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**FIRST THOUGHTS ON THE 25TH JUNE 2023 ELECTION IN GREECE**



GPSG Pamphlet No 8

Edited by Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni

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## **First Thoughts on the 25<sup>st</sup> May 2023 Election in Greece**

Edited by Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni

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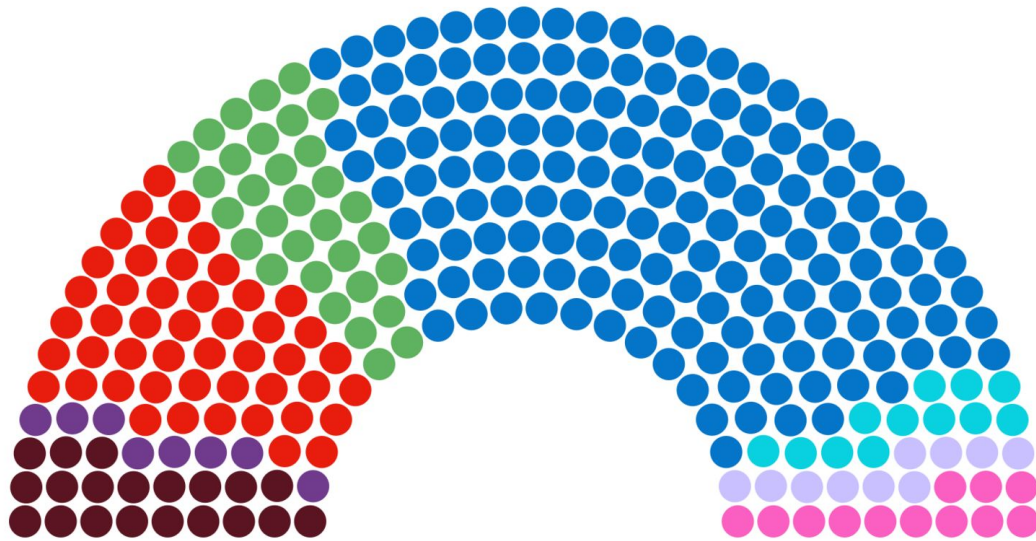
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# Greek parliamentary elections, June 2023

Results after 99.64% of vote counted



Party	Seats won June 2023	May 2023	Seat change
● Communists	20	26	+6
● MeRA25	0	0	0
● Freedom Sailing	8	0	+8
● Syriza	48	71	+23
● PASOK	32	41	+9
● New Democracy*	158	146	+12
● Greek Solution	12	16	+4
● Niki	10	0	+10
● Spartans	12	0	+12

Source: Greek interior ministry, Turnout 52.8%, \* Includes bonus seats



25<sup>th</sup> June Parliamentary Elections Results *Source: BBC* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65997486>

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## Editorial

By Vasiliki (Billy) Tsagkroni and Angelos Angelou

Within a month period from the previous elections of the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2023, the party of New Democracy managed to achieve a second clear win and a safe self-reliance in the national parliament. With the party gathering 40.56% of the popular vote, that translates to 158 seats, Kyriakos Mitsotakis was sworn as Prime Minister on Monday. He committed to remain faithful to his national duty 'with a plan, dedication and above all hard work, without tolerating any arrogance'. He also promised to proceed immediately with major reforms in view of improving the Greek public health and education system.

Former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, did not manage to recover from the soundly defeat of the 21<sup>st</sup> May elections, and the party of Syriza ended losing further ground. It ended up gathering a mere 17.83% of the vote and 48 seats. Tsipras promptly sought to address the leadership issue, stating that the final decision lays with the party's membership. He also clarified that Syriza 'assumes from today the responsibilities assigned to it by the popular vote'. He also vowed to invite the party's members to coordinate and draft a new strategy along with an assessment of the leadership's track record.

Pasok received 11.86% of the vote and 32 seats, with the leader of the party Nikos Androulakis stating that the party stands strong as a patriotic, modern centre-left representative, in the country's national scene. KKE, the communist party received 7.67% and 20 seats, maintaining its public support, while the far-right Greek Solution, received 4.45% and 12 seats. But the far-right won't just be represented by one party. Sunday's results placed the newly formed party of "Spartans", in the fifth place. "Spartans" won almost 4.7% of the vote, crossing the threshold and entering the parliament for the first time. The party was openly supported by former Golden Dawn MP, Ilias Kasidiaris, currently serving jail time. The party's leader, Ilias Stigas stated that "Spartans" constitute the new 'nationalist party' ready to defend and represent 'the ideals of Hellenism and the values that are currently lacking in our country'. The third party of the far-right that will be represented in the parliament is the ultra-conservative Christian Orthodox party Niki, gathering 3.7% of the vote and 10 seats. That brings a total of 34 seats of far-right representatives in the parliament. Finally, "Course for Freedom", led by former Syriza member Zoe Konstantopoulou, also entered parliament, gathering 3.17% of the vote and gaining 8 seats, with Konstantopoulou stating that she will act as 'the citizens' advocate'.

Last but not least, the elections that took place last Sunday featured a unique record: voter turnout reached a record low amounting to less than 53%. While one can attribute such high abstention rates to a variety of reasons, from high temperatures to the results of the May elections, the above-mentioned record constitutes a negative benchmark in Greek political history. Whether this trend will continue, leading to even higher abstention rates and a further delegitimization of governing institutions, remains to be seen. Yet, without a doubt, the democratic parties now in parliament face the immense challenge of reinvigorating the public's interest in

politics. The upcoming regional and European parliament elections will constitute the first test on whether they will succeed.

Following the success of our previous Pamphlet editions, the Greek Politics Specialist Group is delighted to host our seventh collection of short commentaries on the June election. This pamphlet is by no means a comprehensive, detailed or definitive account of the elections. It is merely a dialogue platform as an opportunity for reflection. We hope this publication will spark further discussion on the Greek political scene, and we welcome further contributions through our various outlets, such as the GPSG Working Papers series, the series of articles on our website and newflash, and, of course, our forthcoming events and panels.

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## **Section I**

### **General political trends and party competition**



# 1 | 'Out of the woods; toward a new political landscape'

By Costas Dikeos

It has long been claimed that Greece performed a stable two-party system (with PaSoK being a little more prominent than ND) between 1981 and 2009 (or 2012). Political participation was also rather high (taking into account a recent update of the electorate register).

In order to forecast whether a new party system is emerging (and what kind will it be) we need to make brief references to previous periods.

Thus, in 1981, 1985, 1989 (I), 1989 (II), 1990, and 1993 turnout ranged from 78.61% to 80.69 and the parties that entered Parliament, were a minimum of three maximum of six with PaSoK and Nea Dimokratia dominating and KKE being always in Parliament albeit in some cases in different forms. The other parties were minor whereas also short-lived (eg Di-Ana, Greens, PolAn, DiKKi, and the local formation in Thrace).

Turnout gets a little lower in the 1996 to 2009 period ranging from 70.95 (in 2009, with the economic crisis arising) and 76.35% (in 1996). The parties entering Parliament were four and occasionally five, with the (then) Synaspismos/SYRIZA becoming a permanent feature, however with low scores.

2012 is a turning point. Turnout drops significantly. Surprisingly, the highest is at 2012 (I) election (65.10%) that was characterized as a U-turn due to the economic crisis and the collapse of the party system, and featured very low percentages for all major parties (especially ND and PaSoK). This trajectory continued to yesterday's elections' results (that presents us with the lowest ever in the Third Hellenic Republic of 52.8%), whereas on the other hand we observe an eight party Parliament, something very rare since 1974. Additionally, three parties enter Parliament for more or less the first time, two of them of laying on the far right.

A number of questions arise:

- (i) is ND going to be challenged as a governing party in the near future?
- (ii) what do small or even niche parties of July 2023 have in common with small or niche parties of earlier eras?
- (iii) what is the significance of low turnout and high abstention?

An attempt of a very brief commentary commencing with (iii):

It is very early days (or indeed nights for that matter) to understand abstention. As mentioned in a previous comment a poll post exit poll or post election day is highly necessary. Questions like 'did you vote on Sunday?' ; 'why if not?' ; 'when was the last time you voted?' ; 'what party did you vote for?' ; 'are you satisfied with the outgoing government?' ; 'do you identify yourself as ultra left, left, centre left, centre, centre right, ultra right' ; combined with age, stratum/class, urban/semi-urban/rural community, profession etc should be asked.

Taking into account that four (more or less) 'protest' parties (Niki, Spartans, Greek Solution, Course of Freedom) entered Parliament, plus Mera25 remained fractionally short of the 3% threshold, seems to me that the once 'disappointed' or 'indignant' (some of them part of Syriza post 2012) felt had no options.

We could start with a hypothesis that the indignant of the 'upper part of the square' of 2012 went for Niki, Spartans and Solution (alongside some more voters concerned with the North Macedonia issue, migration etc), whilst the 'lower part of the square' went for Mera25. This can be strikingly different than 2012, 2015 (i & ii) and 2019 with also low turnouts (but higher than July 2023).

Bizzare as it may sound, the possibility (or indeed probability) of ND voters both happy with government performance ("you 've never had it so good" to remember Britain of the 1960s) and their standard of living after the crisis, and sure about the outcome (polls and the so called 'first round'), alongside disillusioned and disheartened Syriza voters who also abstained, should be thoroughly examined. This subtly implies that the result (and moreover the constitution of Parliament) would have been astonishingly different with perhaps Niki and Course of Freedom not entering.

As far as (ii) is examined the answer is more difficult, since SYRIZA itself rose to prominence after 2012, and Course of Freedom and Mera25 are break-away splinter parties of SYRIZA, keeping the 'indignant – protest' profile. Spartans is seen by many (including by and large themselves) as a relaunching of Golden Dawn, with Niki being a niche party close to the Church (albeit not the official Church of Greece) predominantly as a protest to the 'Prespes Agreement' with the Republic of North Macedonia, something Greek Solution posits too.

These lead us to question (i): how will the Greek party system look in the near to medium term future? Seems that ND has not just won a second term in a row, but may have secured a dominant position in Greek politics. SYRIZA and PaSok have very steep hills to climb, especially as the era of memoranda, austerity and restrictions are almost over. On the other hand, it is up to Syriza themselves to offer a credible opposition and alternative solution (PaSok need even more time), instead of turning to internal feuding, proving that Syriza at the end of the day was one more 'protest-indignant' party that proved medium term lived instead of short-lived as other parties. Political scientists are not, and should not try turning themselves to fortune-tellers, or forecasters. However, if a long or just medium term prediction is required, then the possibility (as mentioned a month ago) of a dominant party system with ND in charge, similar to Japan should not be overlooked, with two reservations, both coming (as 'you have never had it so good') from UK politics of the 1960s. Never forget that "the only thing dear boy a Prime Minister has to be afraid of is 'events'" and that "a week is a long time in politics".

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*Dr Costas Dikeos is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Democritus University of Thrace.*

## 2 | Uncharted Waters: Greece's Election Upheaval and the Rise of Extremism

By Georgios Samaras

The repercussions of the recent election in Greece extend beyond the immediate shockwaves. The unexpected success of far-right parties, particularly Spartans, has ignited debates about the state of Greek society and the direction in which the nation is headed. It raises questions about the underlying factors that have allowed such extremism to gain traction.

The potential resurgence of Golden Dawn through Spartans is alarming, considering the previous convictions and bans placed on its members. Ilias Kasidiaris' endorsement, though controversial, managed to sway a significant portion of the electorate. This demonstrates the lingering appeal of far-right ideologies, even in the face of legal consequences. The fact that such parties now have a prominent voice within the Greek Parliament sends a chilling message about the rise of intolerance and xenophobia.

Conversely, the left-wing forces find themselves in disarray. Their failure to resonate with voters indicates a disconnection between their rhetoric and the concerns of the Greek population. The decline of SYRIZA and the speculation surrounding Tsipras' leadership underscore the urgent need for the left to reassess its strategies and rebuild its platform. The absence of a viable opposition could further strengthen the dominance of New Democracy, leaving the political landscape imbalanced.

The next few months will be crucial in determining the trajectory of Greek politics. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the leader of New Democracy, now wields significant power, boasting both a clear mandate and strong approval ratings. However, the unintended consequence of his party's success is the emergence of a new right-wing bloc that surpasses New Democracy in its extremist ideology. This poses a dual challenge for Mitsotakis: to govern effectively while also countering the rise of far-right sentiments within his own political sphere.

The current state of Greek politics demands careful observation and proactive measures. The presence of far-right parties threatens the inclusive values that underpin a healthy democracy. It is essential for Greek society to address the root causes of this extremism, which are often linked to economic inequality, social divisions, and a sense of marginalization. Efforts must be made to promote social cohesion, education, and economic opportunities for all citizens.

Moreover, the broader European context cannot be overlooked. The rise of far-right movements and populist ideologies across the continent presents a shared challenge that requires cooperation and collective action. Greece's response to this challenge will be closely monitored by its European partners, who will undoubtedly offer support and guidance to ensure the preservation of democratic principles.

In conclusion, Greece stands at a critical juncture in its political history. The shockwaves of the recent election have exposed the deep divisions and vulnerabilities within Greek society. The return of far-right extremism, the decline of the left, and the dominance of New Democracy present formidable challenges. However, by fostering inclusivity, addressing societal concerns, and reaffirming democratic values, Greece has the opportunity to navigate these uncertain waters and pave a path towards a more stable and prosperous future.

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*Dr Georgios Samaras is an Assistant Professor of Political Economy at King's College London.*

### 3 | Voter turnout in June 25<sup>th</sup> elections

By Athanasia Chalari

There are different ways to read the results of the Greek (or any other) elections, but one of the least favoured is by focusing on those who didn't vote.

This time the percentage of the Greeks who did not vote in June 2023 elections, was about 47%. In the last national Greek elections in 2019 the percentage was 42%.

This means that, 53% of the Greek citizens (about half of the population), have decided which party is going to form the new government and which parties will form the Greek parliament.

This is one of the paradoxes of democracy: if those who vote become less and less, then parties need less and less voters to support them. Ultimately, the fact that fewer people vote, allows fewer citizens to decide who is going to govern the country.

The paradox of this version of democracy, is that all citizens who have the right to vote, should pick one of the offered options. If a voter is not happy with any of the options, then there is no provision that this citizen's disapproval is somehow recognised, respected, acknowledged or even measured. Ultimately, this paradox allows and enables countries (like Greece) to be governed by minorities.

Naturally, the profound question is: 'why don't they vote'? and a quick and painless answer probably would be: because 'they don't care'.

Over the last decade I have interviewed hundreds of Greeks of all ages and backgrounds, for the purpose of various qualitative research projects. Young participants in particular have clearly displayed a collective sense of remaining inactive, however, without being apathetic.

Greek participants have been commonly expressing their disappointment and lack of trust towards the state and any form of authority which ultimately leads to an inactive attitude towards social and political developments.

Remarkably though, this does not mean that those persons have become apathetic. On the contrary, they display full and clear awareness of the impact of any given situation (eg Greek crisis), but due to the lack of any reliable and accountable form of support or protection (in their view), they feel powerless and thus consider pointless to engage in any form of reaction. Overall, they do not react not because they don't care, but because they are convinced that there is no point.

Being inactive may not be the most effective way of declaring a collective disapproval of the way democracy works in Greece or any other country. But it may be the most honest way of staying away from a reality that may not include, accept, respect, protect and support whoever decided not to become a part of it and not vote for it.

Ultimately, this may have become the only way to 'not support', 'not agree', 'not believe' in any offered option, even though in these elections, the very high number of eight parties, will form the new Greek parliament.

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*Dr Athanasia Chalari is a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Hellenic Observatory, LSE*

## 4 | New political landscape: The emergence of multiple parties in Greece

By Minas Lyrstis

The Greek elections of 21s May 2023 are a prime opportunity to challenge and revise much of our conventional wisdom about the behavior of Greek voters. Moreover, the result of the Greek elections makes us understand that there are issues that we did not know or at least refused to discuss.

The parliamentary elections held in Greece in June 2023 marked a significant shift in the country's political landscape. With the emergence of eight parties, including four in the right- far right spectrum, one in the centre-right, and three on the left-far left, there is a clear indication of a shift in the country's political ideology. This new era in Greek politics is characterised by the collapse of the main opposition party, SYRIZA, and the inability of the left to gain representation. The anti-systemic vote has moved towards the far right, with two new right-wing parties, Niki and Spartiates, with the latter having links to the outlawed Nazi party, Golden Dawn.

The low attendance at the polls, with only one in two citizens voting, is a reflection of the country's political disillusionment. However, the election results have shown that the dominating issues of immigration/refugees, national security, and the economy have influenced the citizens' voting choices. As seen in Europe, the rise of far-right-wing parties is a trend that is becoming increasingly prevalent. The citizens' increasing belief that a radical approach is needed reflects in the emergence of new right-wing and far-right-wing parties. The Greek left reeling after the results is in dire need of restructuring and regaining contact with its base and in general the people. It is obvious that SYRIZA's collapse is a critique to its stance as opposition and its inability to grasp aspects of the modern political agenda and propose solutions.

The emergence of multiple parties in Greece does not necessarily mean a broader agenda but probably more radical approaches. Having immigration/refugees, national security, and the economy as dominant issues, means that ultra right-wing voices will be heard louder in the next parliament. As such the society will also has to face hostile and radical approaches in major issues. In conclusion, the real opponent of the government will be the far right and not the centre-left. New Democracy will have a full plate as new austerity measures are in order, probably leading its disenfranchised voters towards their far-right opponents.

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*Minas Lyrstis is a PhD candidate on Middle Eastern Politics at Aegean University and a Regional Councillor of the South Aegean Region.*

# 5 | Greek elections June 2023: Constructing the 'Other' or another 'Other'

By Aimilia Vilou

The Greek society was defined by the left/right cleavage since the 1940s. After the transition to democracy (1974) this division was crucial and led to the triumphant victory of the social democratic party of PASOK, in 1981, over the conservative party of Nea Dimokratia (ND). The cleavage was vivid for almost 30 years, the Communist Party (KKE) dared to overcome it, in 1989 for six months, and is apologizing about it since. In the mid-2000s the differences between right and left wing smoothed away. KKE remained the exception with its slogan being "5 parties - 2 tactics", implying that there were two sides. From the one side, the popular strata and the KKE and on the opposite side all the other parties and the bourgeois class. The left/right cleavage appeared once again during the 2012 elections and was the decisive element of mobilization for the 2015 elections and SYRIZA's victory. In the recent two elections, the main political parties implemented their agenda mainly through constructing binary opposites, a "We" versus an "Other". The following analysis discusses this strategy.

NEA DIMOKRATIA 40.55% (New Democracy): is the major conservative party founded in 1974. ND is stating that, independently of the policy field, the enemy of the democracy is insecurity and populism. It is the only party that we cannot discern stating a clear division, apart from the accusation of recklessness that is attributed to its predecessor ruling party of SYRIZA. Nevertheless, the "He who is not with Me is against Me" attitude was loud and clear. The "Other" is anyone opposed to ND. SYRIZA 17.84%: a radical left coalition party, first formed in 2004. The party of SYRIZA invited all "democratic citizens" to ally and fight against the danger of an unprecedented conservative restoration, clearly recalling the left/right division and indicating the right wing as the "Other".

PASOK 11,85%: a historic social-democratic party, founded in 1974. The party is opposed to conservatism, populism and negativism. Once again, PASOK clearly restored, the left/right division, yet, this time transformed as a democratic/totalitarian division. For PASOK the "Other" are the conservatives.

KKE 7.69%: is an orthodox communist party founded in 1918. On the May 2023 Elections, the party's slogan was "They stand alone against all of us". During the June 2023 Elections campaign the slogan was even bolder, "Hope - Strength - KKE: 100% people's militant opposition". The above can be interpreted as follows: the Greek political scene is bipolar, with one polar being the working class and its allies and the other polar being the bourgeois class and its parties. Furthermore, it is implied that KKE is the only party that can oppose the government.

NIKI 3.69% (Victory): NIKI is an ultraconservative and deeply religious pro-life party, but not a testimonial party. It was founded in 2019 nevertheless no one knew its existence since the May Election. It stands against all the "corrupted" parties that



have been in government in the past. The party dare to dream of re-establishing Greece by glorifying the ancient Greek and Greek orthodox civilization, a paradox for most of us but not for them. So, the “Other” for NIKI are the atheists and the non-Greeks.

ELLINIKI LISI, 4.44% (Greek Solution): is a far-right party, founded in 2016. It stands against any European and/or international solution, proposing a solution of Greek origin. It was founded with the slogan “Greece should be governed by the Greeks” so the non-Greeks are the “Other”.

PLEFSI ELEFThERIAS 3.17% (Course of Freedom): an one-woman party founded in 2016 by Zoe Konstantopoulou, a former President of the Hellenic Parliament (2015) coming from SYRIZA. Its an “anti-establishment” party seeking votes both at the right and the left of the political spectrum. One could argue that it is “nationalist left” party. The party is against the oligarchs and the “rotten regime” supporting them. The head of the party Zoe Konstantopoulou, when elected, stated: “I am worth 100 congresspersons”. In that sense, Zoe is in one corner and everyone else in the other corner, the “Other”.

Spartiates 4.64% (The Spartans): is another far right party, founded in 2017 and no one had heard of them 15 days ago. It is supported from the ,now convicted and incarcerated, f former Golden Dawn spokesman Ilias Kasidiaris. As such, it is obviously a neo-Nazi party. The party is prioritizing the Greece and the Greeks and is opposed to “Cosmopolitanism”, the “Left Transnationalism” and the “globalized centre-right politics”. The “Other” is everything that it’s not them. After all, they are fascists.

DiEM25 2.49%: is a radical left(ish) party, founded in 2015 and couldn’t overcome the 3% barrier needed to enter to the parliament. The party, alongside with the “people”, is against the “Mitsotakis SA”. Crying out loud that the government is a corporation owned by the leader of the conservative party of ND. Additionally, the party is stating that “Europe will be democratized, once the oligarchy is overthrown” highlighting that the Europeans are subjects of the oligarchs; a small group of people who have the economical and the financial power to overrule the government(s). The “Other” are the oligarchs and theirs allies.

Summarizing, all the parties deem the Greek society as divided, but they don’t acknowledge the same division. A good part of Greek political parties are stating that they are opposed to the “oligarchs” and are ready to fight against them. Once again an antifascist front is on the making.

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*Aimilia Vilou is a PhD Candidate in Political Science at Panteion University and Research associate for ENA Institute for Alternative Politics.*

## 6 | 'Ice-cold peace' on the horizon

By Emre Metin Bilginer

The title after the first round was "Cold Peace or Hot War?". The title had a question mark since the Greek Election in May did not highlight a clear win for New Democracy. Now, we do not only observe a crystal-clear winner but also a loser. The defeat of the Left and the rise of the right populism and nationalism do not offer a promising future for the bilateral relations between Turkey and Greece, considering Erdoğan's recent electoral victory. Greece and Turkey have faced severe economic difficulties in recent years. Besides, both countries experienced earthquake and train crush disasters just before their general elections.

Moreover, the Messenia migrant boat disaster took place in Greece a few days before the General Elections in June. Electorates did not punish the government for its weakness during these tragedies. The rationality of the electorate derives from the problems they face in their daily lives. Just like Erdoğan, Mitsotakis managed to motivate his electorate by offering a to such problems. Nevertheless, despite his landslide victory, Mitsotakis's second term will be more difficult. Voters entrusted him with extensive authority expecting tangible solutions. However, the refugee problem and the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian War will likely increase the burden on the Greek economy.

On the other hand, three ultra-nationalist parties managed to enter the Greek Parliament. Although Mitsotakis instrumentalized nationalist sentiments embellished with securitization policies during the pre-election period, he must return to a rational mindset to bring solutions for the Greek economy. The ultra-nationalist structure of the Greek Parliament will not allow Mitsotakis to make a turn to rationalization effortlessly. Therefore, the new dialogue process with Turkey that Mitsotakis offered after the Turkish elections will not be an uncomplicated task, nor a priority, for his government in the short term.

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*Dr. Emre Metin Bilginer is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Kadir Has University.*

## 7 | The centre shifted to the right

By Ilias Pappas

The clear victory of New Democracy, combined with the losses of SYRIZA, shows that centrist voters - the most moderate and unorganized group of voters - have shifted to the right. New Democracy, having left its conservative past behind, it moved towards a liberal version of the right, thus, managing to convince that programmatically it can implement reforms for the “benefit of the majority”.

Its liberal political discourse reaches out to the broad masses, recognizing the importance of the welfare state and the need to strengthen it. Furthermore, it has convinced that it is a serious solution and the people have renewed their confidence. The shift of the New Democracy towards the centre, however, displeased a large part of its conservative voters and as a result, other right-wing formations got more than 3%, thus accumulatively gathering around 13% of the vote (NIKI, SPARTIATES, EL. LYSI) leading to an 8-party parliament. All the above might have major implications for the parliament’s quality.

The liberal turn of New Democracy remains to be proven in practice via its governmental program. This is particularly difficult to achieve in the next four years with the EU fiscal rules returning, state interventions decreasing and the money of the Recovery Fund running out.

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## 8 | The new Greeks: No longer the underdog?

By Georgios Karyotis and Iakovos Makropoulos

The results of the 25 June 2023 confirmed the dominance of the conservative party in Greece, with New Democracy retaining the share of the vote they captured five weeks earlier, on 21 May, and further increasing their margin of victory from their closest rival, the radical left SYRIZA party (Figure 1). With a comparably less proportionate law in operation in the June contest, New Democracy secured 158 seats in the 300-strong Parliament and has formed a majority government on a mandate for radical reforms that will further detach Greece from the stagnation and trauma of rolling recent crises.

Party	Oct 2009	May 2012	June 2012	Jan 2015	Sep 2015	July 2019	May 2023	June 2023
New Democracy (centre right)	33.5	18.9	29.7	27.8	28.1	39.9	40.8	40.6
SYRIZA (radical left)	4.6	16.8	26.9	36.3	35.5	31.5	20.1	17.8
PASOK (centre left)	43.9	13.2	12.3	4.7	6.3	8.1	11.5	11.8

Figure 1: Greek Parliamentary Elections Results (2009-2023) – Top 3 Parties

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis will serve a second 4-year term at the helm, capitalising on both his personal appeal and his party's successful electoral strategy, which, he declared, made New Democracy "the most powerful centre-right party in Europe". What are the key elements of this strategy, to what extent did it change during the intervening weeks between the two elections and what do these results mean for the Greek electoral system?

The key ingredients of this strategy were outlined in the previous post-election [GPSG Pamphlet](#) in the article 'The Secret Code: Affective Polarisation and Electoral Behaviour in Greece'. New Democracy convinced voters, more than any other party, that it had the competence and determination to move Greece beyond crises, avoiding polarising and populist rhetoric and conveying a far more positive sentiment in the pre-electoral speeches of Mitsotakis, compared to other party leaders (Figure 2).

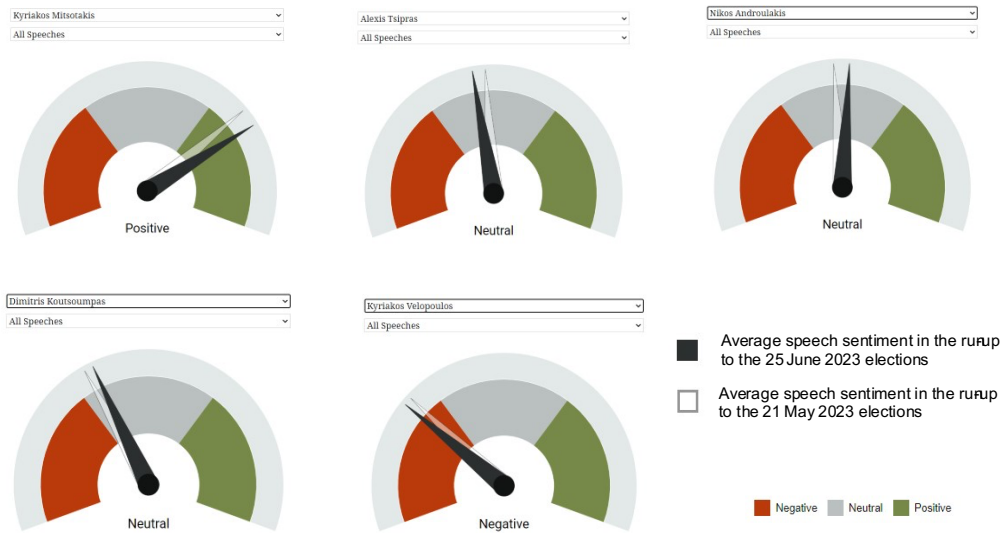


Figure 2: Average speech sentiment by party leader, 2023 Greek Elections, Source: iMEDD lab

Thematic and sentiment analysis of pre-election campaign speeches, conducted by the [iMEDD lab](#), also show continuity as to the degree to which party leaders focused on presenting their policy proposals or criticising others. Across the five leaders for which we have data, we see an overall small increase (9%) in favour of programmatic rhetoric between the May 2023 and June 2023 contests.

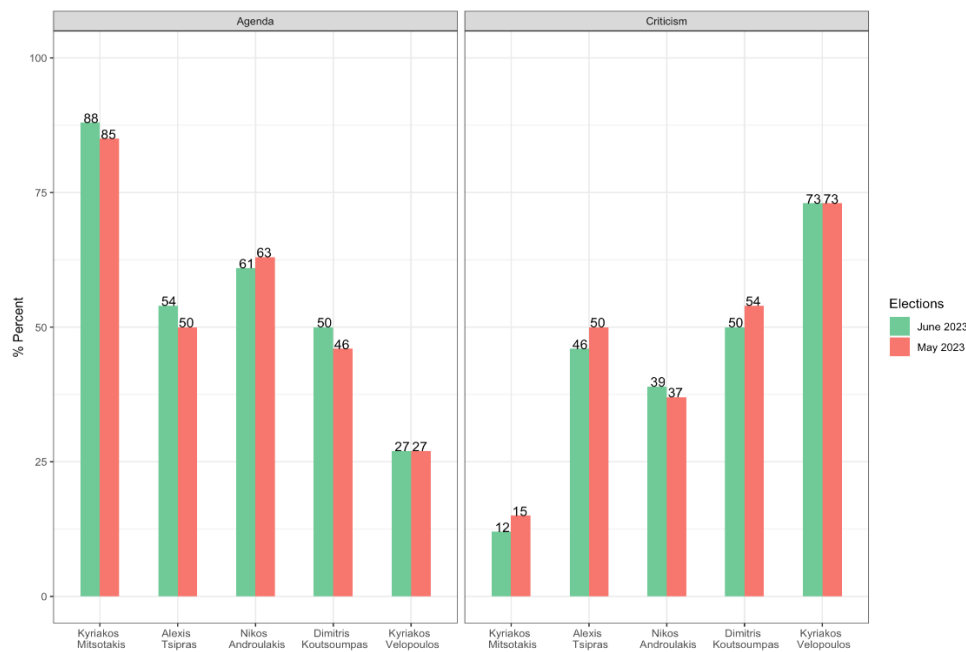


Figure 3: Leaders' pre-election rhetoric: Ratio of Programmatic vs. Negative messaging

The topics that dominate public conversations in the run-up to an election, is known in the literature to impact on electoral behaviour in general. Our analysis of 2019

survey evidence (see [webinar](#)) further added that issue salience also mobilises the emotions of voters, with an underappreciated and significant impact on vote choice.

The intervening period between the two 2023 Greek elections was marked by the tragic and controversial shipwreck of an overcrowded fishing boat on June 14<sup>th</sup> in the southwest of Greece's Peloponnese peninsula. The death of up to 650 irregular migrants led the caretaker government to declare a three-day national mourning period, during which electoral campaigning was suspended. While this symbolic move would signal a recognition of the sanctity of human life, irrespective of what papers one is holding, this was not reflected in the political discourse and public conversation in Greece.

On the contrary, the analysis of the [iMEDD lab](#) shows that when campaigning resumed, migration became a central issue in the speeches of Mitsotakis and of right-wing 'Greek Solution' leader Kyriakos Velopoulos, both promoting a security logic, but was largely absent in the discourse of Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras and Pasok's leader Nikos Androulakis. Syriza had championed the humanitarian frame, while in government during the 2015 migrant crisis, but its silence on this occasion may be considered a missed opportunity to project these values, perhaps wary of electoral costs. Pasok, we previously argued (see [webinar](#)), was the party that was best placed to benefit electorally from promoting more liberal and normative frames in relation to migration. However, its leader Androulakis, while acknowledging labour needs for migrant workers in his brief references to migration after the tragedy, he focused more on Frontex and border protection and claimed credit for conceiving and initiating the construction of the Evros fence, all of which are projecting the idea that migration is a threat.

With Communist Party (KKE) leader, Dimitris Koutsoumpas, the only one advocating for human, not national security, and refusing to rally around the flag in relation to other crises (e.g. pandemic; war in Ukraine), conditions were fertile for two more far-right parties, in addition to the Greek Solution, to enter Parliament for the first time. The newly emerged 'Spartans', which is most closely associated with Golden Dawn, received 4.6% of the vote, while NIKI (the Democratic Patriotic Movement – Victory) a further 3.7%. The left-wing anti-establishment party 'Course of Freedom', with 3.2%, completes the 8-party Parliament.

The Communist KKE was able to increase its share of the vote from 5.35% in July 2019 to 7.7% in June 2023. A further reason for this may be due to the appeal of its leader, Koutsoumpas, who unintentionally became an internet sensation in Luben and other popular channels. His 'catchphrase' – "These is who you really are" ("*Αυτοί Είστε*") referring, with a high dosage of cynicism -if not exasperation- to political opponents, other than humorous, also touches on a sensitive chord.

Greece appears to be at a crucial juncture and is ready to roll the dice. One the one side, there is a Greece that appears to be confident, bold and brave to move forward, the central message of New Democracy's electoral campaign. If the new government continues to avoid polarising/populist rhetoric, seeks to bridge political differences with socio-democratic forces (e.g. with a number of former PASOK members featuring in the new cabinet), and most importantly, delivers on its programmatic pledges and

improves the quality of life, for all, a real opportunity is there for Greece. An opportunity to dislocate what Diamantouros coined in 1994, as its engrained 'underdog political culture', which romanticises the idea of Greece rising from its ashes and overcoming the odds and which is considered to serve as a primary source of resistance to modernisation, globalisation and Europeanisation.

On the other side, there appears to be a significant portion of Greeks, who feel threatened by the pace and direction of change, and who appear to be experiencing a loss in their sense of what it means to be Greek, what is known as their 'ontological security'. Such socio-political forces, both on the left but especially on the right, may be destabilising but their rise may also be symptomatic of a failure as to how, as a society, Greece negotiates change, and anxiety, and difference. New Democracy's electoral strategy may very well be seen as a blueprint for other centre-right, but also, perhaps, centre-left parties to follow, but the real test for the country is how well and how fast the new government can deliver tangible improvements for people, in line with its programmatic targets, which would, arguably, be the most effective way to diffuse support for the far-right in particular.

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## **Section II**

# **The ascent of the far-right**



## 9 | A far-right turn in the Greek parliament

By Orestis Chatzigiannakis

For the second time in two months the party of New Democracy achieved a historic victory in the elections of June and its leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis has won a second four-year term as prime minister, promising major reforms, specifically in education and health care system. With the stakes for the winner of the elections already answered in the previous elections of May and the voters' electoral fatigue reasonable due to the double elections, the increasingly poor turnout at the elections (52,82%) was expected.

The most important characteristic of these elections is the rise of the far-right parties. A few days after the devastating shipwreck off Pylos, with hundred immigrants and refugees dead and still missing, the far-right parties achieved a dangerous 13% percentage in the second elections of June. It's not only the percentage that matters, but it is the first time that three far-right parties made it into the Greek parliament.

Ten years after the killing of the antifascist singer, Pavlos Fyssas and the Pakistani immigrant, Luqman Shahzad by the neo-Nazis members of Golden Dawn, the far-right Spartans' party, which has been backed by the jailed neo-Nazi and former deputy head of Golden Dawn, Ilias Kasidiaris, achieved a worrying percentage of 4,64%. Apart from the success of Spartans' party to cross the 3% parliamentary threshold, it is very alarming that the far-right party of Greek Solution and another one, the Democratic Patriotic Movement NIKH, have also made it into the Greek Parliament.

This rise of the far-right parties in Greece highlights three different aspects of the issue: firstly, a broader conservative turn of the Greek society; secondly the influence of part of the Greek church that promoted the "NIKH" party, and thirdly and most worrying, the fact that the 9,2% of voters between the age of 17-34 voted the ,open about its links with neo-nazis, party of Spartans.

The result of the elections creates much competition among the right-wing parties in Parliament, which leads to two different paths for the new government. From the one hand, a most positive turn towards more progressive policies. On the other hand, a negative shift towards a conservative mode of governance, where basic human rights will be in danger. Given the competition within the right-wing, the progressive parties and especially the biggest loser of the elections, the party of SYRIZA, have the chance to articulate a progressive rhetoric inside parliament with almost 2/3 of the MPs being from right wing parties.

Concluding, as the far-right parliamentary opposition will increasingly raise reactionary policies in the political agenda, there is a need to collectively protect democracy and basic freedoms.

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# 10 | Turn right and then right again? Far-right variation in the Greek parliament

By Georgios Kordas

The 2019 parliamentary elections were thought to have begun a new era of realignment in Greek politics, with the far-right represented by the Greek Solution, a small, populist party. Considering October's 2020 final court decision regarding the Golden Dawn and the end of the Greek decade of crises, it was broadly thought that far-right in Greece would be marginalised again, favouring pro-democratic forces. Nevertheless, the 2023 double elections reshuffled the political scene, leading to a fragmented eight-party Parliament. Indeed, in the current elections, New Democracy earned the majority of the votes. Although Greece has often experienced significant fragmentations since 2012, the current one was not followed by an 'electoral earthquake' like in 2012. However, it resulted in four out of eight political parties deriving from the far right.

Such an unprecedented phenomenon needs in-depth research to be understood. Nevertheless, some directions could be drawn whilst sketching the field. Velopoulos' Greek Solution achieved re-election strengthening his party's representation, adding two more members in its parliamentary group when compared with the 2019 national elections (10→12). The party became known for its populist and conspiracist discourse, while its president is known as a pro-Russian and pro-religious politician. Whilst the party imitated LA.O.S discourse and policies, it met competition from different far-right variations. Spartiates, a patriotic – as they prefer to describe themselves – party achieved to elect 13 representatives. Even though the party is not as extreme as Golden Dawn (GD) was, it has gained the support of the former GD member – now jailed – Elias Kasidiaris, drawing its support from many GD's castles. The latter is a nationalist party with its creation being deemed a result of the Memorandum period when it had the profile of a social organisation for the weak.

Two more parties have passed the 3% threshold for entering the Parliament. 'Niki', a religious, nationalist, pro-Russian party, has drawn its electorate from the anti-vax movement. Moreover, it promotes traditional values, like family and religion, while it is against abortions and LGBTQ rights. Plefsi Eleftherias is the last entry into the new Parliament. A strongly Eurosceptic party, Plefsi does not fully fit into the far-right family. However, it shares similarities with its nationalist positions, its anti-vax support, its populist rhetoric, and its idea of people's participation in the police. Zoi's Konstantopoulou, Plefsi's leader, personality is typical for the far-right parties' family, as she is authoritarian and attempts to be seen as charismatic.

After briefly sketching the newcomers' profiles, some conclusions could be drawn. All parties result from the permacrisis era, as anti-vax, anti-memorandum, and conspiracism are their common features. Moreover, those parties passed the electoral threshold without national crises. It is the first time the Greek Parliament has such pluralism on the right side of the political spectrum, which raises questions about

future parliamentary function. Nevertheless, more research is needed regarding parties' manifestos and their leaders' profiles.

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# 11 | The clouds of intolerance and irrationality have come for the Greek Parliament

By Serxhio-Alex Hasani

Three events emerged from the elections of 25 June. First, the record-breaking abstention rate of 47.32%. Second, the deafening entry of nationalist, racist and extreme right-wing parties («Spartiates», «Elliniki Lisi», «Niki»), which together accounted for 12.7% of the vote, into the parliament. Taking into account the party of «Plefsi Eleftherias», the leader of which, Zoe Konstantopoulou, defines it as "neither left nor right party", reminiscent of the French radical right, the percentage rises to almost 16%. Third, the fragmentation of the systemic left («SYRIZA», «PASOK»), the exclusion of the progressive anti-systemic left (Diem 25) and the overall defeat of the Left in the Greek parliamentary elections.

The standard argument regarding the huge abstention rate in the parliamentary elections is that this was due to its predetermined results, due to the May parliamentary elections, and the "summer heat". Yet, this argument is considered naive if we do not take into account the financial inability of Greek citizens to travel to the place where they vote, combined with the labour coercion of non-licensing, especially during the summer months in the tourism industry. Facilitating the exercise of the right to vote should have been foreseen and implemented. It should not be forgotten that huge abstention rates coincided with the country's entry into the memorandum and correlate with its economic strangulation.

The conservatization of Greek society does not sound like a convincing excuse to justify the entry of neo-fascist parties into parliament. It is rather a systemic strategy of spreading the blame. These party formations, have been incubated, maintained and protected by the party and media systems. The Greek media (ranked 107th in press freedom according to Reporters Without Borders in 2022) have for years laundered and devoted valuable TV time to promoting the convicted criminal organization Golden Dawn. In the same vein, the Greek media have now chosen to not only cover these far-right parties under the prism of "infotainment" by showing gossipy news, such as the "little hearts" of Zoe Konstantopoulou but also to put on the agenda constantly and systematically the migration "crisis", the Turkish provocations and, in the last month, the issue of the minority in Thrace, taking a defiantly cynical, conservative and racist position. The government's positions on increasing arms defense spending, increasing military service, the Evros fence and the overall security-centric approach to the migration issue were applauded by the mainstream media, while progressive views were condemned as policies leading to lawless regime, thus cultivating conservative and extreme consciences, which were revealed by the June 25 election result.

The dire state of left-wing forces in the election results is mainly attributed to «SYRIZA». The negotiations after the 2015 referendum, the «illusions» of Alexis Tsipras, the party's turn to the center-left and the self-defeating application of the simple proportional representation system led to the devaluation of the progressive space by the systemic parties and media. The dominance of «New Democracy» with twice as many votes as «SYRIZA», the re-emergence of «PASOK» in double digits rates, the rejection of «DIEM 25», where the issue of political rupture was raised again, and

the strengthening of «KKE» by two points, update «T.I.N.A» and establish it in the Greek reality.

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# 12 | Niki: The return of the triptych «Πατρίς-Θρησκεία-Οικογένεια» with a twist<sup>1</sup> (;)

By Thanasis Dimakas

Reviewing the results of the two recent elections, we can notice some significant changes. Although, the dynamics of the four largest/strongest parties didn't change drastically, overall, the party system of Greece seems a lot different. The biggest change lies in the number of parties that entered the Greek parliament: from five in May to eight in June. One of the newly entered parties was the ultra-conservative party Niki (Νίκη – Victory). In this note we will focus on Niki from two perspectives: the party's identity and its electoral performance.

The party founded at 17th of June 2019 and has its headquarters based on Thessaloniki. with the main axes of its ideological and political identity being, as declared by Niki's president Dimitri Natsio, the triptych: "Faith, Homeland and Family".

In the party's constitution they were defined, among other party identity issues: that Niki is not defined or expressed by the political terms "right", "center" or "left", "progressive" or "conservative" party but only from the timeless values and principles of Hellenism and the Orthodox Faith. Also, that only Greeks by origin (or proven philhellenes) can be members of Niki, but also that former politics from others parties can't join the party. As for the integration policy of immigrants/refugees, it is foreseen the simplification of the deportation process for immigrants/refugees who do not comply with the prescribed control measures, e.g. they must attend a mandatory health, work status and criminal record check every month.

Taking these as facts, we come to the conclusion that Niki ultimately has a "hidden" anti-political and anti-systemic profile, a nationalist ideological starting point and can be included in the far-right political context in a broad sense.

Niki was an unknown to the general party until the beginning of spring, when she was first spotted in opinion polls ahead of the May elections. With gradually increasing percentages, the party seemed to have the potential to enter parliament, but Niki failed to pass the threshold by a few thousand votes (2,92% - 172.260). However, the party managed to enter to the Greek parliament in the June 25 elections, receiving 3,69% and a total of 192.158 votes electing 10 MPs. As mentioned, the party is based in Thessaloniki, so it is not surprising that in the wider region of Macedonia it recorded its highest percentages, probably due to its opposition to the Prespa agreement that

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1 The basic political-identity axes for the Greek conservative and far-right political front through the years: Homeland-Religion-Family, but Niki replaced the word Θρησκεία [religion] with Πίστη [Faith].

changed FYROM's name to Republic of North Macedonia. Something remarkable that Niki achieved in the recent elections is that Niki not only managed to gather 20.000 more votes as a total, but that it is the only party that increased its percentages in all electoral districts of the country compared to the May elections.

In conclusion, Niki is a party that avoids positioning itself in traditional dipoles, but maintains such strong ties with tradition (national, religious, cultural etc.) that it goes beyond the strict definition of a conservative party and approaches the principles of the far-right family of parties.

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## **Section III**

### **The descent of the left**



# 13 | Mourning

By Theodore Koulouris

Despite the unsavoury torch-laden [celebrations](#) in the Athenian centre by a small number of Greek communists on June 25<sup>th</sup>, the latest electoral [results](#) compound the dismantling of the Greek Left for the foreseeable future.

*Nea Demokratia's* victory was expected, and the enhanced proportional representation (EPR) system afforded Mitsotakis' party a comfortable parliamentary majority of 158 MPs. Whilst *SYRIZA's* share of the vote retreated to 18%, Yanis Varoufakis' *MERA25* failed to muster even the requisite 3% to enter parliament.

Eight parties have entered parliament, essentially fragmenting what was hoped to be an effective opposition to Mitsotakis' hardcore neoliberal reforms.

Kyriakos Velopoulos, a former [TV chancer](#) who used to sell Jesus Christ's handwritten epistles and cures for baldness while himself being bald, entered parliament leading *Elliniki Lysi* (Greek Solution) alongside 12 MPs. Zoe Konstantopoulou, Tsipras' former firebrand Speaker, formed her own groupuscule *Plefsi Eleftherias* (Course for Freedom) and elected 8 MPs. To this day, no one knows what Konstantopoulou's 'party' stands for other than perhaps for its leader's penchant for what she calls 'love politics'.

Most worrying, however, is the parliamentary success of the neo-Nazi formation *Spartiates* (Spartans), whose overt connections with the Nazi convict Ilias Kasidiaris (formerly of Golden Dawn) enabled this new far-right party to elect 13 MPs. Another far-right formation that successfully elected 10 MPs is *Nike* (Victory), whose manifesto reeks of a nostalgia that sets out to 'correct' the circumstances in which the 'native Greek and his traditional family are hated, the two genders and traditional procreation lose their sanctity' and in which 'economic conditions crush the autochthonous Greeks for the sake of "[illegal, uninvited settlers](#)"'.

SYRIZA's 2015-2019 gamble did not pay off, either for Alexis Tsipras and his party or for Greece as a modern European country. Its civil society is old and tired, whilst its institutions, especially [the media](#), are not only ineffective but in the [payroll](#) of Mitsotakis' government. The multiple scandals that bedevil Greece – [Novartis](#), the 2022 Greek Wiretapping scandal AKA [The Greek Watergate](#) – are all but buried in the country's notorious judicial bureaucracy, whilst the resurgence of *Patris-Threiskia-Oikogeneia* (Fatherland-Religion-Family) as not only a desired right-wing hegemony but as a powerful legislative force paint a very bleak picture for a country that only a few years ago seemed capable, despite its size and puny economy, of carrying Europe's hopes against economic desolation.

Very few Greeks, it seems, mourn Pavlos Fyssas aka Killap P, the rapper [murdered](#) by Golden Dawn thugs in 2013, or the 700 refugees [drowned](#) in the Mediterranean Sea only a few days ago under the watchful eye of the Hellenic Coastguard. Instead, we are, with hindsight, left to mourn for a Greece that was never on the cards. That said,

if we treat 'mourning' not as an end but as a necessary signifier of collective resistance there may still be a glimmer of hope.

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