

Kantor Center Position Papers

Editor: Mikael Shainkman

August 2014

THE WORRISOME DEFIANCE OF THE GOLDEN DAWN

Michal Navoth*

Executive Summary

In the wake of the deep economic crisis and the tough austerity measures in Greece, a previously insignificant and marginal movement, the Golden Dawn, has grown to become the country's third largest party. It stands strong in the polls and elections despite increasing evidence of its involvement in organized violent crimes and its unabashed racist, antisemitic and neo-Nazi ideology. The voters still flock to the party since it has managed to capitalize on the anger of the public against the austerity measures – not least by carrying out highly publicized charity work “for Greeks only.” The Golden Dawn's ability to achieve and consolidate its present prominent position, despite an unprecedented crackdown undertaken by the Greek authorities since mid-September 2013, is worrisome from the perspective of its potential long-term influence on Greek society.

Introduction

On June 17 2012, eighteen members of the Golden Dawn (“Chryssi Avghi” in Greek), were sworn into the Greek Parliament after their party had received 6.92 percent of the vote in the general elections. In so doing, it has arguably become not only the most extreme right wing political party to have won parliamentary seats in Europe in the last years, but is also among the most extreme to have entered a European national legislature since Nazi-era Germany.

The Golden Dawn's popularity has grown ever since, and has established itself as Greece's third-largest party. No other party has managed to capitalize on the growing levels of despair of the population at the debt stricken country as effectively

as the Golden Dawn has done.¹ Following a crackdown of mid September 2013 against the party leadership, the Golden Dawn lost some of its popularity, but by the end of November that year it had recovered and is today as popular as ever, consistently polling as Greece's third largest party.²

This paper analyzes why only the arrest in September 2013 of a party supporter who confessed to the fatal stabbing of an anti-fascist musician spurred the in-depth investigation of the Golden Dawn's leadership, and to what extent, if any, the high profile investigation has had an effect on the Golden Dawn and its popular support.

Normalizing Racism and Rehabilitating Nazism

Even if the party is not a member of the governing coalition, it has an impact on society, normalizing racist and antisemitic speech, pushing its views into mainstream policies. Lawmakers from the Golden Dawn have frequently used undisguised antisemitic rhetoric in the Greek Parliament. For instance, on February 7 2013, the Golden Dawn MP Ioannis Lagos submitted an interpellation questioning the country's marking of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27 and the teaching of Holocaust in Greek schools.³ On June 6 2013, the Golden Dawn MP and spokesman Ilias Kasidiaris went further and even intimated that he is a Holocaust denier.⁴ Kasidiaris was not the only one. The Golden Dawn leader Nikos Michaloliakos publicly and repeatedly denied the Holocaust in the spring of 2012, a few weeks before the elections.⁵

Senior party members also repeatedly express admiration for Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. In mid-May 2013, the Golden Dawn lawmaker Christos Pappas re-

¹ Helena Smith, "Greeks protest against Golden Dawn attack on Communists", *The Guardian*, September 13 2013, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/13/greeks-protest-golden-dawn-attack-communists.

² "Greek neo-Nazis see rise in voter support: poll", *Hurriet Daily News*, November 24 2013, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/greek-neo-nazis-see-rise-in-voter-support-poll.aspx?pageID=238&nID=58434&NewsCatID=351. See also below note 36 and accompanying text.

³ David Saltiel, *Report on Antisemitism in Greece 2010-2013*, Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, March 2013, Annex 1, p. 4.

⁴ "Greek lawmaker suggests in Parliament he is a Holocaust denier", The World Jewish Congress, June 7 2013, worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/13579/greek_lawmaker_suggests_in_parliament_he_is_a_holocaust_denier.

⁵ Michal Navoth, "The Greek Elections of 2012: The Worrisome Rise of the Golden Dawn", *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, No. 1 2013, p. 87-94, israelcfr.com/documents/7-1/7-1-7g-MichalNavoth.pdf.

affirmed his admiration for Hitler and National Socialism during a session of the Greek Parliament. Later the same week, the Parliament ejected a Golden Dawn lawmaker and shouts of 'Heil Hitler' were heard in the chamber.⁶

On July 2013, the Golden Dawn played a Greek version of the Horst Wessel Lied, the anthem of the German Nazi Party. It was done during a charity food handout attended by more than 2,000, where Golden Dawn functionaries checked recipients' identity cards to insure that non-Greeks were excluded, in accordance to Golden Dawn racist agenda and propaganda.⁷ Despite the fact that German occupation of Greece 1941-44 is still a painful memory for many Greeks, the same ritual of singing the Nazi anthem repeated itself at the beginning of June 2014 at a rally in front of the Greek Parliament. This caused then-Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection Nikos Denidas to condemn the Golden Dawn as a "pathetic copy of Nazi totalitarianism".⁸

Swastikas and other fascist symbols have become increasingly popular along as Golden Dawn's political strength has grown. On August 4, 2013, photos of party spokesman Kasidiaris' swastika tattoo were published in the Sunday issue of Greece's largest selling newspaper, *Poto Thema*.⁹ Another Golden Dawn MP, Panayiotis

⁶ "Greek neo-Nazi party lawmaker urges killing of 'bankers'", The World Jewish Congress, May 22 2013, www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/13504/greek_neo_nazi_party_lawmaker_urges_killing_of_bankers; and "Greek parliament ejects neo-Nazi MP as 'H[e]il Hitler' shouts heard", *Hindustan Times*, May 17 2013, www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/greek-parliament-ejects-neo-nazi-mp-as-hail-hitler-shouts-heard/article1-1061719.aspx.

⁷ Umberto Bacchi, "Greece's Golden Dawn Plays Hitler's Nazi Anthem at Athens Food Handout", *International Business Times*, July 25 2013, www.ibtimes.co.uk/golden-dawn-nazi-anthem-food-handout-athens-494551. The Golden Dawn used its Nazi rhetoric to enhance its anti-immigrant platform. In July 2013 on the basis of Law No. 927/1979 (the anti-racism law) a public prosecutor pressed charges against Alexandros Plomaritis, a former Golden Dawn parliamentary candidate, for introducing the use of Nazi-era tactics against immigrants in Greece. In a program aired in March 2013 on Britain's Channel 4 News and filmed in Athens, Plomaritis threatened to turn immigrants "into soap," put them in "ovens," and "make lamps from their skin." The trial is set for September 16 2014. See *Greece 2013 Human Rights Report: Executive Summary*, U.S. Department of State, 2014, p. 11, www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2013/eur/index.htm. See also "Greek neo-Nazis threaten to make 'soap' of immigrants", The World Jewish Congress, March 7 2013, www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/13239/greek_neo_nazis_threaten_to_make_soap_of_immigrants.

⁸ Umberto Bacchi, "Greece's Golden Dawn Plays Hitler's Nazi Anthem at Athens Food Handout", *International Business Times*, July 25 2013, www.ibtimes.co.uk/golden-dawn-nazi-anthem-food-handout-athens-494551. Nikos Dendias was Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection from June 2012 to June 2014, when he was appointed Minister of Development and Competitiveness, wire2014.eu/nikos-dendias/.

⁹ *Memo on Golden Dawn*, The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, December 2013, p. 8.

Iliopoulos, said he “didn't know anything about Hitler” and that he chose to have the words “Sieg Heil” tattooed on his right arm because he liked the fonts.¹⁰

The Authorities' Long Awaited Reaction

In its latest annual report on human rights practices, released on February 27 2014, the US State Department slammed Greece's response in relation to the activities of the Golden Dawn: “Although the far-right Golden Dawn ... party had a swastika-like emblem, employed Nazi salutes, and its leaders made anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and xenophobic statements, authorities charged no [Golden Dawn] party MPs with hate speech.”¹¹

But the Greek authorities could no longer ignore the Golden Dawn when it became clear that members of the party engaged in criminal activity. On September 17 2013, the murder near Athens of an anti-fascist musician, Pavlos Fyssas, by a man who admitted to being an active supporter of the Golden Dawn served as a wakeup call for the Greek authorities. Unlike in the past, when members of the party were behind numerous attacks against immigrants and their crimes remained unpunished, the murder in September 2013 triggered massive reactions from the Government and all political parties, as well as a probe into the alleged criminal activities of the Golden Dawn.¹² Prime Minister Samaras was determined to eradicate what he characterized as the evil of neo-Nazism, arguing there was no place for it in any state.¹³ Although the party denies any involvement in the incident, Minister Dendias claimed that the investigation of the murder of Fyssas established for the first time that a clear chain of command could be drawn to top levels of the party.¹⁴

¹⁰ “Neo-Nazi tattoos fall out of fashion in Greece after Golden Dawn crackdown”, Aris Chatzistefanou, *The Guardian*, October 21 2013, theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/21/neo-nazi-tattoos-greece-golden-dawn. The headline should not, however, mislead us. In the article, Michalis Spourdalakis, professor of political science at the University of Athens, points out that it would be much harder to confront neo-Nazism in Greece than simply to erase a few tattoos.

¹¹ *Greece 2013 Human Rights Report: Executive Summary*, U.S. Department of State, 2014, p. 11, www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2013/eur/index.htm.

¹² “Greek neo-Nazis' popularity defies containment, experts warn”, *Global Post*, September 21 2013, globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130920/greek-neo-nazis-popularity-defies-containment-experts-warn.

¹³ Helena Smith, “Golden Dawn leader jailed ahead of Greek criminal trial”, *The Guardian*, October 3 2014, theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/03/golden-dawn-leader-jailed-nikos-michaloliakos.

¹⁴ The Golden Dawn denies any connection with the alleged murderer, although Jorgos Rupakias himself has both confessed to the murder and confirmed he belonged to the party. Moreover, numerous photographs show Rupakias participating in party activities. See “Greek Police arrest eight right-wing

On September 28-29 2013, the Golden Dawn leader Michaloliakos, five leading lawmakers of his party and twenty-six party activists were arrested by the counter-terrorist police unit, following orders by the Supreme Court deputy prosecutor. The arrests and the criminal investigation resulted in a detailed report documenting that the Golden Dawn is a criminal organization operating in line with the “Fuehrer principle”. According to the police, in the homes of MPs arrested, they uncovered swastika flags and photos of Adolf Hitler.¹⁵ A former party member, whose identity is being kept secret by the police, testified that “the Golden Dawn recruits were put through ideological training and brainwashing by being forced to buy copies of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, *Josef Goebbels' diary* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, to learn who the enemy is: Jews, Zionists.”¹⁶ The two magistrates appointed to investigate the case also characterized the party as “a vertically structured organization that operates along military lines and which is inspired by the ideals of National Socialism with clear references to [Adolf] Hitler and Nazism.”¹⁷

In a move not seen since the collapse of military rule in Greece in 1974, party leader Michaloliakos, who was taken into custody in handcuffs, was ordered by a judge to be held in prison until his trial. Thus, he became the first elected political leader to be incarcerated in almost forty years. He was charged with several felonies,

extremists in connection with murder of singer”, *Romea*, September 21 2013, romea.cz/en/news/greek-police-arrest-eight-right-wing-extremists-in-connection-with-murder-of-singer. See also Mark Lowen, “Greece's Golden Dawn: 'Don't say a word or I'll burn you alive’”, *BBC News*, October 10 2013, bbc.com/news/world-europe-24363776.

¹⁵ Helena Smith, “Golden Dawn leader jailed ahead of Greek criminal trial”, *The Guardian*, October 3 2014, theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/03/golden-dawn-leader-jailed-nikos-michaloliakos and Mark Lowen, “Greece's Golden Dawn: 'Don't say a word or I'll burn you alive’”, *BBC News*, October 10 2013, bbc.com/news/world-europe-24363776.

¹⁶ “Former Golden Dawn member: 'We'll enter parliament with tanks’”, *Enetenglish*, October 8 2013, enetenglish.gr/?i=news.en.article&id=1523.

¹⁷ “Greek prosecutors seek to lift immunity from remaining Golden Dawn lawmakers”, *JTA*, 21 February, 2014, jta.org/2014/02/21/default/greek-prosecutors-seek-to-lift-immunity-from-remaining-golden-dawn-lawmakers. In the second half of October 2013 the Court of Appeal appointed Ioanna Klapa as the chief investigative magistrate in order to examine the Golden Dawn case. Another magistrate, Maria Dimitrakopoulou, was also appointed to assist in that interrogation. Maria Papatanaslou, “Chief Magistrate Appointed for Golden Dawn Case”, *Greek Reporter*, October 18 2013, greece.greekreporter.com/2013/10/18/chief-magistrate-appointed-in-golden-dawn-case/. The two magistrates are guarded by armed police around the clock because of death threats they have received, as has the prosecutor who ordered the inquiry. See Helena Smith, “Golden Dawn leader hits out at Greek parliament's 'plot' to prosecute him”, *The Guardian*, June 4 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/04/golden-dawn-leader-hits-out-greek-government-plot-prosecute. The two were described as going “about the business of dissecting Golden Dawn with the precision of a surgeon.” After a thorough six month investigation, they compiled a 15,000-page dossier outlining why they believe Golden Dawn is a criminal organization. According to Greek law, judicial authorities have a deadline of 18 months to put the MPs on trial. Helena Smith, “Golden Dawn: courage of two women stems the rise of Greece's neo-Nazis”, *The Guardian*, March 23 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/23/golden-dawn-women-greece-neo-nazis.

including the forming of a criminal organization, i.e. using his party to operate a criminal gang that sowed terror in Greece. Michaloliakos, as well as the other arrested lawmakers, denounced the crackdown, arguing that they were victims of political persecution.¹⁸ However, while three lawmakers, spokesman Kasidiaris among them, were released on bail, Michaloliakos and MPs Yannis Lagos and Giorgos Patelis were ordered to be kept in detention. The first two were directly connected to the murder, whereas Patelis was the head of the Golden Dawn's local office in the area west of Athens, where Fyssas was stabbed. As of the time of writing, mid-June 2014, several MPs, including party leader Michaloliakos, are still detained, whereas others have been released on bail. In addition, all of the Golden Dawn's MPs have been charged with belonging to a criminal organization. Some of them face additional charges.

Even though the crackdown has been welcomed by many, there are still those who have voiced concerns regarding the legality of the procedures that led to the jailing of Michaloliakos and other MPs. According to constitutional law professor Kostas Chrysogonos: "[a]uthorities are acting within the law, but I also think it would have been constitutionally more correct if they had asked parliament to lift their [MPs'] political immunity first".¹⁹ George Katrougalos, professor of public law and constitutional law, concurred and said that "it would be much better for political and legal reasons if the normal procedure for lifting their parliamentary immunity had been followed." However, he also further elaborated on why he didn't think there had been any violation of the constitution:

"The Greek constitution provides (i.e. Article 62) that the members of the Parliament cannot be prosecuted, arrested, imprisoned or otherwise confined without prior permission granted by the Parliament. However, there is an exception, when members of the Parliament are caught in the act of committing a felony. The crime of establishing a criminal organization (i.e. Article 187 of the Penal Code), under which the Golden

¹⁸ Helena Smith, "Golden Dawn leader jailed ahead of Greek criminal trial", *The Guardian*, October 3 2014, theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/03/golden-dawn-leader-jailed-nikos-michaloliakos and Mark Lowen, "Greece's Golden Dawn: 'Don't say a word or I'll burn you alive'", *BBC News*, October 10 2013, bbc.com/news/world-europe-24363776.

¹⁹ Helena Smith, "Golden Dawn leader charged with heading a criminal gang", *The Guardian*, September 28 2013, theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/28/greece-golden-dawn-leader-charged-criminal-gang.

Dawn's MPs have been arrested, is considered a perpetual flagrant felony. So, technically, their arrest was not contrary to the Constitution".²⁰

In that context it should also be noted that Minister Dendias suggested enacting existing criminal legislation and dealing with Golden Dawn as a criminal gang.²¹

Only Parliament can lift the immunity of Greek legislators and thus pave the way for their prosecution on criminal charges. From the end of October 2013 till the beginning of June 2014, Parliament voted several times to strip different Golden Dawn MPs of their immunity. On June 4 2014, an overwhelming 223 of the 224 MPs present voted in favor of lifting the immunity of party leader Michaloliakos, the party's second-in-command, MP Pappas, and a leading Golden Dawn MP, Lagos. Stripping their immunity will allow another round of criminal charges to be pressed against the three. These charges include illegal arms possession and the supply of weapons. The vote was the first public appearance by Michaloliakos since he was jailed, and it was the first time a democratically elected leader was escorted into Parliament in handcuffs and under heavy guard.²²

Another parliamentary countermeasure taken to challenge the Golden Dawn was a new law that was voted for by an overwhelming majority on October 22 2013. The law allows an indefinite freezing of funds belonging to parties whose leadership is accused of involvement in a criminal group or terrorism.²³ Then, on December 18, Parliament in a roll call voted to suspend state funding to the Golden Dawn. Again, there was an overwhelming majority: 241 out of 272 MPs voted in favor, while

²⁰ Dimitris Rapidis, "Interview with Mr. George Katrougalos, Professor of Public Law & Constitutional Law Expert", *Dimi's Lab on Glocal Politics*, rapidis.blogactiv.eu/2013/12/02/interview-with-mr-george-katrougalos-professor-of-public-law-constitutional-law-expert/ and Helena Smith, "Golden Dawn arrests take Greece into uncharted waters", *The Guardian*, September 28 2013, theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/28/golden-dawn-arrests-greece-uncharted-waters.

²¹ *Memo on Golden Dawn*, The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, December 2013, p. 10.

²² "Michaloliakos, Lagos and Pappas taken to Parliament", *To Vima English*, June 4 2014, tovima.gr/en/article/?aid=602885, Renee Maltezou, "Jailed Greek far-right leader appears in parliament, hurls abuse", Reuters, June 4 2014 reuters.com/article/2014/06/04/us-greece-goldendawn-idUSKBN0EF1E420140604 and Helena Smith, "Golden Dawn leader hits out at Greek parliament's 'plot' to prosecute him", *The Guardian*, June 4 2014, theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/04/golden-dawn-leader-hits-out-greek-government-plot-prosecute.

²³ "Greece cuts state funding for extremist parties", The World Jewish Congress, October 23 2013, worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/14055/greece_cuts_state_funding_for_extremist_partyg.

twenty-six voted against and five MPs abstained. The vote was important; the Golden Dawn was due to receive an annual sum of 873,000 Euros in state funding.²⁴

Meanwhile, the Golden Dawn is unrepentant. Instead of admitting guilt, the party points the finger of blame at the Jews. The theme of Jewish responsibility for the legal actions taken by the Greek authorities against the Golden Dawn is a permanent feature of the party propaganda and a further indication of how deeply antisemitism runs in the party.²⁵ Similarly, in December 2013, on the occasion of the European Jewish Congress visit to Athens, which concluded with the presentation of a symbolic award to Prime Minister Samaras for his firm stance in combating neo-Nazism, the Golden Dawn posted an article on the party's website entitled "In the aftermath of the illegal political prosecution, the reward came: The European Jewish Congress awarded Samaras."²⁶

Is it Possible to Ban the Golden Dawn?

Some political figures in Greece as well as abroad, have called for a ban on the Golden Dawn. This step would not, however, be legal under the current Greek constitution. In the response of the Greek government in spring 2013²⁷ to a report released in April 16th 2013 by Nils Muiznieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,²⁸ the government, referring to the 1975 Greek Constitution, pointed out that "the intention of the constitutional legislator, going back in time to the fall of the dictatorship and the collapse of the military junta in Greece, was to avoid any legislative or judicial intervention to the free functioning of political parties."²⁹ Legal experts in Greece agree that in a democracy, parties and ideologies, no matter how

²⁴ "MPs vote to suspend state funding to Golden Dawn", *Ekathimerini.com*, December 18 2013, www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsitel_1_18/12/2013_532916.

²⁵ *Neo-Nazism in Modern Europe Update – April 2014: A Report to the President*, The World Jewish Congress, March 30 2014, p. 6, worldjewishcongress.org/uploads/materials/0480a2630511c1d6fa26b08f4e509528e7adc2ad.pdf

²⁶ *Memo on Golden Dawn*, The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, December 2013, p. 13-14.

²⁷ *Comments of the Government of Greece on the Report of the Commissioner of Human Rights*, 2013, www.scribd.com/fullscreen/136218395?access_key=key-257u7v0c2dqq3gu3tal.

²⁸ Nils Muiznieks, Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report Following His Visit to Greece, from 28 January to 1 February 2013*, Council of Europe, April 16 2013, [wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CommDH\(2013\)6&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackcolorInternet=B9BDEE&BackcolorIntranet=FFCD4F&BackcolorLogged=FFC679](http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CommDH(2013)6&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackcolorInternet=B9BDEE&BackcolorIntranet=FFCD4F&BackcolorLogged=FFC679).

²⁹ *Comments of the Government of Greece on the Report of the Commissioner of Human Rights*, 2013, p. 4, www.scribd.com/fullscreen/136218395?access_key=key-257u7v0c2dqq3gu3tal. The issue discussed in this paragraph is based on the author's presentation "On Antisemitism in Greece in 2012-2013", Working Group on Antisemitism in the EU and Western Europe, The 4th International Conference on the Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, Jerusalem May 28-30 2013.

extreme, cannot be banned. Outlawing the Golden Dawn “would be technically very difficult and politically dangerous,” experts noted and Associate Professor of law at Athens’ Panteion University, Dimitris Christopoulos, added that “ [t]he constitution makes no provision for the dissolution of a parliamentary group, even if there is proof that it is a criminal organization.”³⁰

Even though there is no legal provision for a ban, the Central Board of Jewish Communities (KIS) is of the opinion that it is appropriate to keep asking for the banning of the Golden Dawn. This, they hope, will spur the authorities to react and to reinforce legislation, or at least to amend the Greek anti-racist legislation.³¹

Such a reinforcement of the general anti-racism legislation in Greece is under way, even though the process is fraught with difficulties. By the end of May 2013 a rift in the coalition on the voting on the new draft anti-racism law was widened as most parties tabled their own versions of a draft law. All drafts endorse the main European guidelines, including punishment of Holocaust denial. The Golden Dawn submitted a bill of its own “to combat racism against Greeks” that would provide severe punishment for immigrants who attack Greeks. In connection to the presentation of the bill, the party stated that “[t]he only racism that exists at this moment in the country is racism against Greeks.”³²

From June 2013, following Greece’s political convulsions, to October 2013, the new Justice Minister Athanasiou from the conservative party New Democracy froze the issue and the procedure required for Parliament to vote on it was suspended. On November 20 2013, after the arrest of the Golden Dawn leadership, a new draft was indeed submitted to Parliament. It merges the previous legislative proposals of the coalition government parties, conservative New Democracy and socialist PASOK, and amends Law No. 927/1979. The draft law provides for increased penalties for those who publicly encourage or cause hate or violence against individuals or a group of individuals on the basis of, inter alia, their race, skin color, religion, ethnic or national origins. Likewise, it would also punish public denial or appraisal of crimes of genocides, war crimes, crimes against humanity, the Holocaust and Nazi crimes when

³⁰ “Greek neo-Nazis’ popularity defies containment, experts warn”, Global Post, September 9 2013, globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130920/greek-neo-nazis-popularity-defies-containment-experts-warn.

³¹ David Saltiel, *Report on Antisemitism in Greece 2010-2013*, Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, March 2013, Annex 1, p. 5.

³² John Kolesidis, “Far-right Greeks push for law jailing illegal immigrants”, Reuters, June 4 2013, uk.reuters.com/article/2013/06/04/uk-greece-goldendawn-idUKBRE95310K20130604

this behavior is against a group of people defined on the basis of their race, skin color, religion, ethnic or national origins and disability.³³ On November 28, 2013 the competent parliamentary committee began processing the bill, but Parliament has of yet to vote on it.³⁴

Once again, the Golden Dawn responded to the anti-racism bill by attacking the Jews. On November 21 2013, on its website, and on November 27 2013, in an article in its paper, the Golden Dawn called the draft “Anti-Greek and not anti-racism” as well as an “abomination.” The Golden Dawn accused the government of having presented a draft “ordered by the Jews” which punishes the denial of the “so-called Holocaust of the Jews” and makes no mention of the genocide of the Armenians and the genocide of the Greeks by the Turks in Asia Minor.³⁵

The Golden Dawn Holding Its Ground

Despite the crackdown and the unprecedented parliamentary actions taken against the party, the voters do not seem to have abandoned the Golden Dawn. The party remains steadily the third largest party in the polls. A poll published on October 4, 2013 found the party had lost almost half of its support since its leader and lawmakers were arrested. Even though the poll, conducted in two rounds, on September 25 2013 and from September 30 to October 3 2013, found that support for GD stood at 8.5%, down from 14.5% in July 2013, another poll from the end of November 2013, indicated that the party had rebounded quickly and would receive ten percent of the vote.³⁶ This trend was confirmed in a series of polls conducted in the first months of 2014, giving the party between 8.9 and 10.5 percent.³⁷

³³ Racism, Discrimination, Intolerance and Extremism: Learning from Experiences in Greece and Hungary, The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2013, p. 15, fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-thematic-situation-report-3_en_1.pdf

³⁴ *Memo on Golden Dawn*, The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, December 2013, p. 14-15.

³⁵ *Memo on Golden Dawn*, The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, December 2013, p.15.

³⁶ “Most Greeks say far-right Golden Dawn a criminal group: poll”, Reuters, October 4 2013, www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/04/us-greece-goldendawn-poll-idUSBRE99309K20131004 and “Greek neo-Nazis see rise in voter support: poll”, *Hurriet Daily News*, November 24 2013, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/greek-neo-nazis-see-rise-in-voter-support-poll.aspx?pageID=238&nID=58434&NewsCatID=351.

³⁷ Lefteris Papadimas and George Georgiopolous, “Greek far-right lawmaker to run for Athens mayor”, Reuters, January 25 2014, uk.reuters.com/article/2014/01/25/uk-greece-politics-idUKBREA00PD20140125 and Kerin Hope, “Greek fascists protest in Athens”, *The Financial Times*, February 2 2014, ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/d8c94728-8bb4-11e3-a47c-00144feab7de.html#axzz35MP5eUpa. It should be noted that in mid-March 2014 the number of Golden Dawn’s MPs was reduced. MP Chrysovalantis Alexopoulos resigned after saying he was

Strengthened by the continuously strong support in the polls, and in a show of defiance, party spokesman Kasidiaris announced at the end of January 2014 that he would run for the office of Athens mayor in the May municipal elections. The first round of elections took place on May 18 2014, and the second round of voting on May 25, coinciding with the elections to the European Parliament. The vote was considered a litmus test of the mood at large. Although Kasidiaris did not make it into the May 25 run-off, he did receive 16.1 percent of the vote, more than double the party's showing in the general elections in June 2012. His support was even greater in some Athens suburbs, where the Golden Dawn received over twenty percent of the votes – an indication that the party is far from a spent force.³⁸

The Golden Dawn received even further proof of its strong standing among Greek voters in the elections to the European Parliament. On May 11 2014, the Greek Supreme Court ruled to allow candidates from the Golden Dawn to participate in the elections to the European Parliament, despite the ongoing criminal investigation against several of the party's leading members. There was no legal way of stopping the Golden Dawn from running, since, according to Greek law, candidates are only prevented from participating in elections if they are convicted of a crime, not if they are under investigation.³⁹

On May 25 2014, the Golden Dawn was voted into the European Parliament for the first time, winning three of the twenty-one Greek seats by receiving fourteen

unaware of the party's "criminal activities," and MP Stathis Boukaras was ousted after suggesting that he too was considering quitting. This left the Golden Dawn with sixteen legislators in the 300-seat Parliament. After his resignation, Alexopoulos was called a "liar and defamer" by remaining Golden Dawn MPs. See Andi Dabilis, "Arrests, loss of MPs unravel Greece's Golden Dawn", *Setimes.com*, March 31 2014,

setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2014/03/31/feature-02 and Andi Dabilis, "Golden Dawn Ditches MP", *Greek Reporter*, March 16 2014, greece.greekreporter.com/2014/03/18/golden-dawn-boots-an-mp/.

³⁸ Helena Smith, "Golden Dawn ditches boots for suit in European election makeover", *The Guardian*, May 23 2014, theguardian.com/world/2014/may/23/golden-dawn-greece-european-election.

³⁹ Nikoleta Kalmouki, "Greek Supreme Court Allows Golden Dawn to Participate in EU Elections", *Greek Reporter*, May 12 2014, greece.greekreporter.com/2014/05/12/greek-supreme-court-allows-golden-dawn-to-participate-in-eu-elections/ and "Greek Supreme Court allows Golden Dawn to run in European elections", *Ekathimerini.com*, May 12 2014, www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsite1_1_12/05/2014_539619. It should be noted that the Golden Dawn European election list includes none of its Greek Parliament deputies. In the local elections, the situation was different. Kasidiaris, who stood for mayor of Athens, was released pending trial, and Golden Dawn MP Panayiotis Iliopoulos, who intended to run for the governor's office in Thessaly, accepted his candidacy while being detained. "Jailed far-right Golden Dawn MP to run for governor", *Ekathimerini.com*,

www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsite1_1_09/03/2014_538015. No Golden Dawn candidate made it through to the second round that took place on May 25 2014. "Golden Dawn's showing in elections worries Greek government", JTA, May 19 2014, www.jta.org/2014/05/19/news-opinion/world/strong-showing-for-golden-dawn-in-greek-local-elections.

percent of the Greek votes.⁴⁰ The result confirmed the Golden Dawn's position as Greece's third largest party.⁴¹ This outcome, albeit not surprising, was nonetheless unwelcome news for many who hoped the crackdown of 2013 would break the party.⁴²

Thus, Golden Dawn, once a fringe group, stands as strong as ever. Despite the government crackdown and criminal investigations of the party leadership, the Golden Dawn, like several other extreme rightwing parties around Europe, seems to be here to stay.⁴³

The Dark Prospect of a Golden Dawn

The Golden Dawn stands firm and even continues to grow stronger. As it grows, the party also becomes increasingly brazen in its embrace of neo-Nazi rhetoric and

⁴⁰ One seat more than the Sweden far-right party, The Sweden Democrats, and two seats more than Germany's neo-Nazi National Democratic Party, NPD. Both of these parties also entered the European Parliament for the first time. See Asaf Ronel, "Far-right parties sweeping EU vote should serve as warning sign", *Haaretz*, May 27 2014, haaretz.com/news/world/.premium-1.595445. The data are also based on diagrams posted in *Haaretz*, May 27 2014 [Hebrew].

⁴¹ The far left Greek party SYRIZA won six out of 21 seats, Samaras' New Democracy five and the Golden Dawn three. Theodora Matsaidoni, "Final List: The 21 MEPs to Represent Greece in the European Parliament", *Greek Reporter*, May 31 2014, greece.greekreporter.com/2014/05/31/greece-meeps-european-parliament-election-results/.

⁴² The extreme rightists are still a small presence in the 751-seat EU Parliament, with only 38 seats as compared, for example, to 213 seats of the Center-right and 190 seats of the Socialists. To set up a political group 25 MPs from seven member states are needed. Marine Le Pen, the leader of National Front in France, a party that has 24 members in the EU Parliament, said that she wanted nothing to do with radical extremists such as the Golden Dawn or Jobbik in Hungary. See Helena Smith, "SS songs and antisemitism: the week Golden Dawn turned openly Nazi", *The Guardian*, June 7 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/07/greece-golden-dawn-fascism-threat-to-democracy. Nevertheless, the far right parties' sweeping electoral gains should serve as a warning sign. Most worrying of all is the presence in parliament of the Golden Dawn, a far-right party with a neo-Nazi ideology. It's arguably Europe's strongest neo-Nazi party, known as a violent political force. In that context it should be mentioned that the World Jewish Congress in its latest report referred to three parties as case studies: NPD in Germany, Jobbik in Hungary and the Golden Dawn in Greece. In the comparison between Jobbik and the Golden Dawn the report finds, inter alia, that Jobbik "is less obviously neo-Nazi than Golden Dawn, (though it is not difficult to be less obviously neo-Nazi than Golden Dawn)", *Neo-Nazism in Modern Europe Update – April 2014: A Report to the President*, The World Jewish Congress, March 30 2014, p. 5. The Golden Dawn took less than 0.5 percent in the 2009 European Parliament elections, and merely 0.23 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections held the same year. That means its support is up 30-40 times since then. This is striking evidence that extremist parties can make substantial progress from the smallest of beginnings. See *Memo on Golden Dawn*, The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, December 2013, p. 1, Michal Navoth, "The Greek Elections of 2012: The Worrisome Rise of the Golden Dawn", *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, No. 1 2013, p. 87, israelcfr.com/documents/7-1/7-1-7g-MichalNavoth.pdf and *Neo-Nazism in Modern Europe Update – April 2014: A Report to the President*, The World Jewish Congress, March 30 2014, p. 7, worldjewishcongress.org/uploads/materials/0480a2630511c1d6fa26b08f4e509528e7adc2ad.pdf.

⁴³ Helena Smith, "SS songs and antisemitism: the week Golden Dawn turned openly Nazi", *The Guardian*, June 7 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/07/greece-golden-dawn-fascism-threat-to-democracy and *Memo on Golden Dawn*, The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, December 2013, p. 1.

symbols. This begs the question: does the popularity of the Golden Dawn indicate an alarming upward trend of neo-Nazism and antisemitism in Greece, as Greek voters flock to the banner of the Golden Dawn? The answer would seem to be that these are not the major attractions of the party, and at least for the time being there are no indications that the Greek voters are embracing the virulent antisemitic and neo-Nazi world view of the party they vote for.

Instead, a large part of the Golden Dawn's appeal to the Greek voters emanates from its vehement opposition to the austerity measures. The near collapse of Greece's socio-economic credibility has enabled the Golden Dawn to exploit the void and to present itself as an alternative social support network for Greeks at a time when the national institutions have failed. The Golden Dawn has established an extensive social outreach program that provides services to the elderly in crime-ridden areas and distributes food and clothing to the needy. But that assistance comes at a price: allegiance to the Golden Dawn, even if those aided don't wholeheartedly support the party's ideology.⁴⁴

As the economic crisis continues to unfold, the Golden Dawn is becoming increasingly outspoken in promoting its neo-Nazi and antisemitic worldview. The approximately 500,000 Greeks who gave the party their vote in the European elections, either supported or were willing to overlook the party's anti-immigrant, anti-EU, and antisemitic rhetoric of hate. This, of course, increases the danger of such views making inroads into mainstream Greek political discourse.⁴⁵

Time and again, KIS has reiterated its position and called upon "the democratic political parties to join forces and combat the morphemes of Nazism in our country within the framework of the Constitution and the rule of law." KIS further noted "that Greece and Europe had a 'duty to isolate those who seek the return of Nazism, and those who disseminate racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic ideas, in order to safeguard democracy'."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Michal Navoth, "The Greek Elections of 2012: The Worrisome Rise of the Golden Dawn", *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, No. 1 2013, p. 87, israelcfr.com/documents/7-1/7-1-7g-MichalNavoth.pdf.

⁴⁵ Pierre Hazzan, "Competing for victimhood: Europe's dangerous elections", *Haaretz*, May 19 2014, haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.591493 and Renee Maltezou, "Jailed Greek far-right leader appears in parliament, hurls abuse", Reuters, June 4 2014 reuters.com/article/2014/06/04/us-greece-goldendawn-idUSKBN0EF1E420140604.

⁴⁶ "Greek government accused of influencing judges in neo-Nazi party probe", The World Jewish Congress, April 7 2014,

* Michal Navoth is an Israeli attorney. Among her fields of expertise is public international law. In this capacity she publishes and lectures in various local and international forums on subjects relating to legal aspects of the Arab Israeli Conflict, human rights and antisemitism. Navoth is also a frequent commentator on events in Greece.