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# 11

## VIGILANTISM IN GREECE

### The case of the Golden Dawn

*Christos Vrakopoulos and Daphne Halikiopoulou*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on vigilantism in Greece. Specifically, it examines the Golden Dawn, a group that beyond engaging in vigilante activities is also the third biggest political party in the country. The Golden Dawn is distinct from a number of other European parties broadly labelled under the ‘far right’ umbrella in that it was formed as a violent grass-roots movement by far-right activists, its main activities prior to 2012 confined to the streets. It can be described as a vigilante group, which frequently uses violence, engages in street politics, has a strong focus on community-based activities, and whose members perceive themselves as ‘street soldiers’. Since 2013 a number of its leading cadres, who are also members of the Greek parliament, have been undergoing trial for maintaining a criminal organization and other criminal acts including murder and grievous bodily harm.

The progressive entrenchment of this group in the Greek political system has raised a number of questions about its potential implications on the nature of democracy and policy-making. This chapter examines various dimensions of the Golden Dawn’s vigilante activities. Following a brief overview of the Greek socio-political context, it proceeds to examine the party’s ideology, its organizational structure, its various operations, communications activities and relationships with other political actors and groups in Greece.

#### **The political, social and economic environment**

##### ***Political violence and the history of vigilantism in Greece***

Vigilante and paramilitary activities have a long tradition in Modern Greek history. According to Psychogios (2013), political violence, including terrorism,

clashes between protesters and the police, and neo-Nazi racist attacks, is not infrequent in Greece because it is ingrained in Greek political culture. The civil war (1946–1949) and military junta (1967–1975) are pertinent examples of political violence. Vigilantism during these periods was primarily aimed, not against ethnic minorities or migrants, but against political opponents. For example, the military regime often targeted political dissidents, and in turn left-wing activist groups and/ or individuals perpetuated violent acts directed against the regime (Voglis 2011). The legacy of both events has been the maintenance of this culture of violence that characterizes Greek society, as political consensus among political parties remained at a minimum level after the restoration of democracy (Papasarantopoulos, 2014).

### ***Vigilantism during the metapolitefsi era***

The period between the restoration of democracy in 1974 and the eruption of the economic crisis in 2008 was characterized by relative political stability. Nonetheless, the adversarial nature of Greek politics maintained the deeply engrained culture of confrontation. During this period, the Greek political system was characterized by a competition between two main parties, the centre-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the centre-right New Democracy (ND), which together occupied the majority of the 300 seats in the Greek Parliament (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2013). Most small parties were excluded from parliamentary representation and vigilante activities took place mainly on the streets.

During this era, political violence was perpetrated by vigilante groups of both the right and the left, some targeting political opponents and others targeting minorities. Most notably, right-wing extremist groups during the early metapolitefsi era (1970s and 1980s) targeted mostly the so-called ‘internal enemies’ (Psarras 2012), i.e. left-wing activists. Michaloliakos, the leader of the Golden Dawn, was a protagonist in those attacks. Notable examples include an attack against five journalists during the funeral of a well-known military junta supporter police officer; a series of bomb explosions in various areas of Athens, most importantly in two cinemas that showed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) movies on the 4th anniversary of the restoration of Democracy. Michaloliakos was arrested in both instances (Psarras 2012). During the 1990s, and after the creation of the Golden Dawn, attacks against internal enemies as well as against migrants, increased. Psarras (2012) identifies at least 27 violent attacks against left-wing individuals, workers and immigrants by members of the Golden Dawn. Also, after the collapse of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, there was an influx of immigrants from those countries, mostly Albanians, who suffered from a large number of racial attacks (Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2015). An example is the mass attacks against Albanians after an international football game between Greece and Albania (Karamanidou, 2016).

### ***Vigilantism post-2008: the Golden Dawn and the Greek crisis***

The eruption of the economic crisis in 2008 altered the dynamics of party competition, as it resulted in a grand coalition between PASOK, ND and the far right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS). During this period, the Greek government signed the first Memorandum of Understanding with the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which offered Greece financial aid and set economic policy conditionality between the country and its creditors (Vasilopoulou et al., 2014). This Memorandum became the target of a number of small, anti-establishment Greek parties, which blamed it for the accentuation of the economic crisis because of the austerity measures that accompanied it. As a result, in 2012 representation increased for small parties. A total of seven parties entered parliament, including the Golden Dawn. This trend continued in the 2014 European Parliament elections and the subsequent January and September 2015 national elections, indicating the party has consolidated a secure voting base of circa 6–7%.

Therefore, Greece's severe economic crisis was in many ways pivotal for the changing dynamics in Greek politics. What is key about the Greek case, however, is the extent to which the economic crisis became translated into a problem of governance and a broader crisis of legitimacy and democratic representation (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2018), indicated by lack of trust in political institutions and an overall dissatisfaction with democracy. Notably, trust in political parties, trust in government and parliament, and satisfaction with democracy declined dramatically in the period between 2007 and 2013, dropping well below the EU average (European Commission, 2018) (for details, see Appendix A1).

At the same time, trust in institutions that employ violence, such as the army and the police, remain high in Greece. Notably, trust in the army and trust in the police both increased during the period 2010–2014. This is a broader illustration of support for authoritarianism, which partly explains the authoritarian attitudes expressed in the support for Golden Dawn. The political crisis in Greece was not just a rejection of the established political parties, but rather a rejection of the political system as a whole (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2018), which created fertile ground not only for smaller parties in general, but specifically vigilante groups defined by authoritarian attitudes and an endorsement of violence.

### ***Immigration and the treatment of minorities in Greece***

The deeply engrained culture of violence (Psarras 2012) as well as support for authoritarian values and nationalism (Fragkoudaki 2013) are often manifested in a deep-seated intolerance against a number of minority groups, including homosexuals, people with left-leaning attitudes, members of other religions and different ethnic groups. The treatment of minorities in Greece has often been criticized by international human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (Human Rights Watch, 2013). This discrimination intensified post-2012, partly legitimated by the fact that violent, vigilante groups such as

the Golden Dawn enjoyed parliamentary representation. This can be illustrated by both non-institutionalized activities that have taken place on the streets, such as the events that unfolded outside the Hytirio theatre in Athens in 2012, when a Greek theatre company was verbally and physically abused by members of the public, Golden Dawn MPs and members of the Greek Orthodox Church for attempting to stage a version of Terence McNally's *Corpus Christi*; and in the institutionalized form of discriminatory policies, for example 'Hospitable Zeus', a policy introduced in 2012 as part of an initiative to reduce the number of illegal immigrants. The racism and overt discrimination characterising the policy have led to severe criticisms with regards to the extent to which human rights are respected in Greece (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015). These examples suggest that attitudes towards minorities may be understood as part of a broader xenophobia that pervades Greek political culture (Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2015).

It is important to note that this scepticism and intolerance towards minorities is to a degree separate from actual levels of immigration in Greece. While this issue has been increasing in salience across Europe, and constitutes one of the key factors to which the rise of the far right is attributed in a series of comparative studies (see e.g. Ivarsflaten 2008; Inglehart and Norris 2016), in Greece, immigration figures are generally low compared to other European countries, and actually declined during the period of economic crisis (see Appendix A1). In addition, research on party manifestos before and after the eruption of the crisis has shown that immigration is not one of the three most salient issues in the Golden Dawn's agenda (Halikiopoulou et al., 2016). Indeed, immigration is ranked as the 4th or 5th most important issue facing the country from 2005 onwards (European Commission, 2018).

With regards to the refugee crisis, Greece is one of the most greatly affected countries in Europe. Between April 2015 and September 2015 Greece received approximately 400,000 new asylum seekers (Dinas et al. 2017). Exposure to the refugee crisis was much greater in certain islands of the eastern Aegean, given their proximity to the Turkish coast, such as Lesbos, which during the same period received over 200,000 asylum seekers (ibid.: 2). Research illustrates that in those Greek islands that faced a massive inflow of refugees just before the September 2015 election, vote shares for Golden Dawn did indeed increase, but only moderately, by 2 percentage points (Dinas et al., 2017). Beyond voting patterns, refugee camps in islands such as Lesbos have frequently become the target of extreme right-wing violence (see e.g. ekathimerini.com, 2018).

### **The ideology and organizational structure of the Golden Dawn: justification and motivation**

Given the centrality of violence in both its ideology and practices, the Golden Dawn can be described as a vigilante group. The party endorses 'the collective use of extra-legal violence' (Moncada, 2017) and fulfils most of Johnston's (1996) criteria for vigilantism, including the planning of the act of violence, the voluntary participation by private citizens, the exercise of autonomous citizenship and the use

and frequent threat of violence. More specifically, in accordance to Moncada's (2017) classification, the Golden Dawn acts as a vigilante group in terms of its social organization, identified targets, its repertoire, justification and motivation. In terms of social organization, the planning and execution of vigilante activities take place at the group level, involving leading cadres of the party and members. In terms of targets, in accordance with its Nazi ideology (see below), the Golden Dawn identifies two sets of enemies, internal and external. The former are usually members of left-wing groups and organizations; the latter are immigrants or refugees. In terms of its repertoire, the party adopts both lethal and non-lethal tactics, which include a range of physical and psychological forms of violence. The justification lies in nationalism (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015); and their motivation, more narrowly, can be found in the party's palingenetic (Griffin, 1991) vision: i.e. the need to cleanse the Greek nation of its internal and external enemies, so to facilitate its rebirth.

Its leader, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, founded the Golden Dawn in 1980 as a bulletin (Bistis, 2013), which openly supported Nazism (Hasapopoulos, 2013). Although the party has increasingly denied the 'Nazi' label, promoting itself instead as a Greek Nationalist Party (Ellinas, 2013; Psarras, 2012; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015), its ideology fulfils all the criteria for what constitutes a fascist, and specifically Nazi, group (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, 2015). In line with Mann's (2004) definition of fascism, the Golden Dawn is pan-nationalist, authoritarian, statist, and militarist. It seeks to transcend social cleavages and cleanse the nation of internal (i.e. political dissidents) and external (i.e. those not belonging to the 'organic' nation) enemies (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015). The two key ideological themes in its programmatic agenda include a focus on societal degeneration and a proposed final solution, which encompasses the necessity for national rebirth through a collective movement from below. In other words, while the party itself may reject the Nazi label, it nonetheless espouses all core Nazi principles.

Nationalism is a central principle in the Golden Dawn's ideology and the basis of justification of its violent and vigilante activities. In its manifesto the party makes clear that to be a member of Golden Dawn one must accept the principle of establishing the state in accordance with nationalism, which it defines in ethnic-organic terms as the supremacy of the 'ethnos-race' (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015: 55). In this regard the party places great emphasis on biological and ascriptive determinants of national belonging, including blood, genealogy, race and common ancestry. The party's nationalism is linked to its palingenetic vision (Griffin, 1991; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015), i.e. the need for the Greek nation to be reborn from the ashes of the old degenerate order for which corrupt domestic and external elites are responsible. It presents itself as the saviour and defender of the Greek nation, which is unique and superior to all other nations (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015: 71). The party is racist and indiscriminately anti-immigrant, portraying all others as 'barbarians' who must be cleansed so that the nation can be reborn.

The party's organizational structure reflects its ideology. It can best be described as a top-down political organization (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017a), highly concentrated, strictly hierarchical and militaristic (The Economist, 2013). As noted above, the Golden Dawn openly endorses and employs violence. Militarism is key to the Golden Dawn in both ideological and organizational terms. The party sees the army as the ultimate value, both because it is the protector of national security and because it embodies the ultimate value of collective sacrifice for the nation (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015: 61). Members are seen as 'street soldiers' fighting for the nationalist cause. They are known for the organization of local paramilitary groupings, which train and carry out raids against a variety of target groups, including immigrants, Roma groups and left-wing groups (Hasapopoulos, 2013; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015).

Golden Dawn's organization expanded after the party's entry in the Greek parliament in 2012. From just 4 local organizations in Athens, Thessaloniki, Piraeus and Kalamata in previous years, the party had developed a total of 69 local branches and 9 local cells across the Greek territory in 2015 (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017a). Their activities also increased, with 3594 recorded during the 2012–2015 period (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017a).

Many Golden Dawn members and leading cadres of the party, including the leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos, are well known for their activities in the right-wing extremist community and have criminal records (Psarras, 2012). Many were previously members of the extreme right party August 4th, which was dissolved in 1977, and also of the National Political Union that openly supported the extreme right junta regime. Michaloliakos has been linked to a series of bombings in bookstores that sell books related to Soviet Union and cinemas showing 'left-leaning' movies (Hasapopoulos, 2013: 13); he was arrested for possession of weapons and bombs in 1976, when he spent ten months in prison (Psarras, 2012). The more recent examples of the criminal activities and records of Golden Dawn officials are discussed in the 'Operations and activities' section of this chapter.

## Support and membership

*Electoral support:* According to the vast literature on far-right voting behaviour, certain socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics are shared by far right voters. Far-right supporters tend to be economically and culturally insecure voters with authoritarian attitudes, often disillusioned with the system and untrusting of democratic institutions (e.g. Norris, 2005). Far-right supporters are most commonly male, either unemployed or in precarious employment. They tend to be working class and/ or low-income individuals who compete with immigrants for jobs and social status (Lucassen and Lubbers, 2012) and they have low levels of education. They are the losers of modernization (Kriesi et al., 2006), those most vulnerable to social change who have come to resent the political establishment that left them behind. An examination of the Golden Dawn voter profile shows some consistency with the findings of this broad literature, but also some differences, notably

in terms of the socio-demographic dimension. Using data from the Hellenic Panel Component of the 2014 European Election Study (EES), Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou (2015) find that attitudinal variables are more significant in determining the propensity for the Golden Dawn than socio-demographic variables. The Golden Dawn voter is unlikely to have a university degree, is highly disaffected by the political system, has little trust in the government and most likely belongs to the right of the political spectrum (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015:47–48). Lamprianou and Ellinas (2017) confirm that economic grievances have a limited, and cultural grievances a moderate, effect on GD voting, while the strongest correlates of GD voting are those capturing institutional grievances.

In terms of socio-demographic variables, we know from the June 2012 exit poll (Georgiadou, 2013) that the voters of the party are mainly male (76%) and 44 years old or younger. The September 2015 exit poll shows a similar picture ([www.metronanalysis.gr](http://www.metronanalysis.gr)). Interestingly, Golden Dawn supporters vary across different occupations (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015). The only occupations that the Golden Dawn is underrepresented amongst are pensioners and housewives, which is also captured from the gender and age group categories. The fact that Golden Dawn's supporters come from a broad range of occupational sectors is in contrast with the main findings from the existing literature on extreme-right voting and supports the political grievance model.

*Membership:* Data with regards to the membership of the organization is less readily available. As the Golden Dawn is an official political party with fairly broad electoral support, it would be incorrect to assume that all its voters automatically take part in vigilante activities. This requires a closer look at the party's membership. To a great extent, the composition of Golden Dawn's membership confirms the 'angry white men' paradigm (Bistis, 2013; Psarras, 2012). The majority of members are males under the age of 50. Female membership, however, has been increasing, with a substantial number of women having joined the party (REF). In terms of gender representation, women tend to have their own Golden Dawn forums where they come together to discuss issues and organize a variety of activities (e.g. White Women Front: [www.whitewomenfront.blogspot.uk](http://www.whitewomenfront.blogspot.uk))

## Operations and activities

The Golden Dawn operates on three different levels: as a political party, as a protest and pressure group and as a vigilante group. While it adopts violence at all levels, only in the latter can its activities be explicitly described as vigilante. We may also distinguish between those activities the party undertakes indoors to communicate with activists and those it organizes outdoors to communicate with voters (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017b). In terms of its activities as a political party, the Golden Dawn runs in national, European and local elections. Despite its participation in democratic procedures, the party is generally critical of democracy and disrespectful of democratic institutions. The party's dismissal of liberal democracy is reflected by the behaviour of Golden Dawn MPs in parliament and their disrespect



of other elected officials. Examples abound. Following their election, the party leader and leading cadres performed a Nazi salute upon their entry in Parliament. During the same year and in a public display of violence, Ilias Kasidiaris threw a glass of water on SYRIZA MP Rena Dourou and slapped KKE MP Liana Kaneli live on Greek television (Telegraph.co.uk, 2012). In 2016, Golden Dawn MEP Lampros Fountoulis violently interrupted an event organized to discuss the situation with ethnic Turks living in Thrace (Crisp, 2016). In 2017, Golden Dawn party spokesman Ilias Kasidiaris attacked ND MP Nikos Dendias on the pretext that the latter walked in front of him while Kasidiaris was talking (Ekathimerini.com, 2017). And, in June 2018 Golden Dawn MP Konstantinos Barbarousis called for a military coup d'état during his talk in Parliament on the Macedonia question (Kathimerini.gr, 2018). The MP was subsequently charged with treason and arrested.

In terms of protest and pressure group activities, the Golden Dawn is highly active, especially following its electoral success in 2012. For example, Ellinas and Lamprianou (2017a) show that, within the time span of three years, the party organized a total of 3594 activities, including speeches and 'debates' where Golden Dawn members discuss current affairs, historical and ideological issues and electoral campaigns; political activities, such as celebrations, demonstrations and even camps and exercises for their members; and social charity activities, such as the organization of job centres, food and clothes collections, blood donations (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017a). It is important to note here that these latter activities were intended only for Greeks, a status to be confirmed by the presentation of a Greek identity card to one of the Golden Dawn members on site, and are part of a broader Golden Dawn initiative to offer an alternative service of state and welfare provisions reminiscent of the Nazi 'Winterhilfswerk' (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015).

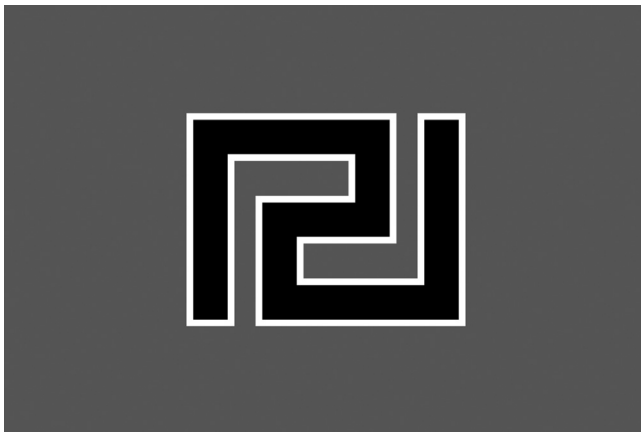
In terms of its vigilante activities, Golden Dawn members have been consistently involved in violent acts since the group's establishment. The group was notorious for a range of violent acts in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Group members often wear black uniforms and military trousers, reflecting the group's military-style organization, in an attempt to instil fear. As noted above, their targets are those groups they identify as internal and external enemies; in other words, left-wing activists and immigrants. An exhaustive list of recorded cases would take up the space of this entire chapter. An indicative list of well-known cases includes the murder of left-wing student Dimitris Kousouris in 1998; numerous attacks against immigrants and pro-immigrant organizations; threats and vandalism at the Chytirio theatre in Athens in 2012 to 'protest' against the staging of the play 'Corpus Christi'; the murder of the 26-year-old Pakistani immigrant Shehzad Luqman, who was stabbed by members of Golden Dawn in Athens in 2013 (To Vima, 2015); and the murder of left-wing activist Pavlos Fyssas in 2013, which triggered the arrest of 20 or so Golden Dawn MPs.

Golden Dawn operations continue. They patrol neighbourhoods in order to provide security to Greeks and carry out attacks. They even carry out visits to workplaces to encourage employers to hire Greeks instead of foreign workers

(Margaronis, 2012). Since the emergence of the refugee crisis, Golden Dawn members introduced another vigilante activity, which is common in other countries, namely boat patrols, to push back the refugees who try to enter Greece from the Aegean Sea (Xchange.org). Despite the notoriety of their violent activities and pending indictment, the Golden Dawn continues to run for election as its leading cadres continue to serve as elected representatives.

### **Communication activities: Golden Dawn propaganda offline and online**

The Golden Dawn has a very elaborate propaganda strategy. The party is particularly active in disseminating its message, both verbally and visually, through online and offline means of communication. The message they try to convey is the following: the Golden Dawn is a Greek nationalist party, not a Nazi party. While, for example, the party's logo (see Figure 11.1 below) is reminiscent of the Nazi Swastika (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, 2015), the Golden Dawn itself insists it is the Meander – an ancient Greek symbol – and completely unrelated to Nazism. As noted above however, despite the party's denial of Nazism, its ideology and practices well fit all the criteria of what constitutes a Nazi group. Like other Nazi organizations, the group sees its ultimate goal as the eradication of the corrupt social order through the cleansing of the nation's enemies. The Phoenix-like rebirth of the Greek nation from its ashes can only be made possible through the Golden Dawn, a movement from below which embodies the Greek nation and whose mission is to salvage it from extinction and restore its former glory (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015). Their motto, 'blood and honour' is a well-known Nazi motto; their organization of soup kitchens and blood donations are



**FIGURE 11.1** The Golden Dawn logo

reminiscent of the Nazi ‘Winterhilfswerk’; and their practice of standing and saluting the leader upon entry is clearly a Nazi practice.

In terms of its online presence, the Golden Dawn has a frequently updated website (<http://www.xryshaygh.com>) whose prime aim is to disseminate the party’s nationalist message and justify its stance on a broad range of issues. The website is elaborate, with a series of sub-sections including the party’s positions and manifesto, news and current affairs, history, local government and EP party activities. There is a special ‘dedications’ page, which offers short articles on Greek historical events, prominent Greek figures and popular heroes as well as commemorative texts on anniversary dates for important national events. Online pages are updated on a regular basis, and it is clear the Golden Dawn invests time and resources for these activities. News and current affairs are framed in terms of nationalism, taking advantage of various issues such as events to do with the country’s relationship with Turkey and FYROM/Macedonia among others. Interestingly there are many references to Cyprus and the activities of the Cypriot sister party to the Golden Dawn – ELAM. The Golden Dawn also has a radio station ([radio.antepithesi.gr](http://radio.antepithesi.gr)) and publishes a number of bulletins, magazines and newspapers that can also be accessed online, including [ethnikismos.net](http://ethnikismos.net), and <https://emprosnews.wordpress.com>. Finally, the party has set up a number of online and on-site stores where one can purchase a range of paraphernalia including books often authored by Golden Dawn members, flags, calendars mugs, T-shirts, jewellery and key rings with the party’s logo (<http://www.xakatastima.gr>).

### **Relationship to political groups and public agencies**

Overall, other actors have progressively marginalized the Golden Dawn in the Greek system. Initially, after the party’s election in parliament, its reception was varied with some political groups actively opposing it and others not taking an active stance. It was only after the murder of left-wing activist Pavlos Fyssas and the in-depth examination of the case from the police, that the Golden Dawn started facing a more repressive environment. This has a visible impact on party activities. For example, the number of activities the group organized after the 2013 arrest was halved, from 200 activities per month prior to 2013 to 100 (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017a). However, the party has retained its electoral support, which, considering the increasingly repressive environment the party operates in, as well as the fact that it hardly campaigned for the 2015 elections because of imprisonment and impending trial, is alarming.

Because of its anti-democratic profile and links to violence, no other political party in Greece has agreed to co-operate or enter a coalition with the Golden Dawn. The party does not participate in any European Parliament group. It is affiliated with the Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF), which is an alliance of ultranationalist far right parties and politicians including the German National Democratic Party (NPD), Italy’s Roberto Fiore, the leader of Italy’s Forza Nuova (FN), and Nick Griffin, the former leader of the British National Party (BNP).

With regards to the media, the party is often no-platformed. This, however, was not always the case. Following the initial success in Athens mayoral elections in 2010, mainstream media began to pay attention to the Golden Dawn as a political party, frequently covering stories about its members and activities. Much of this initial media focus was on the Golden Dawn's charity activities, for example the blood donations and soup kitchens, while completely ignoring the party's vigilante activities and attacks against immigrants and left-wing activists (Prinos, 2014; Kandylis and Kavoulakos, 2011). Often the media even indirectly promoted the Golden Dawn, portraying its members as modern day Robin Hoods – muscular skinheads in uniforms whose main goal was to protect the vulnerable members of the Greek population from the criminal activities that mass immigration brought to Greece and thus restore law and order (TVXS, 2014). This changed after 2013, following a series of incidents, which exposed the violent tendencies of Golden Dawn members, including Ilias Kasidiaris' attack against KKE MP Liana Kaneli and SYRIZA MP Rena Dourou live on Greek television (Gilani, 2012).

Last but not least, it is important to discuss the relationship between the Golden Dawn and the police, which remains a matter of contention in Greece and has attracted a lot of attention. This issue is sensitive and data is scarce. It is often suggested that the Golden Dawn is particularly appealing to the police. Police officers tend to be Golden Dawn supporters and constituencies with high numbers of police voters tend to turn around higher Golden Dawn results. For example, in their study of police voting behaviour in Athens, Papanicolaou and Papageorgiou (2016) find that Golden Dawn's presence has been much more emphatic among police personnel than among the general public. In addition, according to the Golden Dawn itself, the number of police officers who voted for the party during both 2015 elections was approximately 60% (Golden Dawn, 2015). Beyond voting preferences, the Greek police has frequently been criticized for entrenched racism, endemic violence and unlawful conduct, sometimes linked with Golden Dawn activities. In December 2013, among those arrested alongside with Golden Dawn officials were two police officers; ten police officers were found to have direct or indirect links with criminal activities attributed to Golden Dawn members (Amnesty International, 2014). However, systematic data on this issue is absent.

### **Far-right vigilante activities beyond the Golden Dawn**

From 2015 onwards two new extreme-right vigilante groups appeared in Greece, namely Cryptheia and C18. Both groups appear to be affiliated with the Golden Dawn (Krithari, 2018). Specifically, Cryptheia is a vigilante group created after a breakaway from the Golden Dawn (Dettmer, 2017). The group's purpose is to force all migrants and refugees out of Greece (Dettmer, 2017). The group became known after an attack against the residence of an 11-year-old Afghan boy, just because the boy was selected by his school to carry the Greek flag at a national parade (Dettmer, 2017). Members of Cryptheia also claimed responsibility for an arson attack in a refugee centre in Athens' town centre (Daily Sabah, 2018). With

regards to the C18, this is another neo-Nazi vigilante group, whose members have participated in approximately 30 attacks against leftists, anarchists and others (Krithari, 2018). Some have linked this group with the Golden Dawn, as they stress that C18 replaced Golden Dawn, after the Golden Dawn's trial started (Krithari, 2018).

The actions of these groups can be subsumed under the concept of vigilantism as they meet Johnston's (1996) criteria mentioned earlier in this article, including the planning, use and frequent threat of violence. Such groups often attempt to take law enforcement upon themselves (Heitmeyer, 2005). For example, Cryptheia's objection to a non-native carrying the Greek flag for whatever reason, led to the violent attack against the residence of the 11-year-old Afghan boy. In addition, their attack against the Athens refugee centre is premised on their refusal to accept the existence of migrants or refugees in Greek territory. Finally, C18's attacks against leftists and anarchists are premised on the alleged inability of the legal system – and law enforcement – to prevent building occupations.

## Conclusion

Far-right vigilante groups, operating at the street level, are not uncommon. The Greek case is particularly interesting, however, as the main vigilante group against migrants and refugees is also the third biggest party in the Greek parliament. The rise of the Golden Dawn can be seen as part of a broader trend towards the far right across Europe. At the same time it is set apart from other European far right parties precisely because of its vigilante nature and activities: the party openly endorses and uses violence, which it justifies on the basis of its racist and organic nationalist ideology. What is striking about the Golden Dawn is the extent to which it continues to generate electoral support despite the notoriety of its vigilante activities, the imprisonment of its leading cadres and its impending trial.

## Note

- 1 All the data on trust gathered from the European Commission, as it is yearly and also comparable to the other European Union countries.

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## Appendix A1

*Trust in institutions*: Prior to the crisis (in 2007), trust in political parties was 20.5% (European Commission, 2018).<sup>1</sup> In 2011, this number dropped to 5.1% and in 2013, it declined further to 4.1%. Similar dynamics apply for levels of trust in government



and parliament. In 2007, trust in government was 45.5%. However, in 2011 this was reduced to 8.5%. Trust in the national parliament declined from 51.85% in 2007 to 12% and 11.89% in 2011 and 2013 respectively. Dissatisfaction with democracy also confirms the above argument. In 2007, 62.8% of Greek citizens were satisfied with democracy in their country. However, in 2011 only 17% were very or fairly satisfied with democracy; in 2013 this number slightly increased to 18% (European Commission, 2018).

*Trust in army and the police:* In 2010 trust in the army in 2010 (2011 is not available) was 66.73% and trust in the police was 52% (European Commission, 2018). In 2014 (2013 is not available either) both figures had increased to 71.53% and 58.93% respectively.

*Immigration:* With regards to actual immigration figures, the stock of foreign-born population in Greece is low compared to other European countries. It declined from 7.4% (or 828.4 thousands) in 2010 to 6.6 (or 727.5 thousand) in 2014 (OECD, 2018a). The number of inflows of foreign population also declined in recent years. In 2005 the number of inflows of foreign population in Greece was 65.3 thousand; in 2009 this number dropped to 35.8 thousand; and in 2011, a year before the national elections that saw the entry of the Golden Dawn in the Greek parliament for the first time, the number further decreased to 33 thousand (OECD, 2018b).