

# Chapter 5: Greece

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## Introduction

Greece was accepted as the tenth member of the European Union (then the European Economic Community-EEC) in 1979 and joined officially on 1 January 1981. Since then, Greece has become a member of the Eurozone and has ratified the Lisbon Treaty. It has striven to be included in the European 'family' from as early as 1961. The country's cultural and geopolitical position at the crossroads between East and West, and currently at the EU's South-Eastern border, has contributed to the formation of a rather peculiar sense of 'belonging to the West', which is injected with Eastern (non-European) cultural attributes (Diamandouros, 1994; Demertzis, 1997; Sarikakis, 2010). In political terms, EU membership, especially early on, served to stabilise the political situation after two military coups (1940 and 1967) and a civil war in the post-war period, between the Left and the Right. It also served—in geopolitical terms—to strengthen Greece's affiliation to the Western Europe (as opposed to the former Eastern Bloc) (Sarikakis, 2010: 136-137), within the cold-war context.

The history of European elections (from now on EP elections) in Greece does not seem to differ significantly from similar domestication stories of other countries. Throughout the years, EP elections in Greece have confirmed their character as second order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1997; Sarikakis, 2010), being diachronically in the shadow of national elections. This condition is evident in three major aspects of the EP elections. Firstly, the themes that have been dominating the public (political and journalistic) discourse over the years in the pre-electoral periods of the EP elections are almost identical to the themes that dominate the public discussion during national elections. Secondly, most political parties—especially of the governing and major opposition parties—strive either to praise their governmental achievements (the former), or to undermine the governing party (the latter). Thirdly, in a strategic rationale that combines party and personal political strategy, the EP elections act rather frequently as a steppingstone for a more 'prestigious' national political career. It is a common practice for high-ranked politicians that initially get elected as MEPs, to be replaced by other, less well-known, party members, to run as candidates in forthcoming national elections. In the Greek public sphere, the discussion surrounding the results of the EP elections is being conducted

in a nation-centric win-loss rationale (i.e., which party won or lost the elections), and not in a 'Europeanised' approach (i.e., which political alliance won or lost seats in the European Parliament). Moreover, Greek MEPs in their public announcements to the press tend to affiliate themselves more closely with their national party than with their EP Party Group (Sarikakis, 2010:137). In this rationale, the formation of an EU-centric 'public sphere' has never been actually achieved in Greece, and EU-related issues have been predominantly discussed rather superficially and in a 'fragmented' and nation-centric rationale (Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos, 2019).

## The 1980s: the PASOK era

The first elections that Greece participated in as a full member of the European Economic Community (EEC) took place on October 18, 1981. The high turnout (almost 78.5%) in these first EP elections was the result of the fact that the European elections were taking place concurrently with the national elections. The focal points of each election reflected the significant disagreements between the incumbent right-wing party of New Democracy (led by Konstantinos Karamanlis) and the insurgent socio-democratic party of PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Party, led by Andreas Papandreou) in a wide range of domestic (e.g., economy, civic rights) and foreign (participation in NATO, the Greco-Turkish relations) issues (Clogg, 1978). Self-proclaimed as a socialist party, PASOK managed to gain majority in both elections (with a clear majority especially in national elections), marking a significant milestone in the Greek Third Republic (also called *Metapolitefsi* which had never seen a socio-democratic party in power before). In addition, this election initiated an almost decade-long prevalence of (quasi)leftist political parties (PASOK, Greek Communist Party-KKE and other minor left-wing parties). Among others, as regards the participation of Greece in the EEC, PASOK initially rejected Karamanlis' total commitment to a full Greek membership in the EEC, arguing instead for a loose association agreement. Having won both elections, Papandreou finally opted for the continuation of the full membership of Greece in the EEC.

The 1984 EP elections were the first ones with PASOK in power, and the second consecutive European election won by the governing party. In Greece, the 1984 EP elections were seen as a major test of the socialist government's popularity and

offered a chance to re-debate Greece's recent accession to the EEC (Lodge, 1984:44). The strategy of the main opposition party (New Democracy) was aimed at revealing the extent to which PASOK had lost the confidence of voters. Under these circumstances the European elections could be compared to a full-blown general election campaign. In a heavily polarised contest for votes (stimulated by the prospect of a general election in October 1985), the campaign in Greece gave rise to a level of verbal and physical violence unprecedented even in national general elections (Jowett, 1985:109). New Democracy during its campaign used to blame PASOK for corruption and for giving away the funding from the EEC in non-transparent ways (see Image 5.01). In the 1984 EP election, the progressive political forces of 1981 were replaced by the National Political Union (Ethniki Politiki Enosi-EPEN), a far-right and fiercely anti-communist party, nominally led by the then imprisoned former colonel and dictator George Papadopoulos. The party secured a single European Parliament seat in 1984 and participated in several national elections in the 1980s and 1990s, receiving between 0.1% and 0.6% and no seats in the Greek parliament. EPEN's youth group became a breeding ground for future far right leaders, including Golden Dawn leader Nikos Michaloliakos and the leader of the Hellenic Front (Elliniko Metopo), Makis Vorides (Ellinas, 2014:150). Apart from that, the 1984 elections marked the first attempts to form 'Green' parties, though no such candidacy ultimately stood for election (Lodge, 1984:38).<sup>1</sup>

The 1989 EP elections were once again held at the same time as first-order national elections (Schmitt, 1990:174). The year 1989 is another important milestone in Greek political history, as it has been marked by a bank/financial scandal, the so-called 'Koskotas scandal', with the (never judicially proven) participation of the then prime minister Andreas Papandreou (PASOK had in the meantime won the 1985 national elections as well), who was accused of moral turpitude and passive bribery (Dobratz and Whitfield, 1992). The allegations of possible bribery by Papandreou became known as the 'Pampers case', after they were based on rumors that Koskotas sent money to government officials and Papandreou himself in diaper boxes. This specific period is known ever since as 'the dirty '89'. Within this political context, it was anticipated that the campaign would be dominated by the scandals that had shaken the country for some time and the increasing

<sup>1</sup> All party names that have competed in the EP elections in Greece over the years, as well as all the information regarding the vote share, the voters' participation and the seats' dissemination, have been crosschecked with the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (<https://ekloges.yypes.gr/>).



Image 5.01: New Democracy poster from the 1984 elections: 'Farmer, the EU has given 134 billion drachmas for you. Yet your income has been cut. Where did the money go?... Do something now. Vote for New Democracy'. 1984 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.

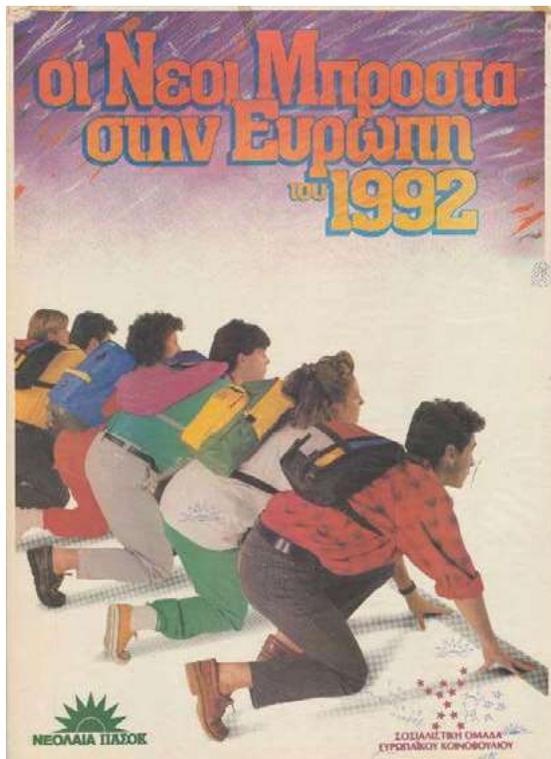


Image 5.02: Poster of PASOK Youth (1989 elections) titled as: ‘Young people ahead in Europe 1992’. 1989 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European elections Monitoring Center.



Image 5.03: Poster of the Alternative Ecologists (1989 elections) which depicts a leaf-shaped map of Europe, captioned as: Ecology: ‘the alternative solution’ 1989 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.

indications that part of the government and the party elite of the ruling PASOK party, including prime minister Papandreou, were mixed up in these scandals (Niedermayer, 1991:7). This issue permeated the whole pre-electoral period, formulating an inverted and polarised political scene. The polarised context created due to the Koskotas scandal ended up with a record turn-out of 80% (Guyomarch, 1995). In addition, in terms of salience in the public sphere, there were two additional issues (the American bases and the Greek-Turkish differences)<sup>2</sup> that reached a moderate level of salience in media discourse during the pre-electoral period (Kuechler, 1991:90). Also, the ruling party of PASOK sought to disorientate the public dialogue by stressing out the then upcoming milestone of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 (Image 5.02). A last noteworthy parameter of the 1989 elec-

tions is the participation, for the first time in Greece, of ecological parties<sup>3</sup> (see for example Image 5.03). This dispersion proved to be their Achilles’s heel, since none of them made it to the European Parliament (Niedermayer, 1991).

All in all, the 1980s European political landscape was dominated by the socialist party of PASOK and its leader Andreas Papandreou. The EP elections took place within a divided political context marked by intense political debate, without actual reflection on issues related to the contemporaneous present and future of the EU.

### **Into the 1990s and Beyond: The Macedonian and other issues**

The 1994 EP elections took place on June 12, 1994, approximately nine months after the general elections

2 One of the most well-known slogans of PASOK in the early 80’s was “EEC and NATO- syndicate of war”. In this rationale, PASOK initially rejected the presence of American military bases on Greek soil, and thus a debate in the Greek political scene was taking place on whether the Greek government should renew the agreement with the US on the bases or not (see for example, Danopoulos, 1988). Greece and Turkey have a rivalry with a history of events that have been used to justify/consolidate their nationalisms. The Greek-Turkish differences are related to diachronic disputes between Greece and Turkey over issues like whether the Greek islands are allowed an exclusive economic zone, the basis of claiming rights over the sea, whether Greece can expand its eastern sea borders to 12 miles according to the Law of the Sea convention, and various other diplomatic tensions (see for example Schmitt, 1996).

3 Namely Alternative Ecologists, Greek Democratic Ecological Movement, Ecological Movement- Political Renaissance.



Image 5.04 Poster of PASOK for the 1994 European Elections, reading: (middle text) ‘Strong PASOK, Strong Greece in Europe’. (bottom text) ‘For the people of Greece. For a people’s Europe’. 1994 European Parliamentary Elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 5.05: Poster of the Democratic Social Movement reading: [grey text] In 1990-1999, they took a lot away from us... [red text] ‘That’s enough, let’s turn the page!’ The red text against the yellow background translates to: ‘Head up high’. 1999 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.

of October 1993. In these elections, the turnout fell from 80% to 71.9% (Guyomarch, 1995:175). It seems probable that some of the turnout decline reflected a degree of ‘voter fatigue’ after the holding of national elections nine months beforehand (Guyomarch, 1995:177). Another possible cause contributing to this decline is the fact that the European Union had become somewhat less popular because of the ‘Macedonian issue’ (Irwin, 1995:187) -regarding the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>4</sup> The role that the Macedonian issue had played in both national and EP elections of 1993-1994 (Irwin, 1995:194), underlines, once again, the central role of a national issue in the influencing of voting behaviour in the European elections. In addition, these elections marked the first implementation of the 3% threshold to enter the EU Parliament, due to a recent law enacted by the previous government of New Democracy. The election results showed a decline in the percentages of both major parties (PASOK and New

Democracy), in favour of communists and their allies that enhanced their position on the left side of the ideological/political spectrum. At the same time, the Political Spring nationalists pulled towards the (far) right a significant number of votes at the expense of both PASOK and New Democracy conservatives (Smith, 1994; Guyomarch, 1995; Bardi, 1996). Still, the socialists and conservatives had by far the largest shares of the votes and the government did not feel any pressure to alter its orientation towards the Union (Pinder, 1994:507). Also notable is the fact that the 1994 EP elections mark the first electoral competition for the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn. To the extent that the public discussion in the pre-electoral period focused on European issues (Image 5.04), all parties stressed the importance of the financial assistance for infrastructure projects that would be received in the coming years (Irwin, 1995:187).

The 1999 EP elections served as a ‘warm-up’ for the forthcoming national elections that would be

<sup>4</sup> Another nationalist issue concerning the name of the then newly established country of Macedonia, after the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. The newly formed state named officially Republic of Macedonia at the northern border of Greece, abutting the Greek prefecture of Macedonia, caused massive protests instigated by conservative political parties and the Greek Orthodox church, whose argument is (up to nowadays) that there is only one Macedonia, and it is Greek. This issue was allegedly settled by the Prespes Treaty signed in 2018, but remains essentially unresolved, since many parameters of the treaty have not been ratified by the Greek parliament yet (see for example Bechev, 2023).



Image 5.06: Poster of the Communist Party of Greece depicting a broken chain with a weight ball affixed to it. The accompanying text reads: 'Without surrendering to the euro, better!'. 2004 European Parliamentary Elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

held in 2000 (Guyomarch, 2000), and, once again, the national issues were at the forefront of the public debates. Of major importance was the 'Macedonian' issue and the involvement of Greece to the NATO bombings against former Yugoslavia, and especially Serbia, which mobilised both left- and right-wing citizens and organisations since leftists were demonstrating for peace and right-wing people would not approve the bombing of another Christian Orthodox country. These bidirectional pressures formed a negative context for the government of PASOK. The almost 'game-changer' news for the government would come from Brussels, since the allegedly successful course of the country towards entering the European Monetary Union managed to partially reverse the negative climate. Though hoping for a wide victory as a prelude for a win in the upcoming national elections in 2000, the major opposition at that time, New Democracy, won the elections with a short margin of 3%. More generally, the 1999 EP elections in Greece belonged to those which no party gained or lost more than two seats (Guyomarch, 2000:164), compared to the 1994 elections. Specifically, the new-left DKK (Democratic Social Movement-Image 5.05) gained two seats and the Communist KKE one. Conversely, the socialist PASOK shed one seat and the right-wing Political Spring party two seats (Teasdale, 1999:449).

The 2004 EP elections in Greece were a 'non-event', even though Greece had recently become member of the Eurozone. The recently elected conservative government of New Democracy wanted a 'reaffirmation' of the popular verdict, while the socialist opposition party (PASOK), knowing that three months is a very short time in which to change the political climate, wanted to hold onto their share of the vote at the national elections. The three small parties (Communist Party-KKE, Coalition of the Left, Movements and Ecology-SYN, and the far-right People's Orthodox Party-LAOS) tried to capitalise on the greater electoral volatility at EP elections. However, apart from the Greek Communist Party which campaigned against EU membership and the EU Constitution (Image 5.06), all the parties focused on domestic political issues (Kavakas, 2005).

The timing of the 2004 EP elections was also 'problematic', resulting in a (then) record-low turnout. This was not unique to Greece; only five of the 15 established EU member states (Belgium, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Luxembourg) managed to mobilise more than half of their electorate (Adshead and Hill, 2005: 538). This steep decline in voter participation can be attributed to at least three different factors. Firstly, national elections had taken place only three months earlier, in March, resulting in victory for the conservative New Democracy. The temporal

proximity of the conservative victory eliminated any doubt that New Democracy would be the leading party at these European elections (Adshead and Hill, 2005). In addition, the political parties had exhausted most of their budgets in the recent national elections and were unwilling to invest effort and funds in the EP elections (Kavakas, 2005: 131). Secondly, the public were unwilling to remain in the cities to vote during hot summertime weekends, particularly after people had already voted three months ago. Finally, on the Saturday evening before the Sunday elections, Greece's national football team won the opening Euro 2004 championship game against the host Portugal team. Saturday night and most of Sunday was given over to celebration. Even when the results were presented on Sunday evening on television, the reports from Portugal and the interviews with football players and commentators outnumbered the reports and interviews of politicians and election analysts. Politicians themselves were keener to discuss football than the results of the EP elections (Kavakas, 2005: 132).

The main issues that dominated the agenda in the 2004 EP election campaign were the performance of the new conservative government during the three months since its election; the new elements in the 'actual' economic situation in Greece revealed by the new government<sup>5</sup>; the referendum in Cyprus (PASOK and SYN appear to have lost votes due to their support of the Annan plan)<sup>6</sup>; and preparations for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. During the 2004 EP election campaign, New Democracy declared its full support for the EU Constitution and federal solutions to European integration; however, its message followed the domestic debate. In PASOK's campaign the European element was always there but in the background. It was something given, not disputed (Image 5.07). The Communist Party was perhaps the only party that focused exclusively on Europe. Its policies and priorities make it the most important anti-European political force. Perhaps this explains the doubling of its share of the vote compared to its share in the March national elections. With its main message focused on domestic issues, the Coalition of the Left (SYN) tried to persuade the public that 'There is another way, take it to the left!' Their only reference to Europe during the campaign had been the affirmation of its support for the constitution but with certain qualifications to prevent Europe becoming a fortress, and to ensure

that the EU's so-called 'fight against terrorism' would not compromise or eliminate citizens' rights and liberties. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the elections was the success of a new far-right party, LAOS (People's Orthodox Rally). This populist party promoted religious orthodoxy and xenophobic rhetoric, following a campaign that was centred around its leader, George Karatzaferis, under the message 'Vote YES for him who knows how to say NO.' It won one seat (Adshead and Hill, 2005:540; Kavakas, 2005:135).

Compared to the 1999 elections, Greece showed a decrease in visibility of EU issues in the media (de Vreese et al., 2006:489) and a tendency towards rather negative news (de Vreese et al., 2006:493). Public TV and a few radio stations dedicated limited time to discussing the relevance of the European Parliament and its powers in EU decision-making. Despite several radio and television programmes sponsored by the European Parliament seeking to disseminate the message that Greek MEPs would participate in an institution that had increasing power and significance for making decisions that would impact on the daily lives of citizens in Europe, it seems that the message failed to get across. Such TV programmes did not manage to attract significant numbers of viewers and radio programmes failed to initiate a genuine European debate (Kavakas, 2005:134).

In 2009, turnout fell to 52.6% from 63.6% in 2004, the lowest turnout since the re-establishment of Metapolitefsi in 1974. For PASOK, the election offered a testing ground for its policies and strategy in anticipation of a snap parliamentary election (that eventually took place in early October 2009), whereas ND hoped to minimise its losses (Gemenis, 2010). As predicted by the opinion polls, the election was won by PASOK. New Democracy designed an electoral campaign based on the second-order national election model. For the first few weeks of the campaign, ND focused almost exclusively on national issues. The early television adverts for ND simply accused PASOK of overestimating the implications of the recession without making any reference whatsoever to Europe (Gemenis, 2010:356). This trend was to be partially reversed during the final weeks, however. Towards the end of the pre-electoral period, ND's campaign focused on a pro-EU political approach, again with strong national references (Image 5.08). The party related the country's entry to the EU to its past leadership pointing out

5 In 2004 the newly elected government of New Democracy accused the former PASOK administration of having presented intentionally "sugarcoated" evidence on the status of the Greek economy, especially in terms of public deficit.

6 Till now the Annan plan, designed under the auspices of the UN is the only plan that has been officially proposed for re-unification of Cyprus. The plan was proposed through a referendum to Turkish-Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots. The plan was supported by the Turkish Cypriots (65%), but not by the Greek Cypriots (24%). After this result the Annan plan was rejected and never put into practice (see for example Tannam, 2016).

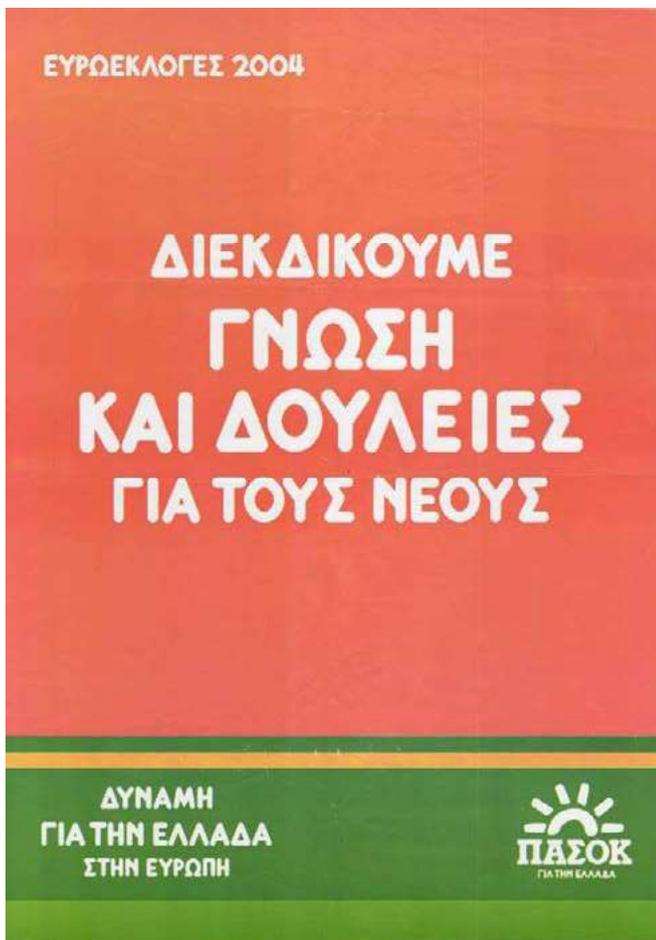


Image 5.07: Poster of PASOK. 'We claim knowledge and employment for young people'. The bottom left text translates to: 'Strength for Greece in Europe'. 2004 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.



Image 5.08: Poster of New Democracy, reading: 'New Democracy, the true European choice. The bottom text translates to: 'With you as an ally. New Democracy'. 2009 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

the pioneering decision to prepare the country for a schema of governance that has attained much political significance in Europe and the world. The ND's campaign was expressed in the slogan: 'we decide for MORE Europe'. Although the campaign had a European focus, this was mostly operationalised through its links to issues of national importance, such as the question of Cyprus, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, economic growth, 'illegal' immigration, and structural funds (Sarikakis, 2010:139).

PASOK also presented a pro-European campaign blended with references to national issues, in particular those prioritised by the EP: unemployment, climate change, Europe's place in the world and international affairs, immigration, security, agriculture, and the Lisbon Treaty (Sarikakis, 2010:139). PASOK began its campaign by launching its 'Europeanisation' manifesto: for each policy area, the impact of European integration was explicitly acknowledged, emphasising, therefore, the importance of the election which was fought under the slogan 'We vote for Europe—We decide about Greece'. (Gemenis, 2010:356). The tone of the campaign was subtly critical of the EU, which was characterised as a polity in crisis (economic, political), with an emphasis on a vision for a future EU characterised by social solidarity, social welfare, peace, employment, and cooperation (Sarikakis, 2010:139).

Of the remaining parties, SYRIZA (Coalition of Radical Left, the new form of SYN) (Gemenis, 2010), Ecologists Greens (OP), KKE and LAOS were all critical of Europe in various degrees and ways. SYRIZA spoke of ecumenical concerns of safety, employment and climate change as those uniting European peoples and the rest of the world: '(for a) social, ecological, and feminist Europe. Europe of solidarity, culture, Democracy and peace. Europe of Socialism'. The campaign dictated the need for social and economic change (e.g., demilitarisation of the EU, recognition of the state of Palestine, solidarity against undocumented immigrants and social unity across Europe) (Sarikakis, 2010). The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) followed its diachronic strategy of opposition to the EU, hoping that it could increase its vote share by attracting the protest vote of those who were most affected by the recession. KKE considers the EU as the bastion of a capitalist assault upon workers' rights. The far-right LAOS managed to increase its vote share by attracting Eurosceptic and more conservative voters of ND (Gemenis, 2010), promoting a highly polarised nationalist agenda, and presenting the EU as undermining national interests, with Greece depicted as a country under siege (Image 5.09). The OP's agenda was focused on the issue of climate change as one that concerns all Europeans, calling for a new European constitution

(Sarikakis, 2010:140). One more notable parameter is the re-appearance of the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn (GD- Chrysi Avgi), although it didn't manage to gain any seats (Sarikakis, 2010:141).

### **The Crisis and Aftermath**

The severe Greek crisis, starting from 2009, began as a financial crisis, which progressed to an economic, then a political, and, eventually, a social and cultural crisis. In late 2009, Greece's debt was labelled as 'unsustainable' and the Greek government resorted to a massive bailout from its Eurozone partners along with the IMF, in exchange for austerity policies and structural reforms (Poulakidakos, 2014; Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos, 2019) that will continue to regulate Greece's financial and social life in the years to come. The economic crisis and its repercussions brought about a significant transformation in the Greek political sphere. Greek voters elected 21 new members, from seven Greek parties but not even one of the previous MEPs was re-elected (Fanourgiakis and Kanoupakis, 2016:650). The rise of the extreme right party of Golden Dawn (it elected three MEP's, with a vote share of almost 10%) was the most alarming sign of these elections (Fanourgiakis and Kanoupakis, 2016: 646), placing the neo-Nazi party, for first time, at the centre of Greek politics. Until the 2014 elections, GD stayed on the margins of parliamentary politics, never having managed to gain more than 1% of the vote (Ellinas, 2014:152). The two main political parties, New Democracy (conservative) and PASOK (social democratic) both suffered significant losses and new political powers emerged. In this new environment, SYRIZA dramatically increased its support: it won 4.6% in the 2009 general elections but gained 26.6% in the 2014 European elections (in January 2015, SYRIZA won the general elections as well).

The ongoing economic crisis profoundly influenced the 2014 campaign in Greece, since the vast majority of political messages concentrated on the crisis and related austerity measures, connecting the domestic situation in Greece mostly in a secondary level to its future in the EU. In both videos and posters, the narratives dealt with the crisis and the country's future, having a mainly domestic character (Novelli et al., 2017). Two dominant (and opposing) narratives were evident in the political advertisement strategies. First, New Democracy and PASOK (the latter represented through the 'Olive, Democratic Coalition') sought to emphasise positives for Greece's economy and society in the EU. This positivity was more than evident in the main slogan of ND- 'Steady steps ahead' (Image 5.10). The positive stance of these two parties was influenced by their pro-European political ideology, as well as the fact that

they were members of the incumbent governmental coalition at the time of the 2014 elections (Novelli et al., 2017).

The alternative approach employed predominantly negative representations of the EU. This approach was taken by parties such as SYRIZA (Coalition of Radical Left), KKE (Communist Party), ADARSYA (Anti-Capitalist Left Coalition for Overthrow), DIMAR (Democratic Left)—covering the centre-left/left political spectrum—and AN. ELL. (Independent Greeks) and Golden Dawn covering the far-right spectrum. The common denominator in the message of these parties was an emphasis on the problems that Greek society faced due to the implementation of severe austerity measures. It was either connected to an underlying pro-European stance (in the cases of SYRIZA, DIMAR, AN. ELL.) or an anti-European stance (KKE, ADARSYA-Image 5.11, GD) (Novelli et al., 2017). It is worth noting that the financial crisis and the subsequent austerity policies were the source of most of these negative attacks. An exception was 'To Potami' (The River), a newly established and self-proclaimed liberal party, which had a clear pro-EU attitude and a rather neutral stance towards its regional political adversaries.

Thus, the pre-electoral material/period of the 2014 EP elections reflects the intersecting divides that had already been formed (since mid-2010) in the Greek public sphere due to the financial crisis: pro-austerity vs. anti-austerity and pro-EU vs. anti-EU, signifying the existence of a rather intense domestic political 'battle'. Within this political communication environment, Greek voters preferred the anti-austerity, pro-European political discourse in the 2014 elections (and in the subsequent national elections in 2015), mainly represented by SYRIZA, followed by AN. ELL. (Fanourgiakis and Kanoupakis, 2016). Due to their associations with the already implemented austerity policies, ND and PASOK lost heavily (e.g. PASOK, having won the 2009 national elections with 44%, collapsed to 8% in the 2014 EP elections). The old bi-partisanship was replaced by a new one in the form of SYRIZA and New Democracy (Gerodimos, 2014).

The prevalent discourse of the 2019 EP elections has both similarities and differences to the 2014 elections. In 2014, the ongoing economic crisis had profoundly influenced the campaign in Greece. The vast majority of political messages focused on the crisis and the related austerity measures, heavily criticising the asphyxiation of the Greek economy and society. In the 2019 EP elections, though the starting point of the discourse remained the same—the Greek economy—the notion that conquered the public dialogue was 'development', instead of 'crisis' or 'austerity'. In this way, the major political parties (SYRIZA

and New Democracy) that occupied the first and second place in the elections sought, in their own way, to underline the gradual distancing of the Greek economy from the crisis period and its entrance in a new era of financial and social elevation, leaving behind the economic upheavals of the last decade (Poulakidakos, 2019:126). In addition, the 2019 elections, taking place just months before the general elections, were seen as a test for the political parties, in view of the national elections that—due to the result of the European elections—took place earlier than anticipated, on July 7, 2019 (Alvares et al., 2022). This domestication of the political discourse was also a result of the large period without elections in Greece. Given that the last elections (before the 2019 EP elections) took place back in September 2015, the Euro elections were really about demonstrating the popular sentiment prior to the national ones. To the extent that the EU was mentioned, the 2019 EP elections demonstrated a prevalent pro-EU rhetoric (with rather minor criticisms on behalf of the major parties), whereas the anti-EU voices were restricted to minor parties (the Greek Communist party being the most important among them) (Poulakidakos, 2019: 126).

Within this political context, it would not be an overstatement to claim that the large majority of the pre-electoral material published by the political parties (with the exception of the Greek Communist Party-KKE), could have been part of an electoral campaign for Greek general elections, as well. Under the rationale of domestication, most political advertisements focus on issues like unemployment, social justice, financial development, social welfare, and immigration, presented according to the ideological orientation of each party (Alvares et al., 2022). The then governing party of SYRIZA sought to promote its achievements by emphasising the policies implemented throughout its period in office. Domestication appears to be the prevalent context, within which SYRIZA builds its predominantly positive narrative on issues like civil rights, access to public health, enhancement of the welfare state, labour rights, education, upgrade of the capacities of the national health system. At the same time, SYRIZA was eager to project a prosperous future for all, through financial development accompanied by social justice, seeking to underline the distancing of the party (and the country) from the unjust implementation of austerity policies, some of which applied by the SYRIZA government itself (Alvares et al., 2022).

New Democracy's (ND) pre-electoral spots focused on the need for 'political change'. Looking towards the future and with the main moto, 'we deserve better', ND presents its vision for the future of the country, simultaneously criticising the aus-

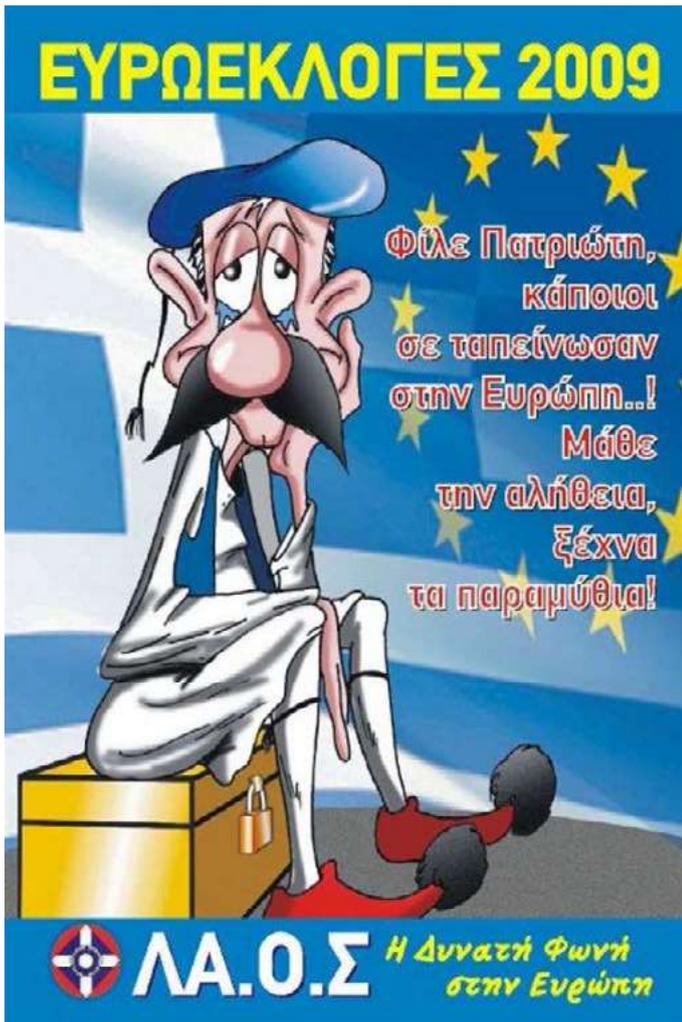


Image 5.09: Poster of the Popular Orthodox Rally (LA.O.S.) a male cartoon figure dressed in the traditional Greek Evzone (Tsolias) uniform. The text featured reads: ‘My patriot friend, some people humiliated you in Europe. Learn the truth, forget the fairy tales!’ The bottom text translates to: ‘LA.O.S. The strong voice in Europe’. 2009 European Parliamentary Elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.



Image 5.10: Poster of New Democracy titled as: ‘Surplus or babbling of benefits? We move forward’. 2014 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center



Image 5:11: Poster of the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left reading: Bring down the government. Exit the euro and the EU. Wealth and power to working people. 2014 European Parliamentary Elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

terity policies implemented by the SYRIZA administration. Apart from its criticism of SYRIZA, ND, on a rather optimistic basis, lays out the main axes of the proposed policies, which—according to the right-wing ideological orientation of the party—are focused on financial growth and security from both internal and external ‘enemies’ (there is reference to the need for better border control and the necessity to ‘bring back a feeling of security’). Again, domestication prevails, although not in such an intense way as in SYRIZA’s campaign, since ND underlines the ‘European’ past of the party (Greece entered the EU as a full member back in 1981 with ND in office) (Alvares et al., 2022).

Domestication, along with an optimistic rationale on the development perspectives of Greece, is evident in electoral campaign of the social democratic Movement for Change (KIN.AL.), an (unsuccessful) attempt to re-brand PASOK. This focus on the future perspectives of Greece is salient through the intense presence of young people in KIN. AL.’s political material since the party’s messages aimed to reach the youngsters of Greece in order to motivate them to vote in the election (Alvares et al., 2022). The Greek Communist Party (KKE) stands as the exception to the prevalence of domestication since it focuses its messages on the European Union in a critical way. Asking for ‘a Europe of the people’, KKE’s anti-EU stance is expressed through the participation of young people from various European countries, including Greece. Once again, similarly to KIN.AL.’s strategy, young people are placed at the forefront of the campaign (Alvares et al., 2022).

The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn and the far-right Greek Solution both used extreme discourse against the ‘enemies’ of the country. These included, among others, immigrants/refugees characterised as ‘illegal intruders’, the politicians that ‘gave away’ (the name of) Macedonia through the Prespa agreement, and the people advocating for the opening of a Mosque in Athens and for a cohabitation agreement for homosexuals in Greece. In a similar vein, using nationalistic discourse and symbols (Greek flags, ancient monuments), Golden Dawn promoted its rationale, opting for ‘a Europe of the nations, a Europe of the homelands’ and, of course, seeking ‘revenge’ for the Prespa agreement. The party’s motto was ‘we vote for Golden Dawn to keep Greece Greek’ (Alvares et al., 2022). As foreseen by opinion polls, New Democracy achieved a landslide victory against SYRIZA by almost 10%. Far right parties managed—once again—to gain 9% of the popular vote. Another notable fact is that the 2019 Euro-elections were the first elections in which 17-year-olds were able to vote (the previous age limit was 18 years of age) (Poulakidakos, 2019).

## Conclusion

The current text does not constitute a detailed analysis of the EP elections conducted in Greece, but rather a brief overview of important instances of these elections. From what we have so far discussed, the EP elections in Greece have not motivated substantial discussion about the EU and its various aspects (Poulakidakos, 2019). Quite the opposite, any discussion that might include the EU as a whole and its relation to Greece, has been superficial and conducted in a fragmented way.

More than 40 years have passed since the first EP election in Greece (1981) and domestication remains the prevalent theme behind almost any discussion in the public sphere concerning the EU and its relation to Greece. That is why the EU-Greece relationship is a complex, ‘fragile’ and contradictory one, directly related to domestic political developments, party competition and nation-centric understanding of the international environment. Therefore, one could vaguely discriminate at least four different periods regarding the ‘image’ of the EU in the Greek public sphere.

The acceptance of the full membership of Greece in the (then) EEC by the socialist government of PASOK and the influx of European funds during the 80’s contributed to the formulation of a positive initial image of the EEC. The first serious ‘crisis’ in the relationship between Greece and the EEC/EU comes in the early nineties, due to the ‘Macedonian issue’—a major issue in the pre-electoral public debates of the EP elections of 1994 and 1999.

The admission of Greece in the Eurozone, accompanied by flattering comments on the potential of the Greek economy, enhanced the positive opinions towards the EU until 2010. Since mid-2010 we encounter—justifiable—increasing criticism (especially on behalf of opposition parties) against the EU, due to the severe austerity measures implemented as an ‘answer’ to the financial issues of the Greek economy. These austerity measures, along with the pre-existing problems of the Greek economy, have caused extreme poverty and unemployment. An alarming effect of the impoverishment of the Greek society, in combination with the diachronic ideological prevalence of nationalism in the (Greek) public sphere, is the rise of far right and neo-Nazi parties (e.g., LAOS, Golden Dawn, Independent Greeks). From mid-2018 onwards, with the proclamation on behalf of Alexis Tsipras of the ‘end of the Memoranda’ and the consequent re-orientation of the political discourse towards a rationale of economic growth, the image of the EU appears to improve. The upcoming elections in early June 2024 will show whether this improvement is here to stay, and thus establish a new period in terms of the image of the EU in the Greek public sphere.

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