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# Crisis, Authoritarian Neoliberalism, and the Return of “New Democracy” to power in Greece

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## ***Crisis, Authoritarian Neoliberalism, and the Return of “New Democracy” to power in Greece***

### **Abstract:**

This article focuses on New Democracy (ND), Greece’s main conservative party, and its return to power in 2019. The study enquires into ND’s hegemonic strategy and governing practice. ND’s hegemonic strategy is grounded in both neoliberal and Far-Right premises. This enabled ND to create a hegemonic block that ranges from centrist liberals to far-rightists, while advancing an anti-leftist ideological project, connected to progressing upper-class interests. The ND administration unfolds an autocratic form of executive governance that is based on legislating class-related

reforms, propaganda and effective control of the mainstream media, and coercive force. These features reflect the development of neoliberal authoritarianism in Greece. They represent “the new form of bourgeois republic in the current phase of capitalism,” bearing the traits of autocracy, illiberalism, and Far-Right mainstreaming. The study deploys examples from ND’s political discourse and from policies that the ND administration has launched.

**Keywords:**

Neoliberal authoritarianism, postmodern Far-Right, propaganda, racism, anticommunism, EU

## **1. Introduction: Context and Concepts**

The election of a Left-led coalition government in Greece that was headed by the Syriza (*Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras* [the Coalition of the Radical Left]) party with an anti-neoliberal austerity agenda on 25 January, 2015 shocked the liberal establishment of the European Union (EU) and Greece. By July 2015, however, Syriza’s government succumbed to the pressures posed by the EU and the so-called Troika (an institutional body formed by the European Commission [EC], the European Central Bank [ECB] and the International Monetary Fund [IMF]) mechanism for the continuation of neoliberal austerity policies, according to Greece’s creditors’ demands (Roos 2019: 261; Varoufakis 2017). Syriza’s capitulation to the Troika became the strategic moment for New Democracy (ND), Greece’s major right-wing party, to develop its counteroffensive and regain power. The timing also seemed ripe internationally for ND to launch its counteroffensive, as conservatives began to gain momentum in different countries across the globe: from the rise of Viktor Orbán to power in Hungary, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Donald Trump in the US, among others (McManus 2020: 167; Traverso 2019: 20; Mondon and Winter 2020).

In this article, I approach ND as a right-wing party that currently comprises conservative, (neo)liberal, and Far-Right features, signifying a mutation of its previous center-right dispositions that corresponds to broader antidemocratic trends regarding the rise of “authoritarian forms of governing... used to defend and maintain the order and interests of economic liberalism” (Wilkinson 2020: 133). I analyze the ND party’s hegemonic strategy, understanding hegemony as a process of leadership, domination, and consolidation of power (Thomas 2013: 26). I also inquire on the policies that

ND implements as they unfold in the social context of a peripheral EU state, caught in a prolonged and polyvalent crisis and subjected to constant EU interventions that lack democratic legitimacy. The analysis of hegemony addresses the discursive normalization of the (bourgeois) class interests and the castigation of the (leftist) opposition, while the material/institutional dimension is concerned with the state laws, policies, and interventions that reproduce the capitalist relations of production (Gallas 2016: 25). The study deploys the Gramscian “passive revolution” idea to inquire upon the continuities and discontinuities of the ND administration’s politics with those of the Syriza administration, particularly after Syriza’s capitulation to neoliberalism in July 2015. The study then deploys the concept of neoliberal authoritarianism (Bruff 2014), developed from Nicos Poulantzas’ (2014) earlier notion of “authoritarian statism,” to understand state and democratic transformations in the post-2008 global neoliberal context that are marked by an “organic crisis” of the liberal-capitalist democratic polity.

## 2. New Democracy’s Legacies

New Democracy was founded in 1974 by Constantine Karamanlis, a prominent right-wing politician in postwar Greece. Founded after the Colonels’ Dictatorship (1967–1974), ND emerged as a popular right-wing force that distanced itself from the Far Right, which, from the end of the Greek Civil War in 1949 until then had formed an organic part of all major right-wing political parties (Tsoukalas 1974). The postwar right-wing parties, which hegemonized the political life of Greece until 1974, represented the full spectrum of the Right in the country. In the post-1974 context, the Greek Far Right became marginalized.

ND has played a central role in Greece’s post-1974 political life by assuming government on different occasions. During its reign from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, ND followed a mixture of state protectionist and market-driven policies, shifting toward neoliberalism from the 1980s onward. From the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, ND moved toward the center, adopting some liberal sociocultural agendas along with a neoliberal economic program. Generally, the ND party has represented the upper classes and has been traditionally supported by urban and rural, middle- and lower-class nationalists and conservatives, including far-rightists such as royalist and pro-junta citizens, as well as by market-orientated liberals.

The arrival of migrants to Greece and the so-called Macedonian issue in the early 1990s were key matters operationalized by the Far

Right to gain a new momentum and escape the margins (Psarras 2013: 10). This was also fueled by ND's nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric while in government. To ND's right, POLAN (Political Spring) was formed by Antonis Samaras after his departure from ND in 1993 due to the Macedonian question. Additionally, the resurgence of the Far Right occurred by advancing a "countercultural" influence in the Greek public sphere from the 1990s onward (Psarras 2010). This manifested through nationalist publications and popular private television shows, allowing it to eventually find a place in the Greek parliament with the election of LAOS (*Laikos Orthodoxos Sinagermos* [Orthodox People's Rally])<sup>1</sup> in 2004.

The so-called Greek crisis (2009–2018), linked with the global economic recession that started in 2008 in the USA (Davidson and Saull 2017: 708), produced important sociopolitical turbulence that destabilized Greece's fragile hegemonic establishment. This was based on a neoliberal, "modernizing" and "Europeanist" consensus that lasted for more than two decades (Souvlis and Lalakis 2020: 87). Mass protests that occurred between 2010 and 2013 in many ways followed Greece's December 2008 revolt and were connected to broader dispositions of class and generational discontent (Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011). These protests challenged the legitimacy of the established whith politics and empowered new political formations, mainly from the Left, which was further expressed through Syriza's parliamentary gains, but also from the Right. The Far Right was expressed on the parliamentary front through ANEL (*Aneksartitoi Ellines* [Independent Greeks]), and, most importantly, through the rise of the previously marginal neo-Nazi Golden Dawn [GD] to a mass reactionary civil society movement, which was also represented in the Greek parliament between 2012 and 2019. The Greek economic crisis thus developed into an "organic crisis" (Souvlis and Lalakis 2020: 89; Jessop 1985: 90), where the established hegemony could not be maintained by the two main governing political parties that had ruled the country since 1974. As a result, the once-thriving social-democratic PASOK (*Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima* Panhellenic Socialist Movement) collapsed and lost most of its electoral basis, while ND also saw a considerable reduction of its power.

After 2009, ND shifted further to the right from the center-right disposition it held under Kostas Karamanlis (1997–2009). This shift occurred after Antonis Samaras, who had returned to ND in 2004, assumed leadership in 2009, and intensified during the crisis years.

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<sup>1</sup> LAOS was founded by formed ND members, including the party's leader, Giorgos Karatzaferis, who were dissatisfied with ND's centrist turn.

Under Samaras's leadership, former members of the Far-Right LAOS party, such as Makis Voridis<sup>2</sup> and Spyridon "Adonis" Georgiadis among others, became ND politicians. Samaras resigned after ND's electoral defeat by Syriza on 25 January, 2015 and was eventually replaced by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Greece's current (2020) Prime Minister (PM). The son of Kostas Mitsotakis (a prominent conservative politician, former ND leader and former Greek PM in 1990–1993), Kyriakos Mitsotakis enjoys a center-right profile. Mitsotakis, though, became leader of ND in January 2016 with the support of the ND's Far Right; Adonis Georgiadis, a known Far-Right bookseller, media persona, and former LAOS member, was also an ND presidential candidate but after his defeat in the elections' first round gave his support to Mitsotakis, allowing him to win the decisive second round of the ND's 2016 presidential elections.

### **3. The Empire Strikes Back: Passive Revolution, Authoritarian Neoliberalism, and Postmodern Conservatism**

ND's resurgence to power is situated in a broader structural and transnational context, marked by an organic crisis: a situation where civil society cannot be represented by the existing political institutions (Souvlis and Lalakis 2020: 76), and different possibilities of sociopolitical change can emerge (Fabry 2019: 178). The following discussion revises analyses that stress the rise and normalization of Far-Right ideas today. It shows how these analyses are entangled within neoliberal restructuring processes in an authoritarian liberal framework that is hostile to alternative politics and that can challenge "marketization, capital accumulation and liberal economic rationales" (Wilkinson 2020: 134). The Gramscian idea of passive revolution is also evoked in order to understand the context of ND's strategy to regain power.

In principle, conservative thought emerges in defense of the status quo. Conservatism is a reaction to events of change and subversion, such as the French and the Russian Revolutions in historical terms. As conservative theorists have noted (see, e.g., Michael Oakeshott [Robin 2017: 21]), conservatives are presumably moderates that aim at defending what is already known and has proved to be resilient and stable while reacting to forms of change and novelty. Nevertheless, as a current of reaction, conservatism is

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<sup>2</sup>Makis Voridis, in particular, is a politician with a long and often violent background in neofascist politics (The Press Project, 2021).

also defined by the revolutionary or other subversive practices it resents. Conservatism has a radical and offensive predisposition, aiming at defeating its enemies. This makes conservatism prone to absorb ideas and tactics of the forces that it opposes, revolutionary or reformist (Ibid: 40).

In a recent work, Matthew McManus (2020) deploys the term “postmodern conservatism” to critically analyze contemporary conservative politics and ideologies by looking at some of their most successful examples, such as the rise of Donald Trump to the US presidency, or the prolonged reign of Viktor Orbán in Hungary, among others. These political trajectories occur in a late/postmodern sociocultural context characterized by a persistent economic crisis, in late capitalist societies defined by individualism, competition, consumerism, cynicism, and high insecurity. Postmodern conservatism describes the “right-wing politics which emerge as a reaction to the dynamics of neoliberal society and post-modern culture” (Ibid: 16). This is further characterized by the rise of Far-Right agendas adopted by the liberal establishment.

McManus (Ibid: 168) traces the emergence of postmodern conservatism to the 2008 global economic crisis, which had the features of an organic crisis where neoliberalism was challenged by social movements across the world (like the “Occupy” movement). David Harvey (2019) notes that since the 2008 crisis, neoliberalism has largely lost its public legitimacy. For this reason, neoliberal policies came to rely on coercive state practices and on executive administrative policies that sidestep democratic processes (Bruff 2014: 116) through a “range of coercive and legal measures that aim to insulate the state from popular contestation” (Fabry and Sandbeck 2019: 111).

The 2008 crisis meant the decline of a progressive neoliberal hegemony, paving the way for a more conservative and authoritarian neoliberal variant. By not addressing the systemic foundations of the crisis in its complexity, the insecurities triggered by neoliberalism were articulated by authority figures and the media, through discourses blaming targeted groups (such as migrants or leftists). The loss of social stability and cohesion was substituted with nostalgic and essentialist imaginaries and identity constructions related to nationalism, religious faith, traditional gender roles, and bourgeois tropes (connected to success, hard work, and regimes of entitlement) (McManus 2020: 17).

Among others (e.g., Ryan 2019), Stuart Hall (2011) explained the cultural dimensions of the neoliberal authoritative turn already occurring in the early 1980s. While studying Thatcherism in Britain, he noted its success in constructing hegemony through developing

moral panics around issues related to crime and public safety, by scapegoating minorities, and by stressing the need for authorities to protect a nationally-defined citizenry from “lawlessness” (Bruff 2014: 118). In the contemporary setting, Nancy Fraser (2019: 16) argues that nationalist and racist ideas (that she frames as regressive recognition politics) have become increasingly prominent in neo-liberal politics, as exemplified in Trump’s 2016 electoral campaign and victory in the USA.

Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter (2020) take this discussion further, arguing that the various antidemocratic and illiberal developments across the world over the last ten years reflect a mainstreaming of the Far Right, which has come to be increasingly normalized by the liberal-democratic establishment. According to Mondon and Winter (Ibid: 122), this has mainly been a top-down process, because the elites could not concede to progressivist demands and instead turned to regressive ones. The authors maintain that illiberal and reactionary tropes are inherent in liberalism (Ibid: 53). This can explain the intolerance of the liberal establishment toward the moderate leftist politics that Syriza (and also Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, and Bernie Sanders in the USA) represented, while maintaining a much more attentive stance toward the Far Right (Ibid: 207). In this sense too, the liberal strands of conservatism, related to liberty, meritocracy, or limited government, come secondary when established hierarchy and privilege are threatened (Robin 2017: 16), giving way to the illiberal legacies of the Right.

ND currently shares various characteristics with other Right and Far-Right parties and political formations that are socially influential and that have assumed government in countries across the world. To this respect, Antonio Gramsci’s idea of passive revolution is useful to discuss the conjuncture between ND’s rise in power to its predecessor’s (the leftist, Syriza-led coalition government) continuation of neoliberal austerity. By passive revolution, Gramsci meant systemic transformation “from above” by non-revolutionary means (Callinicos 2010: 492), in times of organic crisis, when the politico-economic establishment is questioned by civil society. “The passive revolution syntagma captures various concrete historical instances in which aspects of the social relations of capitalist development are either instituted and/or expanded, resulting in both a ‘revolutionary’ rupture and a ‘restoration of social relations’” (Morton 2010: 316). The ruling classes here may accept demands advanced by the lower classes in order to achieve social consensus (Nelson Coutinho 2012: 159). These demands, however, are often displaced and rearticulated. Fraser (2019: 13) argues that the regressive polit-

ical economy of neoliberalism in the USA became popular after the adoption of progressive agendas by the ruling elites, such as cultural recognition demands, articulated in a class-orientated discourse associated with ideas such as meritocracy and opportunity. Likewise, a decisive victory of Thatcherism was that it even forced its major opponent, the Labour Party, to be transformed into New Labour by adopting core neoliberal ideas and policies through a progressivist stance (Mouffe 2018: 30). Most crucially, through passive revolution the dominant classes can exclude the popular classes from developing autonomous and antagonistic politics (Thomas 2013: 30).

After its capitulation to the Troika in July 2015, Syriza adopted a no-alternative neoliberal austerity policy framework; “for six months, supposedly ‘apolitical’ European institutions, in close connection with Greek oligarchs, the principal owners of the media, waged a veritable economic and ideological war against the Syriza government” (Dardot and Laval 2019: 99). The Greek and the EU bourgeois establishment’s political objective was Syriza’s defeat because Syriza represented a Left that challenged neoliberalism, even beyond the confines of Greece, and further confronted the Western-centric formation of the EU. After its capitulation, the Syriza-led administration attempted to develop a (somewhat milder) neoliberal politics, with a philanthropic and progressive sociocultural stance. Therefore, Syriza’s ceded administration signified a “passive revolution” moment, where, through Syriza, the bourgeois EU establishment imposed its will for neoliberal reforms from above.

The continuation of austerity meant deepening inequalities in Greece, and the Left’s shrinking popularity and militancy in Greece and elsewhere. This context enabled ND to advance its counter-offensive against leftist politics, publicly discrediting the Left as failed, ideologically obsessive, unrealistic, backward, and dangerous. ND was able to seize the discontent that a large segment of the citizenry experienced after Syriza’s continuation of neoliberal austerity. Class frustration and popular dissatisfaction toward the economic crisis and neoliberal austerity were channeled against the Left, blamed as responsible for the crisis itself, for the austerity reforms’ failure (attributed to the social unrest of the late 2000s and early 2010s and Syriza’s “populist” challenging of the Troika), and for austerity’s overall continuation (due to Syriza signing a third memorandum of agreement for neoliberal austerity). Either way, after its 2012 electoral gains, Syriza started to become a more centralized and traditional party at the expense of its internal democratic processes, failing to deepen and develop its ties with social movements and labor organizations (Souvlis and Lalakis 2020: 90).



Once in power, the ND administration accelerated the neoliberal reforms framework that had also been continued by Syriza, while further assaulting established sociopolitical rights and liberties.

ND's identity and politics share some of the broad characteristics that define postmodern conservatism in illiberal and antidemocratic cultures. Most importantly, ND assumed power in a local and global context of organic crisis, which strains the reproduction of capitalist accumulation. In its hegemonic strategy, ND operationalized various Far-Right ideas and identities and amalgamated them with neoliberal aspirations. By moving further to the Right, ND has been able to construct a hegemonic block between the liberal center and the Far-Right, assimilating the right-wing reaction to the effects of neoliberal crisis and austerity (notably, an important chunk of GD voters), articulating it against the Left (and Syriza in particular, despite the Syriza administration's continuation of neoliberal policies), from both nationalist and liberal perspectives.

Besides targeting the Left, ND has diverted popular discontent from the grim realities of neoliberal society toward other scapegoats, such as specific vocational groups (e. g., public servants), and most crucially, the migrants and refugees that attempted to enter Europe through Greece while fleeing war and poverty (Koutouza 2019: 230). Along with ND, the mainstream media sustained a moral panic against migrants and refugees in the Greek public sphere, normalizing racist repertoires through a nationalist language that stressed "racialized imaginaries of solidarity" (Davidson and Saull 2017: 716) while advancing neoliberal austerity. Overall, such features created the conservative sense of social cohesion that was necessary for the advance of a hegemonic political project (Gallas 2016: 31).

#### 4. Hegemonic Strategy

This section has two interrelated parts. The first part looks at ND's identity manifestations, related to how it addressed the Greek population in its hegemonic strategy during the time span of the study. Liberal and Far-Right characteristics are present in the ways that ND addresses (all) "Greeks," and the "Greek middle class" in particular. These form the hegemonic societal block that ND constructs in its efforts to marginalize and passify its opponents, notably the Left. Additionally, the public construction of Kyriakos Mitsotakis as a "charismatic leader" has a central position in ND's hegemonic strategy. The second part of this section looks at how ND has utilized mass media to create a personality cult around its leader and to consolidate power through presenting the ND administration and

its policies positively while discrediting and underrepresenting the opposition. The ideological dimension of ND's hegemonic strategy to assume power is associated with the advance of class politics and achieving class domination (Gallas 2016: 5), as expressed in the policies launched by the ND administration.

A brief discussion of the Greek media's political economy is necessary to understand how the media assisted ND's return to power, and how they regularly reproduce a positive public image of the ND administration. The Greek mainstream media is owned by few powerful families of Greek tycoons and has always played an active political role by exercising different forms of pressure upon governments and politicians (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Due to the particularities and limitations of the Greek media market, the Greek media relies on favorable state interventions and subsidies. Additionally, the fierce economic competition between different Greek media conglomerates does not result in polyphony, but leads to conformity and the shrinking of public debate (Smyrnaiois 2010). The economic crisis hit the Greek media industry hard; Syriza's attempts to regulate the media environment of Greece and to establish transparency was resisted by the concentrated interests of the Greek media industry (Kostopoulos 2020: 16).

The mass media overwhelmingly supported ND while the ND was in opposition. Many famous (self-defined liberal) journalists and media personas are openly affiliated with ND, and some were even elected as ND MPs in 2019. Further, ND ranked as the third top advertiser in Google (Google Transparency Report 2020) among all EU political parties, having spent a staggering €648,950 from 20 March, 2019 until 12 May, 2020 to promote itself, even though ND is one of the most indebted political parties in the EU (Galanoopoulos 2020). Once in government, ND appointed its own beneficiaries at pivotal positions in ERT, the public broadcaster (such as Konstantinos Zoulas, the ND's former press bureau director and current director of ERT). In April 2020, ND postponed payment for the 2021 TV broadcasting license fee installment. Additionally, during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ND government paid a total of €20 million to the media for Covid-19-related information campaigns, though this information can be published for free by law. Investigative journalists demonstrated that this money (a case known as the "Petsas list" [The Press Project 2020a]) was mostly delivered to media favorable to ND (The Press Project 2020b). Between February and April 2020, the media disproportionately promoted ND administration measures over more substantial information on the pandemic itself, while leaving little space for oppositional voices

(Avgi 2020). Likewise, the pandemic publicity did not allow adequate space for critique of the government and obscured a variety of underhanded government transactions (International Press Institute 2020). In this way, press freedom in Greece has seriously declined. For 2020, Greece ranked at number 65 in the list of the world's press freedom (Reporters without Borders 2020). ND has thus been able to exercise an undue influence on the citizenry.

#### **4.1 ND's Manifested Identity: An Osmosis of Liberalism and the Far Right**

ND's political discourse dislocated class dissatisfaction from systemic concerns and articulated it in its own programmatic language. To do so, it had to further engage with inflammatory, nationalist, xenophobic, and anti-leftist ideas, which had been advanced by the Far Right. Widespread spite and fury generated by the economic crisis and neoliberal austerity were streamed against marginal and disempowered social groups and political opponents of the Right.

Mitsotakis's ND colonized Far-Right agendas under a "middle class," "moderate," "liberal," "patriotic," and "Europeanist" discourse. ND developed a hegemonic chain of equivalence<sup>3</sup> (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 144) that stretched from the liberal center to the Far Right. On the one hand, ND articulated a liberal progressivist language that blended signifiers such as "future," "Europe," "development," and "freedom." On the other hand, it appealed to conservatives and far-rightists by presenting itself as the true patriotic force fighting for Greece's "national issues" (such as the infamous Macedonian affair), to circumvent "illegal migration," and to ensure the "safety" of Greek nationals, aiming at establishing "normality" and "national unity" in Greece, which had been disturbed by the dangerous and polarizing ideas and politics of the "populists."

ND's main opponent in its political discourse is "populism," and Syriza in particular. These form the negative identity that defines the positive characteristics of ND. Maintaining a post-political (Ranci re 2007) outlook that defines political antagonisms less in terms of "Left vs. Right," but more in terms of "forward vs. backward," ND adopts a "centrist" position, equating the Left (mainly Syriza) with the main Far-Right force that lies outside ND (the GD), as an equivalent that is "outdated" and "populist," which represents "protest politics," and "extremes." This problematic equa-

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<sup>3</sup>For Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 120), a hegemonic logic of equivalence concerns the politico-discursive strategy of constructing a common identity framework between different social groups, in relation to an adversary.

tion conceals the fact that, while in government, ND tolerated and maintained ideological and political ties with GD at least until the end of 2013 when GD's persecution started (Psarras 2015: 33). By reproducing an "extremes" theory, ND flattens its own historical responsibility for mainstreaming the Far Right and shrinks the space of democratic politics, all the while promoting technocratic notions of governance (Mondon and Winter 2020: 195).

The liberal aspect of ND's hegemonic project has been formed around the middle-class signifier and its articulation through notions related to neoliberal citizenship:

"We are the party of the private sector, we are the party of the middle class, we will support it and we will express it politically" Kyriakos Mitsotakis had said on June 21 during the official presentation of the government program of ND. (I Kathimerini 2019)

[...] they [the middle class] are the Greek men and women of next door. They are the ones who built Greece. And while they are united in one whole, they do not dissolve into a mass. They remain individuals with individual responsibilities. They are citizens that know their common destiny. They are productive citizens who do not complain. They demand from the state efficiency and respect for the money that they pay [...] and they demand that their intelligence and their dignity will not be insulted. In other words, gentlemen of Syriza, the middle class are all those who usually dress up simply, but they also know how to wear a tie where they should, to use a stylistic reference.<sup>4</sup>

The ideal identity of the middle-class subject for ND is entrepreneurial, self-sustaining, individualist, competitive, patriotic, hardworking, and mannered; it is also associated with a broader free-market economic and liberal-Europeanist imaginary. For conservatives like Friedrich Hayek, the entrepreneur is the subject producing wealth and driving society forward, instead of the worker, as understood by the Left (Robin 2017: 154). The middle-class appeal, along with calls to "all Greeks," downplays (without abolishing) identities and politics of class conflict despite the deepening of inequalities in Greece. In ND's discourse, social conflict is dislocated from issues of class; social conflict is denied and semantically displaced through a language of winners vs. losers, backward vs. forward, past vs. future, center vs. margin, realist vs. populist, merito-

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<sup>4</sup>This statement, which was delivered in the Greek Parliament, can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=27&v=QTJGGxNiu4&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=27&v=QTJGGxNiu4&feature=emb_title)

cratic vs. mediocratic, moderate vs. extremist, unifying vs. dividing, national vs. traitor, Europe/West vs. rest. In Mitsotakis's sense, the political demands of the Greek middle class concern the making of an efficient "executive state" to produce the reforms that will facilitate growth/development (which supposedly amount to prosperity), and that will restore a sense of individual and national pride.

A fetishization of development (Dirlik 2014: 2) is evident in ND's discourse. Development is nowadays a global hegemonic ideology, sustaining the neoliberal capitalist "no alternative" thesis, associated with the imperative of capitalist growth. For ND, "development" is associated with notions of affluence, consumption, and lifestyle. One of ND's potentially most catchy electoral TV and social media ad stressed that "development means freedom."<sup>5</sup> Visualized through the depiction of people moving towards open horizons, this message contained a utopian dimension to appeal to the voters' emancipation desires, spinning neoliberal economic activity as "forward thinking and liberatory" (Fraser 2019: 15).

For ND, the technocratic state and the neoliberal citizen reflect more adequately the "future," "reality," and its "challenges" as they advance in the Western world. In Mitsotakis words::

We have not realized the impetus of the coming future, which is tremendous. We are in danger of [...] finding ourselves discussing "how did history pass us by?" Greece was never passed by [...] despite its crises, in important moments, we were at the right side of history [...] we are facing a different war here and if we fail to grasp it, reality itself will overcome us. We will become a backward country unable to cover the lost ground. I am asking for elections soon because time cannot wait. The soonest we face these issues, the better.<sup>6</sup>

A reified, monolithic sense of time and the future appears in such excerpts: a future that will be "hard," competitive, aggressive, and relentless. The future here carries an apocalyptic force that levies the reforms that ND wishes to establish on the premise of national salvation. An anti-leftist imperative can also be observed, associated with references to Greece's belonging to "the correct side of history," and warranted by a quasi-theological, apocalyptic sense of time that legitimizes authoritarian dictates for neoliberal reforms.

For Mitsotakis and the liberal branch of ND, anti-leftism is articulated with technocratic arguments, although the ND's Far Right

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAK0hIj6uDs>

<sup>6</sup> The full discussion can be followed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yswEChD7L-g>

articulates an antagonistic anticommunism, connected to Greece's twentieth-century political conflicts:

This faction (the Right) was always historically correct, and yet, while it has always been on the right side of history, there was always something happening and it had to apologize [...] this is what I have often talked about. It is called the ideological hegemony of the left. Entire mechanisms, communicative, educational, cultural, had to blame us, target us, insult us, humiliate us [...] For the first time, an important condition is establishing after 40 years. What is happening now [...] can shape the conditions for overthrowing the hegemony of the left, consolidating the ideological hegemony of the right to sustain, not just the government but also our ideas, as dominant in Greece so as to liberate her, to make her great again, to bring her where she deserves, [which is] what we all want. This is happening now, after 40 years. That is what is changing. (In.gr 2020)

According to Makis Vouridis here, besides acquiring and sustaining power, the Right's quest is to further establish an ideological hegemony in Greek society. For the Far Right, the Left has launched an ideological hegemony in the country that must be abolished. The "correct side of history" that Vouridis also refers to corresponds to the thirty-year-old "end of history" thesis coined by US conservatives like Francis Fukuyama to moralize and to legitimize the global hegemony of the liberal, capitalist West in the world after the collapse of the socialist block. The "end of history" thesis has proved to be highly problematic (Traverso 2019: 152), as history cannot just "end," and instead it is always written from the winner's point of view. Simultaneously, by echoing Trump's "Make America Great Again," Vouridis iterates a similar nationalist fantasy while attributing to the Left and its supposed ideological hegemony Greece's problems, which mainly derive from the Greek capitalist formation. The "greatness" that Vouridis highlights, though, while referring to what existed in Greece forty years ago, is the period in which the Right hegemonized Greece through authoritarian, quasi-democratic regimes and dictatorship.

Representatives of the ND's Far Right such as Vouridis and Adonis Georgiadis nominally deny their Far-Right identity (European Jewish Congress 2019). Nevertheless, this practice seems to further normalize Far-Right politics and ideas because they become further integrated into the liberal mainstream (Mondon and Winter 2020: 199). Georgiadis has stated that he would vote for Trump "with both hands," and has referred to the Left as "fascist" (Hatzistefanou 2020),

attempting to colonize the vocabulary of his opponents. Both Georgiadis and Voridis have taken pro-Israeli positions and denounced anti-Semitism. Georgiadis was also sent to represent Mitsotakis's government at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz in Poland. This was favorably received by the ND-friendly media and was used to further attack the Left, allegedly on the grounds of antifascism (AthensVoice 2020). Georgiadis's presence at the iconic site of fascist crimes, however, echoes Walter Benjamin's (1940) sixth history thesis, where "not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious." As Enzo Traverso (2019: 43) shows, different Far-Right politicians and parties in Europe today (like Germany's Alternative für Deutschland) formally recognize the Holocaust in order to settle their accounts with the Nazi/neofascist past and become accepted by the liberal-democratic establishment.

Anticommunism is further associated with nationalism. "National issues" were crucial in the ND's hegemonic strategy. The so-called Macedonian issue provided a solid opportunity for ND to raise a nationalist voice that would appeal to widespread patriotic sensibilities. The Syriza-led administration came to an eventual agreement over the specific issue with North Macedonia through the Prespes Treaty of January 25, 2019. This provided a solution to a nearly thirty-year-long unresolved dispute between Greece and North Macedonia. Along with other nationalist and religious forces, ND positioned itself against this treaty, which it described as a "national defeat": "The Prespes Treaty should never have been signed, nor should it have reached Parliament, it is a national defeat [...] Your government is tormenting political life; [to remain] for a few months in power, you are taking the country back many years, Mitsotakis stressed" (Ta Nea 2019).

ND and various Far-Right, nationalist, and religious groups fueled the mobilization of a reactionary movement across Greece over the Macedonian issue. ND promised nationalist voters that it would overturn the specific treaty once in power. A few months later though, after assuming power in July 2019, ND recognized North Macedonia as the neighboring country's legitimate name, supported its candidacy to the EU, and welcomed its membership to NATO.

Along with nationalism, ND has advanced a xenophobic position toward migration, particularly in relation to the so-called refugee crisis. In a highly insecure neoliberal social context, the Far Right has elevated the issue of migration into a central public concern. Mainstream liberal parties (both Right and Left) in Europe and the US have progressively adopted the racist, nationalist, and nativist

agendas of the Far Right, in order to contain and attract voters (Mondon and Winter 2020: 117), and also to shift public attention from the systemic aspect of the 2008 economic crisis (Titley 2019: 74).

GD's institutional legitimacy while in Parliament contributed significantly toward the normalization of nationalism, racism, and xenophobia in Greek society, traits which were by no means foreign to it. The media made a spectacle of Far-Right agendas, producing moral panic on migration while stressing concerns related to national security and integration (Titley 2019: 71). ND tapped into these themes to address the Far-Right voting pool. For instance, during the commemoration of the ancient battles of Salamis and Thermopylae in October 2019, Mitsotakis associated the Persian invasion of the ancient Greek lands with contemporary migration, stating that “nowadays refugee and migrant waves are besieging European countries” (Info-war.gr 2020). As over the last ten years Greece has been a main entry point for migrants and refugees wishing to relocate to Europe, the migration issue has been central to the public debates between ND and Syriza. ND's migration discourse and policies, particularly since its return to power, have been particularly harsh against non-western/non-white migrant flows.<sup>7</sup> In effect, racism and enmity against migrants has been growing, reflected in the ways that the migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are treated, both institutionally and at a lay level in Greece, for more than a decade.

## **4.2 The Media and Class Politics: Catastrophology, Technocracy, Leadership Cult**

Mitsotakis's rise to the leadership of ND in January 2016 signified the beginning of an intense and polarizing oppositional strategy against the Syriza-led government, culminating in ND's electoral victory on 7 July, 2019. Among others, ND instrumentalized Syriza's political defeats and launched a highly offensive oppositional strategy against Syriza's policies. ND also weaponized specific events, such as the “refugee crisis,” and calamities that occurred during Syriza's administration, such as the July 2018 catastrophic wildfires in Attica that resulted in the tragic deaths of 102 people.<sup>8</sup> While in opposition, ND presented Greece as run by

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<sup>7</sup>ND's politics toward the migrants and the refugees further reflects the EU's border security and migration policies (Webber 2018).

<sup>8</sup>Such tragic wildfires have happened before in Greece, however. ND was also in government during the wildfires that occurred in the summer of 2007 in Peloponnese, Attica, and Evia, where eighty-three people perished.



dangerous populists that originate in both the Far Left and the Far Right (associated with Syriza's partner in government, ANEL). The mass media here played a crucial role in publicly establishing ND's catastrophizing as "common sense." The media produced a moral panic (Gallas 2016: 13) over the Syriza-led administration's (alleged) inadequacy and harmfulness, while praising Mitsotakis's ND as an ample political force of "national salvation" that could create order and prosperity.

The efforts of the Syriza-led administration to abolish austerity in early 2015 were severely reproached as catastrophic by the oppositional ND at the time. Under Mitsotakis's leadership, ND pursued the depoliticization of Syriza's counter-austerity strategy because it presumably weakened Greece politically and economically, burdening it with more debt, more austerity, and blocking recovery due to the time lost for futile negotiations. Syriza was also labeled as a populist force that gave fictitious and impossible promises to citizens. Drawn from a popular ND-affiliated yellow paper, the following report is indicative:

Mr. Mitsotakis noted that Mr. Tsipras understands the first six months of his rule as a bad dream. "But it's more than a bad memory, because the economy has sunk and businesses have closed. The reduction in salaries and pensions is the painful price of this period" he said, adding that the country had been dragged into an unnecessary third memorandum, at a cost estimated at 86 million euros by the governor of the Bank of Greece, and at 100 million euros by Mr. Redling. Commenting on the speech of the Finance Minister, he noted: "Mr. Tsakalotos told us that this is the cost of the new memorandum. But aren't you the ones who would tear up the memoranda?" "You fooled, you played the country on the dice, you caused irreparable damage to the prestige of the country. What wise man would leave unexplored the conditions that led to these mistakes? We do not do it out of revanchism. We are doing this to prevent populists from repeating the same mistakes in the future" said Mr. Mitsotakis. (Proto Thema 2016)

The media amplified ND's strategy of presenting Syriza's (failed) attempts to negotiate a way out of neoliberal austerity as "anti-European," economically catastrophic, and politically scandalous. Ambiguous calculations (Varoufakis 2017: 72) on the potential economic loss of the counter-austerity politics were regularly publicized to legitimize the ND's anti-leftist and pro-neoliberal reforms stance as realistic and "European." Likewise, Syriza has been constantly accused of "populism," which presumably stands on the opposite side

of a “rational” or “realist” mode of governing. According to such a logic, the populist is a demagogue that makes false promises, leading to dangerous trajectories (Stavrakakis 2018: 35). Therefore, ND and its mouthpieces advance a reactionary politics, according to which, (leftist) counter-hegemonic politics are not only deemed to fail, but are to be proven as catastrophic. Technocracy is promoted instead as a safe and “European” trajectory for Greece’s future.

The ND’s positive, pre-election message connected with the progressive strands of neoliberalism, articulated through demands for normality, merit, growth/development, a technocratic government led by excellence, and Europeanization/modernization. To use a media-related example:

The question of the day after tomorrow’s elections is a return to normalcy [...] A European [type of normalcy], if we want to be a little bit optimistic, with laws that are sufficiently discussed before they are passed and voted on to be enforced. [A normalcy that] promotes the unrestricted freedom of speech everywhere, but restricts the freedom of the hooligans to harass [people] at the universities every now and then. [A normalcy that] punishes lawlessness in a fair way and not in accordance with the declared intentions of the offenders. [A normalcy that] has a tax equalization and does not burden those who declare that they have good intentions to invest. [A normalcy that] has a state that counts its money and examines how it spends it to maximize the results of its necessary operations. [A normalcy that] allows people to create wealth. [A normalcy that] taxes as much as it needs and does not distribute gifts to voters just before the election. [A normalcy that] negotiates without fear, but with knowledge of international correlations. [A normalcy where politicians] dare to tell the truth to the citizens and not the convenient delusions. (Mandravelis 2019)

In the words of P. Mandravelis, a popular columnist in *I Kathimerini*, Greece’s leading conservative daily, the normalcy that Greece should return to is a “European” one. Normality therefore seems to be something that exists elsewhere. Hence, North/Western Europe appears as the benchmark of normality for Greece to follow. The understanding of Europe as a meritocratic, efficient, pragmatic, neoliberal, entrepreneurial, law-abiding entity ignores the contradictions of “Europe” and its antidemocratic and oligarchic turn (Dardot and Laval 2019: 14). The downfall of popular anti-austerity politics, their discrediting under the notion of “populism,” meant that the specific (neoliberal) context of normalization that ND pursues has “no alternative” and is to be consented to by all citizens as a common horizon

for the country's future (Stavrakakis and Galanopoulos 2019: 182).

Mitsotakis's profile has been publicly cultivated through notions of merit. Generally represented as a self-made, successful, man of excellence (the holder of Greece's "best CV"), Mitsotakis supposedly outshines his main rival, Alexis Tsipras. Tsipras's working-class background, his personal life choices, his insufficient mastery of the English language, his Greek public university educational background, his stylistic choices, and his youth activism have all been constantly reprimanded by liberal media since his rise to the Syriza leadership in 2008. Tsipras has thus been publicly caricatured as a villain, a populist opportunist unworthy of representing Greece.

As PM, Mitsotakis continues to enjoy a positive framing by the mass media, presented as a gifted leader. This is further supplemented by the regular sensualistic media coverage of his and his family members' lifestyles. Mitsotakis, however, remains the beneficiary of a powerful political family and the son of a former PM, Kostantinos Mitsotakis, who also headed the ND. Mitsotakis (Jr) has often responded to such obvious forms of critique in the following way:

I have received a lot of critique for my name. I am perhaps the most wronged offspring of all political families, the one who had to work more to prove what he really deserves. I accept that. Beyond that, I ask citizens to judge me for my views, my CV, and my abilities. I know that the political symbolism of someone considered as "self-made" may be strong. I can't resist that, because I can't change who I am. I had to work twice as hard in my life to prove what I really deserve. (Kourdisto Portokali 2020)

Here, Mitsotakis's name appears to be more of a burden rather than a blessing. The myth of the self-made, successful individual is a standard, self-confirming popular bourgeois myth that legitimizes and reproduces upper-class privilege and entitlement (Skeggs 2003: 35). By focusing on individual qualities and efforts alone, Mitsotakis's self-branding strategy obscures class divisions and legitimizes inherited privilege, although achievement is nowadays (in times marked by of low social mobility) more associated with family background than with personal effort (Littler 2018: 9). It is worth noting that, besides his father, Mitsotakis's sister Dora Bakoyanni is also an ND politician, while her son, Kostas Bakoyannis (Mitsotakis's nephew), currently serves as the Mayor of Athens (a position also previously held by his mother, Dora) under an ND-supported candidacy.

Mitsotakis's sense of personal excellence can also be associated with the culture cultivated in the business schools of upper-class

universities like Harvard (where he studied) or in the finance industry, which reproduce and publicly legitimize the “mediocre but arrogant” (Parker 2018) attitude, and the ideology of upper-class superiority and distinction (Ho 2009). Conservatives do not see merit or privilege as negative, *per se*; Robin (2017: 161) argues that Hayek too saw inherited privilege to be crucial for society’s leaders. In a televised discussion with the liberal philosopher Stelios Ramfos, Mitsotakis stated among other things that “we are not all the same; and we will never become equal [...] Equality or freedom [...] what a liberal party should say is, ‘equal opportunities to all but not equalization’,” iterating the conservative division between “freedom” and “equality” ((Ibid: 159): 159). Privilege thus becomes naturalized and even “democratized” (Ibid: 191). It is interesting to add that for Fraser (2019: 13), the replacement of equality with meritocracy is part of the progressive neoliberal repertoire, to assimilate popular demands and sensibilities of social justice through competition and individualism.

## **5. Institutional Dimensions; Crisis, Restructuring, Class Struggle**

The state is a relatively autonomous apparatus that functions by organizing different national social classes into a power block under the hegemony of one class fraction (Jessop 1985: 109). For Poulantzas (2014), hegemony is not only achieved through the mechanisms of ideology and repression, but also through positive interventions that sustain the consensus of the popular masses (Jessop 1985: 116). Although the state is generally not fully determined by the economy, in the neoliberal context the “economic functions occupy the dominant place within the state” and the totality of the operations of the state are organized in relation to its economic role” (Ibid: 168). Furthermore, within a global capitalist framework, transnational institutions like the EU emerge as a state project (Sandbeck and Schneider 2014: 863) to integrate the different national economies into the transnational capitalist framework, something that occurs in a contradictory manner through uneven and combined development.

Neoliberal reforms reflect the state’s efforts to restructure and reproduce the capitalist relations of production. As the liberal state is mainly responsive to the demands of the capitalist class, the institutions that empower the lower classes are severely weakened. In this instance, the law misses the universalistic status it bears in the liberal democratic pretext because it becomes rather particular-

ized. Capitalism's long-term crisis fuses the legislative, the juridical, and the executive branches of the state, with the executive to assume more power than the other two, and with the development of parallel networks of power, "cross-cutting the formal organization of the state and holding a decisive share in its various activities" (Jessop 1985: 98). The power to formulate norms and rules moves to the executive and the state administration, bypassing democratic processes and institutions (Ibid: 865). Further, the ruling political party structure subordinates the state administration to the summits of the executive, ensuring the administration's political loyalty (Poulantzas 2014: 233).

Drawing on Poulantzas, Stathis Kouvélakis (2018) frames the transformations of the Greek state during the Greek crisis as peripheral authoritarian neoliberalism. The contributing factors of this process include the debt-led economic growth model advancing through austerity, the passing from a tax state to a fiscal consolidation state (Streeck 2016). Here the state legitimizes itself through the international financial markets and the rise of authoritarian statism, where the asymmetrical relations of dependency are internalized, leading to the concentration of power by top layers of state bureaucracy at the expense of representative bodies (such as political parties). State power at this juncture relies less on "bureaucratized mass civic participation," but on a combination of citizens' passivity and selective repression (Kouvélakis 2018: 3).

Others (e.g., Sandbeck and Schneider 2014) working on the same principles, emphasize the formation of transnational political institutions, like the EU, which they understand as transnational state formations. Over the last ten years, Greece's reforms policy framework has been dictated and supervised by the EU, with the Greek state assuming an executive role. Greek decision-making processes are relocated to specific top branches of the government, and to the EMU's apparatuses, such as the ECB, which is insulated from democratic contestation (Sandbeck and Schneider 2019: 154). Therefore, this form of neoliberal authoritarianism, described by Sune Sandbeck and Etienne Schneider (2019: 139) as "transnational authoritarian statism," depoliticizes the (neoliberal) policy reforms framework from a technocratic perspective and marginalizes resistances. The state (in its transnational or national form), however, is both strengthened and weakened because it openly intervenes in favor of specific fractions of capital to antagonize working-class interests and popular forces (Sandbeck and Schneider 2014: 866), risking a broad societal consensus over the legitimacy of the state and its policies being sustained.

The policies and laws developed and voted by the ND's administration up to the point of writing (October 2020) are connected to such state transformations, overall applying the EU's ordoliberal<sup>9</sup> reform imperatives (Streeck 2016). One of the first laws that ND passed was on the "Executive State" (4622/2019), binding the Greek state executive apparatus to the EU executive apparatus, and the EU's restructuring demands for the further integration of Greece to the Eurozone and EU capitalism. ND has been supporting the EU's ordoliberal agenda in order to achieve fiscal discipline, low inflation rates, high primary surpluses, the development of competitiveness, and foreign investment. Greece's main peripheral/comprador bourgeoisie branches support these agendas as they are tied to the core EU/USA bourgeoisies' strategic interests (Sandbeck and Schneider 2014: 858).

In the neoliberal restructuring context, the law formulates new capitalist accumulation regimes. In what may resemble the first months of Viktor Orbán's administration, ND is developing and passing multiple laws in a short period of time.<sup>10</sup> The ND administration has passed a series of laws associated with privatizing, appropriating, and commodifying public, as well as private, entities and resources, policing protests, deregulating labor, and intensifying exploitation, budget cuts, and the reforming of educational, pension, and welfare systems, all the while probing toward individualistic "alternatives." The environmental law, the educational law, and the law for the regulation of public demonstrations are all examples of the abovementioned points. All these laws received considerable critique and contestation in Greece. During the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, ND passed a new environmental bill (4685/2020).<sup>11</sup> This law was branded as a "green" growth policy framework, in line with the EU's regulations and realities. By aiming at easing environmental licensing, the specific law lifts important environmental protection laws in favor of economic ventures, without adequate public deliberation on the matter, despite the massive outcry expressed

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<sup>9</sup>"Ordoliberalism" describes the German branch of neoliberalism, which strives for an "economic constitution" supported by a strong interventionist state defending the "free market" structure (Dardot and Laval, 2019: 40); Slobodian (2018: 151) discusses the emergence of an ordoliberalist institutional framework protecting the free market on a global level.

<sup>10</sup>As Farby (2019: 175) emphasizes, "in order to further cement its power, Fidesz-KDNP MPs passed an incredible 363 new laws between May 2010 and December 2011 – about one new law for every two working days."

<sup>11</sup>The law can be found here: <https://www.climate-laws.org/geographies/greece/laws/law-4685-2020-on-the-reform-of-the-environmental-legislation-and-the-renewable-energy-sources-licensing-process>

by the Left oppositional parties, environmental organizations, civil society groups, NGOs, local authorities, and universities (Smith 2020). The state here uses public property as an asset that the local and international capitalist class can valorize, “integrating once marginal spheres in the space of reproduction and accumulation of capital” (Poulantzas 2014: 213). Concurrently, the specific law creates new possibilities of accumulation for the extractivist and “green capitalist” sectors, as well as to other economic ventures like tourism. This “green branding” of economic restructuring and the commodification of public entities are important dimensions of today’s progressivist neoliberalism, and is connected with ideas around the “green economy” and “sustainable development” (Wanner 2015: 29). These features are meant to marginalize protests and oppositional voices as “outdated” and achieve broad consensus for the bill. This is supposed to make two ends meet: capitalist growth and environmental protection, which is an impossible case (Malm 2018: 230). Simultaneously, citizens’ protests against the destruction of nature by private investments have been met by both legal persecution and police repression.

As Greece maintains one of the highest public order and safety expenditure rates in the EU (2.1% of GDP for 2018 [Eurostat 2020]), the ND’s rise to power was accompanied by escalating policing practices as well as police repression against targeted groups, mainly leftist ones. Exarcheia, a historical quarter of central Athens that is the landmark of Greek leftist, anarchist, and countercultural politics and movements, became the symbolic epicenter of ND’s law-and-order agenda. Likewise, a relevant law (4703/2020) was voted in that aimed at restricting protest activities, although articles of the particular law have been defined as anti-constitutional (Tvxs.gr 2020).

ND’s educational law (4692/2020) combines neoliberal and conservative educational aspirations. On the one hand, it corresponds to the changes of the labor market brought by the competitive and reflexive demands of capitalist restructuring,<sup>12</sup> linked with the connection between the university and industry, life-long learning programs, and the development of skills through technical education. On the other, it initiates various disciplinary and potentially exclusionary measures under a meritocratic pretext and entails nationalist and religious objectives. Furthermore, this law is also

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<sup>12</sup>Further details of the logics and the imperatives of the current Greek policy reforms can be found at the EC and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports on Greece’s economy: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-27\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-27_en) and <https://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/Greece-2020-OECD-economic-survey-Overview.pdf>.

connected with budget cuts and privatization processes, as it commodifies public education programs and upgrades the legal status of private colleges. Lastly, the 4692/2020 law is also connected to labor deregulation aims. Students are to be educated according to the “meritocratic,” competitive, and “depoliticized” logics of the market and educators are to work according to private economy requirements. Hence, law and ideology formulate the reforms’ framework, sustaining the class structure and undermining the political power of the popular classes.

## 6. Conclusions: What a Carve Up!<sup>13</sup>

New Democracy, a party of the Greek bourgeois establishment, challenged by the class struggles of the 2010s, returned to power in 2019. ND seized Syriza’s programmatic defeat and its succumbing to neoliberal austerity. Through combining technocratic with conservative and Far-Right policy aspirations, Kyriakos Mitsotakis’s ND has been able to address a broad pool of citizens from the center to the Far Right and to create a hegemonic power block. The ND administration’s legitimacy and the attainment of class consensus are based less on positive policies for the popular classes and more on ideological features (nationalism, meritocracy, anti-leftism, development, Europeanism), and repressive practices. The ND administration unfolds an executive form of governance, which reflects neoliberal authoritarian trajectories as they occur elsewhere. This represents “the new form of bourgeois republic in the current phase of capitalism” (Poulantzas 2014: 209), bearing the traits of illiberalism and Far-Right mainstreaming.

Nevertheless, the ND’s economic reforms are failing to meet their declared goals of “growth/development,” “normality,” “meritocracy”; the Greek national debt is on the rise (at 176% in relation to the Greek gross national product [GDP] for 2019 [Statista 2020]), capitalist growth is not achieved (-9.7% for 2020),<sup>14</sup> unemployment is escalating (to 20% in 2020),<sup>15</sup> and so is poverty (with the relative poverty rate at 31.8% for 2018,<sup>16</sup> and the official in-work poverty

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<sup>13</sup>Title of a satirical novel on Thatcherism by Jonathan Coe (1994).

<sup>14</sup>The EC report on Greece’s 2020 growth prospects, worsened by the Covid-19 Pandemic, were grim: [https://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/forecasts/2020/spring/ecfin\\_forecast\\_spring\\_2020\\_e1\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/forecasts/2020/spring/ecfin_forecast_spring_2020_e1_en.pdf)

<sup>15</sup>This data comes from the May 2020, EC transparency report on Greece: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2020/EN/COM-2020-529-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

<sup>16</sup>The data is retrieved from the European Antipoverty Network: <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EAPN-PW2019-Greece-EN-EAPN-4494.pdf>



rate at 12.8% for 2017 [European Social Policy Network 2019]), while inequality (with 10% of the population owning the 42% of the country's wealth [Keep Talking Greece 2020]), nepotism and cronyism are also high and potentially on the rise, amidst the exceptional contexts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Pauperization, injustice, insecurity, and the authoritarian advances of the state, produce popular discontent that can possibly challenge and erode ND's hegemony, if politicized. Nevertheless, the effective challenging of the EU's power structures, and of transnational capitalism itself, is a much more demanding, yet crucial, political task.

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