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Cover photo: "Golden Dawn members hold flags with the meander symbol at a rally outside of party HQ, Athens, March 2015," by DTRocks licensed under CC BY SA 4.0.

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TransHistFarRight

Transnational History of the Far Right *A Collective Research Project led by Marlene Laruelle*

At a time when global political dynamics seem to be moving in favor of illiberal regimes around the world, this research project seeks to fill in some of the blank pages in the contemporary history of the far right, with a particular focus on the transnational dimensions of far-right movements in the broader Europe/Eurasia region.

www.historyofthefarright.org/

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The trial of the leading Greek fascist party, Golden Dawn (GD), began in April 2015 and concluded on October 2020. No other neo-Nazi party has attracted so much public attention in Greece and Europe. According to [The Guardian](#), it was the “biggest trial of fascists since the prosecution of the Nazis at Nuremberg.” More than 68 accused persons stood on trial for violent criminal activity, including murder, with the vast majority receiving prison sentences. In total, more than 500 years in jail time were imposed on those convicted. The party itself was ruled a criminal organization and, accordingly, banned. Despite Golden Dawn’s conviction as a political organization and the subsequent imprisonment of its leadership, the normalization of far right’s activism in Greece has continued to thrive under different circumstances. This article summarizes the role of Golden Dawn and identifies some of its allied and derivative elements.

A post-Golden Dawn Scene

Following the court decision, Golden Dawn officially disappeared from the political life of the country, but its political legacy has left other neo-Nazi groups and far-right parties to use the vacancy to their benefit. Already in the summer 2019 elections, GD had failed to elect any MPs to the Hellenic Parliament; instead, the far-right party “Greek Solution” under its President Kyriakos Velopoulos [gained](#) many of GD’s supporters, electing ten MPs with 3.70% of the vote and one MEP in the European Parliament with 4.18%.

In addition to those who have gone over to Velopoulos’ “Greek Solution,” a substantial fraction of heavily radicalized voters with a neo-Nazi ideology are now supporting other groupings on the right, and it is important to note that GD always had many internal divisions between its high-ranking members and leadership.

An important example of these divisions is the split between GD founder Nikos Michaloliakos and the much younger Ilias Kasidiaris, former GD spokesman, who founded the “Greeks for the Fatherland” Party in 2020, shortly before the court’s decision. Despite Kasidiaris’ imprisonment, he enjoys considerable comforts and has over 100,000 subscribers on YouTube. Another important factional figure is Giannis Lagos, a former GD MEP and high-ranking member who has been condemned to 13 years in prison—a sentence imposed on each member of the GD leadership. It was Lagos who launched ELASYN (Ethniki Laiki Sinidisi), the “National Popular Conscience” party, alongside Konstantinos Plevris, otherwise known as the patriarch of Greek neo-fascism.

While a significant number of Golden Dawn’s voters and supporters voted for Velopoulos’ Greek Solution, many other smaller organizations, including neo-Nazi groupuscules, intend to capitalize on the party’s fall. These widely divided groups often work as communication vessels announcing alliances and divisions (depending on the circumstances). Not all these groups are openly neo-Nazi, but those that are usually function on the fringes of legality and work in obscurity. Many members of

these groups (who will be discussed further below) were former low-ranking members of GD who participated in its infamous “attack battalions.”

At a more official level, the New Democracy right-wing governing party has included former far-right politicians, such as Interior Minister Makis Voridis and Health Minister Thanos Plevris, son of GD’s Konstantinos Plevris. Another figure, Adonis Georgiadis, is currently Minister of National Development and Investments. All of them were MPs of LAOS (Laikos Orthodoxos Sinagermos) the Popular Orthodox Rally party launched by Konstantinos Karatzaferis in 2000 after he was expelled from New Democracy.

Golden Dawn and its Legacy

Golden Dawn was founded in 1980 by Nikolaos Michaloliakos, currently imprisoned, alongside the leadership of the party, on four charges: belonging to a criminal organization; arson; direction of murders and attempted murders; and anti-constitutional acts.

Originally a closed national-socialist club with an agenda of indoctrination, the party evolved to publish the homonymous monthly magazine Golden Dawn. It openly supported the legacy of the Greek colonels who seized power in a fascist coup in April 1967 with the backing of the CIA. The first four editions of the magazine had a round swastika on the front cover. Later, the Wolfsangel runic symbol was [utilized](#) in order to associate the magazine with the Nazi SS heritage. It is important to note that, during WWII, the specific rune was the insignia for the 4th SS Polizei Division, which participated in heavy atrocities against civilians in Nazi-occupied Europe, such as the infamous massacre of [Distomo](#) in Greece on June 10, 1944, which resulted in 220 deaths including infants and the elderly.

In order to camouflage its openly neo-Nazi ideology, Golden Dawn started using the ancient Greek symbol called Meandros, used widely by Greek neo-Nazis, and, in context, the message was understood by all: the internal curve is half of the Nazi swastika. The structure of the party was top-down following the Führerprinzip of the original Nazi party: the ultimate decision-making power was held by the leader (in this case, Nikos Michaloliakos) and his vice-leaders. The party had small nuclei in every large district or city in Greece. All the crimes committed by GD were ideologically motivated. In its founding directives, the party lists its political enemies: the left as well as immigrants, called “subhumans,” a term borrowed from the Nazi notion of Untermensch. The attacks on political opponents were carried out by the infamous “attack battalions,” essentially paramilitary groups organized and trained by former members of the Greek Special Forces who were often members of GD or [other neo-Nazi groups](#).

Many charges have been made against GD members in the past, such as the order of arrest against Andonis Androutsopoulos (also known as “Periandros”), a Greek-Venezuelan neo-Nazi and one of the vice-leaders of GD between 1996 and 1998. Androutsopoulos heavily injured three students, and was finally imprisoned in 2005 after his elimination from GD (at Michaloliakos’ behest). GD was also [accused](#) of carrying out the attack on “Antipnoia,” a pro-anarchist space in Petralona district in Athens.

In 2012, after extensive work to secure support from various benefactors, GD managed to elect enough MPs in the Hellenic Parliament to become the country's third-largest party. The purpose of GD, as Michaloliakos made clear in various local speeches, was to destroy the Parliament and end the Constitution.

By 2013, GD was an organized political force with funding from the state, as all political parties that elect MPs have the right to public funding according to their percentage of votes. Funding was also gathered through illegal activities such as money laundering and extortion. Under these circumstances, GD managed to extend its [paramilitary structure](#), thus menacing antifascists, immigrants, and left-wing trade unionists. Consequently, a 27-year-old Afghan immigrant, Sahzad Luqeman, was stabbed to death in Athens by two GD members, and in September of the same year, the popular antifascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas (known as "Killah P") was stabbed to death after an attack on an attack battalion in Piraeus. At the same time, five trade unionists belonging to the communist-party-affiliated trade union PAME were heavily injured in Piraeus alongside Egyptian fishermen.

The party leadership did not expect that the linkage of all these crimes would lead to the arrest of its leadership and its MPs that same year. Despite members' arrests, GD managed to remain the third party in the elections of 2015. Then, when the trials began, all the evidence against GD was presented, further tarnishing the party's image. Nevertheless, nobody expected the party to reach such a low percentage of voters in the European and parliamentary elections of May and July 2019. As such, GD did not elect any MEPs or MPs since most of their prominent members were on trial. The internal divisions Michaloliakos faced led to the formation of the ELASYN party under Lagos and Greeks for the Fatherland Party under Ilias Kasidiaris. Ultimately, Michaloliakos returned to his neo-Nazi tradition of accusing his former allies of "treason."

AME/C18

Other smaller structures emerged from the GD realm, such as "Non-Aligned [sometimes translated as Autonomous] Maeandrist Nationalists" (AME) and "Combat 18 Hellas" (C18)—two different names for one organization, according to the [findings of the prosecution](#) against the organization's members. Considered a small group on GD's periphery, from 2015 onwards, AME-C18 it became active on the streets of Athens and other cities such as Ioannina in Northern Greece.

The organization is the Greek affiliate of the original Combat 18 formed in the UK in 1992. The original C18 was responsible for many attacks, murders, extortions, and arsons. The Meander is the name of the unbroken, interlocking pattern from ancient Greece named after the Meander River in present-day Turkey; the movement's symbol mimics the Meander's many twists and turns. In the classical design, the pattern often includes an interwoven swastika. The number of the organization, 18, alludes to the alphabetic sequence for Adolf Hitler's initials, with A and H being the first and eighth letters of the alphabet. One of the first supporters of C18 was Golden Dawn's youth organization, Antepithesi, whose journal published an extensive article on C18 written by the neo-Nazi ideologue, Giorgos Mastoras Misiakas, a leading member of GD. Most AME/C18 members are [former GD members](#).

AME/C18 copied GD in every sense, including its paramilitary vertical structure and the use of attack battalions. The big difference between the organizations is that GD acted in its own name while the latter acted anonymously and kept the names of its members secret. Their main political idol is Periandros, mentioned above. This fanatical neo-Nazi organization has [accused](#) Michaloliakos of treason since he betrayed the latter in order to save GD and his position.

The group signed only as AME until March 2015 where alongside the name AME appeared C/18 after defiling Pavlos Fyssas' bust in Keratsini Piraeus where he had been assassinated in 2013. The same group was responsible for the [attack](#) on the social space "Pasamontaña" in Korydallos on February 2015. Since then, AME/C18 has taken responsibility for [various attacks](#) on social spaces and squats, as well as the defilement of the Jewish cemetery in Nikaia, Piraeus (where 60,000 Greeks of Jewish faith perished as a result from Nazi occupation in Greece during WWII), in October 2020.

In 2017, AME targeted the Roma community of Menidi district in the western outskirts of Athens. Following the death of an 11-year-old student by a stray bullet in the region, AME/C18 instantly targeted the Roma inhabitants by organizing attack battalions against them. The group made use of GD's absence from the streets because of the trials by [using the same method](#) in order to exert influence and authority by illegal means. Eventually, the organization collapsed when the police managed to arrest a very large number of its members, thus ending their presence temporarily in March 2018. They reappeared in 2020 when they defiled the Jewish cemetery.

Apella

Another neo-Nazi organization, called Apella, is inspired by the ancient Spartan free citizens' assemblies. Apella's figurehead and leader, Alexandros Tzoulis, is widely known as a high-ranking member of the GD structure of Piraeus. Tzoulis was also a candidate for city councilor for the local elections of 2014; GD's prominent former candidate and former MP Nikos Kouzilos is currently [serving](#) a seven-year term in prison. Tzoulis had participated in the violent clashes against the police outside the Parliament in Athens during the far-right demonstration against the Prespes Agreement in 2018 concerning the official name of the Republic of North Macedonia.¹

Apella emerged in 2016, and despite its ideological proximity to GD, it is close to AME/C18 and Periandros, whom [they met](#) at a speech in the city of Larissa in March 2015. Apella openly admires the Third Reich and Hitler and uses the same mottos as GD. The downfall of the organization began in January 2018 after the [attack](#) on the antifascist free social space "Favela" in Piraeus in August 2017. The police found posters of the Apella organization as well as posters of former GD members. In addition, it was confirmed by the police that Apella and AME/C18 members were the perpetrators of the attack on the same space in April 2017; they left swastikas and Celtic crosses behind. The last attack against Favela took place on February 25, 2018, carried out by GD members led by Sotiris Develekos, Michaloliakos' bodyguard.

¹ The then-government of SYRIZA (2015–2019) had agreed on the name issue of North Macedonia, signing an agreement for the country's name. As such, North Macedonia came closer to NATO. The far right in Greece had organized massive chauvinistic demonstrations against this recognition in Athens and (above all) Thessaloniki in Northern Greece.

Autonomous Nationalists (Aftonomi Ethnikistes)

The Autonomous Nationalists also derive from GD and were active in the 2010s during the peak of the Greek financial crisis. In January 2010, 50 masked members wearing helmets unleashed a furious [attack](#) with handmade lances and truncheons against antifascist protesters, resulting in the serious injury of three antifascist protesters.

Consequently, the Three Member Court of Appeals of Athens convicted the perpetrators to suspended sentences. It is noteworthy that only eight of the 32 accused received sentences. However, the aforementioned groups ceased to act in an organized way.

ProPatria

ProPatria is a fanatical neo-Nazi organization. Formerly a martial arts club, it is now known for its violent attacks against students and peaceful antifascist protesters. Most of its members came from the cadre of GD attack battalions. ProPatria has committed several crimes lately, and its actions have repercussions in other European countries since they have been maintaining contacts with various far-right groups in Poland, Russia, Germany, Spain, France Romania and Italy. Their actions as well as the organization's paramilitary structure are identical to those of GD. Their presence in football stadiums is also notable. In 2018, they [raised](#) the Schwarze Sonne (black sun) flag, one of the most ominous symbols of the Nazi era in Europe, during a football match in OAKA stadium in Athens

The group, originally founded in 2014, maintains a strict routine of physical and arms training in the mountains of Greece and participates in fighting arenas, practicing various martial arts, such as kickboxing, jiu-jitsu, etc. It maintains amicable relations with the Russian [White Rex](#) neo-Nazi fighting club and Pride France, among other organizations; ProPatria also [maintains relations](#) with German neo-Nazi clothing brand Greifvogel Wear. ProPatria has also [ties](#) with the neo-Nazi Polish group Szturm as well as the Spanish Deporte Patriota (National Sport).

In June 2021, 15 members of ProPatria attacked and injured a female university student in the district of Neo Iraklio in Athens' northern suburbs. It is noteworthy that members of ProPatria had participated in the chauvinistic rallies in Athens and Thessaloniki against the Prespes Agreement in 2018. Their stance concerning the anti-COVID 19 vaccination policy of the Greek government found them protesting in Athens' Syntagma Square alongside other major far-right organizations including members of the imprisoned Kasidiaris' party Greeks for the Fatherland. On July 14, 2021, around 3,500 protesters (according to police) gathered in Athens to protest against the vaccine. Among the demonstrators were many far-right and neo-Nazi groups including ProPatria and members of the Greek Orthodox Church, priests and monks included. In July 2021, more than 50,000 people protested [against the vaccination](#); a substantial part belongs to the far right. ProPatria has also participated into the anti-abortion movement.

On October 2, 2021, ProPatria attacked a peaceful demonstration of the initiative "United against Racism" (KEERFA) in Neo Iraklio, north of central Athens. During this event, an attack battalion of 15 members of ProPatria armed with globs, [attacked and injured](#) five protesters, but the police did not intervene to stop them. On October 7, after demonstrations, and due to the outrage on social media, the police proceeded to arrest Marios Papadionysiou, a ProPatria figure and former member of GD

who had participated in the group's attack battalions. He had also been detained in Athens in 2019 after violent actions against the police as well as on July 28, 2021, during an [anti-vaxxers protest](#) in Athens. Papadionysiou used the modus operandi of GD during the attack on KEERFA members in Neo Iraklio. He was accused of assault, illegal armament, and theft. Eventually, he received a prison sentence of thirty months (with parole available).

In addition, ProPatria maintains ties with the neo-Nazi organization Krypteia (also known as the Nationalist Organization of Pella), which acts in Northern Greece. It is not clear whether this group is independent or whether it constitutes a branch of ProPatria. On October 3, in Stavroupoli district in Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city, Krypteia organized an attack on antifascist students and communist militants from a technical school in the region. In this attack, the neo-Nazis, with the cover of the police, attacked the protesters with knives, clubs, and globs. After the attacks, GD's youth group (called Youth Front) supported ProPatria's actions, issuing a [statement](#) stating that "Bolsheviks have no place in schools."

Krypteia

Krypteia owes its name to the ancient Spartan secret militia comprised of young capable citizens whose purpose was to discover plots that the subdued helots or serfs were formulating against the authorities. They were also responsible for the capture of deserters and fugitives.

Krypteia had an active role in 2017–2019 after it took responsibility for various racist attacks on immigrants, even underage children (such as young Amir, a student of Afghan heritage who happened to carry a Greek flag during a national holiday). After a thorough investigation, only one accused person was put on trial. The same perpetrator, Panagiotis P., had vandalized and burnt the space where the Afghan Union of Immigrants had held its meetings in Athens. Krypteia had organized attacks and intended to vandalize the headquarters of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The Court demonstrated the accused's [connection](#) with another neo-fascist organization called ESA.

ESA (Hellenic Socialist Resistance, Ellhniki Sosialistiki Antistasi)

The Hellenic Socialist Resistance (ESA) is another neo-fascist organization which has connections with Krypteia. ESA admires Antonis Androustopoulos or Periandros, vice-leader of GD in 1996–1998, just like the AME/C18 and the Autonomous Nationalists. ESA appears rather small, but its ideology as its name alludes to National Socialism. Their name is inspired by the Greek military's Junta Secret Police, the EAT-ESA. In November 2018, ESA was under the media spotlight when its very young members occupied high schools, turning them into a hotspot for indoctrinating young students into neo-Nazi ideology during [heated debates](#) on the North Macedonia naming dispute.

ARMA

This neo-Nazi group was founded by Stefanos Gikas, a former high-ranking member of GD. Gikas is a fanatical neo-Nazi who admires Adolf Hitler. In 2017, claiming space for his organization in the neo-Nazi political spectrum of Greece, Gikas was inciting violent actions against refugee organizations

and NGOs. His organization acted mainly in the southern suburbs of Athens at small rallies and was handing out pamphlets in which refugees were called “illegal colonists,” a very popular term among the members of the far right in Greece. On the back of these pamphlets there was a map with the location of every refugee camp in Greece, and the text [urged](#) nationalists “to take part for the protection of the country.”

Conclusion

The aforementioned groups belong to a fertile neo-Nazi scene that remains fringe on account of its cultural references and violence. Yet they are all connected to Golden Dawn, which has enabled them to benefit from GD’s political successes and the inroads it made into mainstream politics. Since GD’s electoral collapse and subsequent dissolution, all these far-right organizations have been fighting to gain a share of former GD voters in hopes of entering the mainstream political arena themselves. Two years on from the eruption of the pandemic, they are using the discontent of the Greek people with the conservative New Democracy government to their benefit and are participating in the anti-vax movement in order to secure broader popular support. Whereas other far-right parties in Europe have tried to finesse their ideological beliefs to make them more acceptable to the population—the National Front’s normalization process being the flagship of that trend—Golden Dawn has taken the opposite tack, keeping its neo-Nazi doctrine alive and trying to make it more mainstream. Its actions have not only compromised the safety of democratic institutions in Greece, but also influenced other radical far-right movements across Europe and to a lesser extent the US.