrosios: Agkalia me tous Chrisavgites” 2018). Nevertheless, his discourse was full of anti-LGBTIQA+ rhetoric and the imputation of national disasters, such as the floods in Mandra and the fire in Mati, to the atheism of the SYRIZA government. Regarding GD, Amvrosios described the party as a “sweet hope for the desperate citizen” (Sakellariou 2014, 306–307). Metropolitan Andreas's case is less known, as he avoided publicity. However, he participated in a “festival of hate” organized yearly by the extreme right in Grammos and Vitsi, former battlefields of the Greek Civil War (Sakellariou 2014, 306).

Public policies in Greece under the specter of the Church-far right relationship

The Church's prominent role in Greek social life rose significantly when specific events appeared on the political agenda. Before 2012, Greek governments' almost complete consent to the Church's positions prevented the political manipulation of religious topics. However, after 2012, Islamophobia, LGBTIQA+ rights, anti-gender campaigns, and the novaxx movement arose in political affairs. Islamophobia was successfully diffused in Greek society through LAOS's anti-immigrant political program. According to the party's declaration, this position is at the party's core, simultaneously promoting nationalism (Georgiadou 2019, 158–159). LAOS's position became the basis for a peculiar flirtation between the party and Archbishop Christodoulos, offering the latter the opportunity to highlight the undivided link between Orthodoxy and Hellenism: “keep Hellenism and Orthodoxy as those are our foundations” (Avgoustis 2021). The Church thus claimed the role of national identity's defender against those who were not born Greek Orthodox (Karyotis and Patrikios 2010, 47), transforming *ius sanguinis* into *ius religionis*.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric was re-activated in a polarized political scene after 2012 due to GD's entrance into the Greek Parliament. The party began attacking immigrants, fulfilling its public announcement regarding the breakout of a pogrom (Psarras 2012, 417–420). It also began blood donations and breadlines for Greeks only (Koronaïou et al. 2015, 243). The 2014 migration and refugee crisis reintroduced challenges to national identity as a result of Greece's new, non-Christian populations, leading the Church to join forces with extreme-right groups (Verousi and Allen 2021a). Christodoulos's nationalist discourse from the early 2000s was replaced by Ieronymos's more discreet discourse. Such a shift opened the field for the extreme-right parties, which took advantage of the political opportunity that the 2014 crisis created, recruiting new members in the name of Orthodoxy and the formation of national identity.

During the same period, the Church reopened discussions regarding the construction of a mosque in the Votanikos neighborhood of Athens. In agreement with GD's core positions, the conservative, pro-religious website Penta-postagma (2015) promoted a demonstration against the mosque, in which the Greek Old Calendarists and local city councils participated. At the end of 2016, Giwrgos Lakafosis, a journalist from the ultraconservative orthodox website Ekklesia Online, questioned whether the mosque would be a bridgehead for

Turkey's interference in Greek politics (Lakafosis 2016). Two days after that article, the Greek police scattered a squat at the site of the mosque. It was revealed that responsible for the squat were citizen groups from the 2015 demonstration and GD central figures such as parliamentary members Elias Panagiwtaros and Elias Kasidiaris ("Ekkenothike I katalipsi" 2016). Even though GD disappeared from the political scene after its legal condemnation in October 2020 as a terrorist organization, Archbishop Ieronymos, in January 2021, insisted on describing Islam and its believers as a belligerent political party rather than a religion (Dilwseis Ierwnymou gia to Islam 2021).

Notwithstanding the rising significance of post-materialist issues in Greek society due to the rise of SYRIZA, Greek society favors strongly conservative views (Pew Research Center 2017). LGBTIQA+ rights and the visibility of sexual minorities rose significantly after 2012, as legislation regarding same-sex civil partnership was voted on in 2015 (Papadogiannis 2016). However, Church leaders were totally against it, characterizing homosexuality as an "aberration" (Archbishop Ieronymos), "worse than an animal attitude" (Metropolitan Anthimos), a work of Zionism (Metropolitan Serafeim), and a "physical abnormality" ("O Mitropolitis Mesogaias" 2014). Moreover, Serafeim threatened those who voted in favor of the legislation with excommunication ("Serafeim: Tha aforistoun" 2013). The Church's disagreement with LGBTIQA+ rights was based on the presentation of a traditional Christian Orthodox idea of the family. However, it remains remarkable that no specific actions from social actors and movements close to the official Church—and motivated by the Church's discourse—could be found. Nonetheless, the Church did not condemn the hatred expressed against the LGBTIQA+ community by GD members (Zoumpoulakis 2013, 37).

Patriarchy, sexism, the body's self-determination, and euthanasia are some of the most highlighted topics on this agenda. The Church represents some of the most conservative parts of Greek society, having already announced its positions through its Bioethics Committee. Regarding euthanasia, the Church opposes the concept of "assisted suicide" (Tristram Engelhardt 2014, 250). Nevertheless, the most controversial topic remains abortion. Once more, the Church has clarified its position, considering, among others, that "abortion does not constitute an individual right, but an ethically unacceptable act, and its legalization, direct or indirect, an impermissible social deviation" (Bioethics Committee 2003). Furthermore, the Church focuses on the embryo's rights, denying any actions responsible for its destruction (Tristram Engelhardt 2014, 250).

Seeking high visibility regarding the abortion topic, religious associations have succeeded in persuading the Holy Synod to establish the Day of the Unborn Child (Lakasas 2021). The most recent episode regarding abortion took place in January 2020, when an advertisement was placed on Athens's metro, focusing on the unborn child and its bodily behaviors and feelings to sensitize the public against abortion (Sakkas 2020). The turmoil on social media resulted in the advertisement's removal and the exposure of those responsible. It was discovered that 20 Orthodox Christian associations had paid Statheres Sygkoinwnies (STA.SY.; Urban Rail Transport) to upload the advertisement on Athens's metro stations. Those associations have created the movement *Afiste me na zisw*: Kinema yper tis zwis (Let me live: Movement in favor of life!).

Searching for its members, we can find pro-religious students and scientific movements, women's associations, multi-child families, and associations fighting for Northern Epirus (*Afiste me na zisw* 2019). Its members come from organizations such as Panellinia Enwsi Filwn Polytekwn (Panhellenic Union of Friends of Families with Many Children; P.E.F.I.P.), Panellinios Syndesmos Voreioipeirotikou Agwna (Panhellenic Association of Those Fighting for Northern Epirus; P.A.SY.V.A.), Syllogos "O Agios Nikodimos o Agioritis" (Association of Saint Nikodimos of Mount Athos), Christianiki Enosi Epistimonwn (Christian Union of Scientists; X.E.E.), Christianiki Foititiki Drasi (Christian Students' Action; X.F.D.), and Adelfotis Orthodoxou Ierapostolis "O AGIOS RAFAIL" (Fraternity of the Orthodox Mission of Saint Rafael).

Despite this vast network, it has been impossible to find any connections with other international organizations (e.g., the World Congress of Families). Moreover, searching for their national connections, we observe a network where *Afiste me na zisw* is at the core, giving the impression that abortion has become crucial for the Church's discourse. After the uproar that the advertisement against abortions created, some research regarding its funding took place. It was discovered that the P.E.F.I.P. funded the advertisement. While this union has no direct connections to political parties or church clergy, its founder was a monk from Mount Athos ("O Agioreitis Monachos" 2022).

Notwithstanding the above, the Greek Church is prone to conspiracies. Christodoulos's death in 2009 was considered by many as a conspiratorial act, with Nikos Nikolopoulos, a conservative member of the Parliament, connecting Christodoulos's death to the imposition of the Memorandum and the loss of national sovereignty (Makrogiannelis 2016). Although antisemitism remains prevalent among specific parts of the Greek Church, the COVID-19

pandemic directed the Greek Church to the diffusion of new conspiracy theories and a clash with the Greek state (Kordas 2021).

Precisely when the global scientific community was mapping the unknown virus, the Greek Church acted independently against the suggested pandemic measures. When in March 2020, discussion focused on the role of saliva in virus diffusion, the Church defended Holy Communion, pronouncing its safety and claiming that external interference in the Church's doctrinal topics was non-negotiable ("Koronaiois: Metadidetai kai me to salio" 2020). The government's weakness allowed the Church to present itself as cooperative with the Greek government by announcing the shortening of the religious mysteries on March 16 ("Ekklesia tis Ellados: I DIS" 2020).

However, the Church's social reflections became visible only during the anti-government demonstrations regarding the pandemic's management. Searching for the Novaxx movement inside the Greek Church, we can observe the diffusion of anti-vaccination theories, the occurrence of deaths, especially in Mount Athos monasteries (Tsoumis 2022), and priests who opened their churches during the pandemic, despite the governmental measures ("Koronoiois: Sto edwlio" 2021). The peak of such activity was seen in the anti-vax demonstration on July 21, 2021, in Syntagma Square in Athens. Journalists photographed believers with crosses and images of saints and priests carrying huge crosses, reflecting Christ's martyrdom, who were marching with far-right supporters ("Syntagma: Epeisodia" 2021). Two months after that demonstration, the Athenian Orthodox Christian Unions published a declaration against the compulsory nature of vaccination ("Orthodoxa Christianika Swmateia" 2021).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered a geopolitical crisis, unveiling Russian interference in several aspects of social and political life in EU member states. A characteristic example is the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and its religious relatives in the GOC. For an in-depth understanding of this topic, this chapter focuses on the official Church's positions and the case of the Mount Athos monasteries. The historical relations between Russia and Greece allowed Archbishop Christodoulos to renew these relations and communicate closely with the Russian leadership. Specifically, a breach existed in Christodoulos's relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew due to the ecclesiastical status of some Greek metropolises (Kapranos 2003). Therefore, Christodoulos aimed for the intervention of the Russian Patriarchate, strengthening relationships between the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches (Kapranos 2003). Nevertheless,

such a shift did not come from thin air, as Christodoulos had visited Moscow already in 2001, during Russia's Victory Day, even holding discussions with Putin ("San Simera: Putin" 2022). Even though the Greek Church has distanced itself from the Russian one due to the war in Ukraine ("Polemos stin Oukrania" 2022), conservative voices still nostalgically reproduce Christodoulos's visit and discussion with Putin in 2001 ("San Simera: Putin").

Mount Athos's monasteries are special places for the Russian Orthodox Church due to the presence of Russian monks. Moreover, Putin has visited Mount Athos several times since 2005, expressing his admiration for the historical area and funding the monasteries' renovation. Putin's interest in the monasteries since 2016 and his future aims for the area have recently been highlighted (MacFarquhar 2018). Some monasteries, such as Panteleimon, are known for their prominent pro-Russian positions, and the area was affected by the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2016 (Walker 2018). The tensions between monks reached new heights in April 2022, when the abbot of the monastery of Esfigmenos complained about the presence of Russian ultra-nationalists on Mount Athos (Lykesas 2022). Such complaints were accompanied by photos presenting monks and believers with a flag of Tsar Nikolaos, triggering a game of declarations between the two sides, as Russia appears to be afraid of the possible persecution of the Russian monks ("To Patriarcheio Moschas" 2022).

Is the Christian Right still possible in Greece? The case of Niki (Victory)

The 2022 national elections in Greece highlighted the case of Niki (Victory), a new, ultra-conservative political party. Although the party was formed in 2019, it has only now gained visibility among the electorate, achieving 3.7% of the votes and electing 10 representatives.

Regarding ideology, the party presents how significant religion is for its functioning in its statute, which claims that "Niki is the movement that aims to unite all Greeks who are inspired by patriotic and Orthodox morality to defend the ideals of freedom and independence of the whole nation, the values of the Orthodox Christian faith, and the democratic character of the nation-state, within the framework of the current constitution and legislation" ("Niki—Statute"). Moving forward, the party promotes its anti-abortion positions ("Amvlwseis: Kairos na nomimopoiisoume, xana"), prioritizing what

is known as “the rights of the unborn child.” The party promotes the model of a married heterosexual couple with a child, underlining its significance (“Theseis gia tin Paideia”). Furthermore, it denies that LGBTIQ+ people are capable of marrying and adopting a child due to its belief in the value of the traditional family (“Peri tis kyvernitikis prothesis”). There are also references to climate change as a conspiracy theory, while migrants are understood as a trick for Greece’s Islamization (“Apo tin Greta tis ‘klimatikis allagis’”).

Regarding institutions, Niki is an interesting case, as its leader, the theologian Dimitris Natsios, has been a talk-show presenter on the religious TV station 4E for a decade (Moscholiou 2023). Natsios has been politically active since 2014 through various populist radical-right parties (Moscholiou 2023), achieving no gains. However, his network has expanded over the years, including the organisation Enomeni Romiosini (Moscholiou 2023) and members from Saint Paisios circles (Dimokidis 2023). Moreover, although it remains challenging to draw a direct line between Niki and Afiste me na ziso, Enomeni Romiosini seems to be the missing link that brings them all to the same table. Nevertheless, it is only now that the party’s increasing activity has become visible

According to Christian values, the party’s strategy can be summed up in its policies for avoiding spiritual, biological, and territorial self-destruction by promoting virtue and honesty. Moreover, Niki speaks against partitocracy and favors a more direct democracy, with people as its core (“Antikeimenikos Skopos”). While the party has openly rejected significant rights, as we explained above, discussing the relationship between the state and the Church broadens its vision. Specifically, it claims that Christian Orthodoxy is part of the Greek DNA, but religious freedom is viewed as a core human right. However, such an acceptance is followed by its declaration regarding the state’s social ethics agreement with Christian values (“Scheseis Kratous-Ekklesias”), a topic thoroughly presented in the party’s ideology.

Conclusion

After the economic crisis, a new two-party system was established in the Greek political scene, whose second pole was SYRIZA, a secular radical-left party. SYRIZA’s harmonic cooperation with the Greek Church benefited the latter in maintaining its social capital while abstaining from the political scene. However, the pandemic crisis exacerbated relations between the Greek state and the Greek Church. To protect its doctrinal positions, the Church did not hesitate

to ally with the far right or allow its members to diffuse conspiracy theories against the state's anti-pandemic policies.

The Church's influence over the most conservative part of the electoral body created conditions for a cultural backlash and polarization in Greek society. While the Church remained neutral in the political scenery, it promoted its positions through the media, as in the case of the discussion that occurred following the anti-abortion advertisement. Moreover, the Church pressed the government regarding Holy Communion. In addition, its religious organizations, which were on the margins of social life during the previous years, gained visibility through the anti-abortion advertisement and participated in anti-pandemic demonstrations with far-right content. Given this, along with the far right's use of religion as an aspect of the supposedly endangered Greek identity, we can observe the weakness that such organizations faced in mobilizing Greek society.

Furthermore, such weakness was a result of the absence of specific funding. Even though the P.E.F.I.P. was thought to have funded the anti-abortion advertisement, its patrons are currently unknown. Therefore, political parties are attempting to cover once more the empty social space. Golden Dawn's disappearance offered an opportunity to the populist radical-right party Greek Solution to attract a specific part of the electoral body. Nevertheless, since 2020, the party's website contains only four articles regarding abortion and LGBTIQ+ topics, which openly reject any concessions in terms of rights for women and the LGBTIQ+ community (Press Releases 2022). The 2023 national elections offered the ultra-conservative party Niki the opportunity to cover the existing political gap by adopting the absent positions from Greek Solution's program. The geopolitical crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine brought about a dilemma in the Greek Church regarding its position toward its religious brothers, the Russians. Given the GOC's open support for Ukraine, it remains to be seen how the Greek pro-Russian right will react and how successful the Russian interference in Mount Athos will be. Notwithstanding Russia's invasion significance, it remains to be seen how the Greek Church will benefit from those parties' participation in the Greek Parliament and what will be the future of Christian Right in Greece.

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