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The Political Discourse of Golden Dawn, 2009-2015 Systemicity and Antisystemicity

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Summary:

This paper deals with the phenomenon of right-wing extremism and focuses on the examination of systemic and anti-systemic elements in the political discourse of the Greek far-right party Golden Dawn. More specifically, the research question this paper addresses is: under what conditions the political discourse of right-wing parties changes. Although several researchers maintain that the political discourse of right-wing parties remains stable through time, others support the view that the entrance of these parties into Parliament signals a change in their rhetoric, which tends to a movement towards the center. My hypothesis is that the political discourse of right-wing extremist parties changes on becoming actively involved in the political system. To test my hypothesis, I used methodological tools that rely on quantitative content analysis, and, more specifically, on the creation of a codified framework that is based on material extracted from a variety of contexts in which the party's political discourse is expressed. Focusing on a quantitative analysis of empirical data (statistical analysis), this paper attempts to trace qualitative variation and possible rifts in right-wing radical political discourse.

Key Words:

Right-wing radicalism, systemicity, antisystemicity, variation

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Introduction[2]

Right-wing radicalism may be defined as an attempt to forestall or thwart modernization by means of criteria of inclusion or exclusion from the community.[3] In that light, the notion of social homogeneity is pivotal for right-wing thinking, where he nation functions as a primary *"group of us"*.[4] This is a political ideology which opposes liberal democracy and pluralism, and the principles of individualism and universality.[5] On the basis of the fixed parameter of the "group of us" and the accompanying imperative for national homogeneity, we may distinguish between four different categories of right-wing political powers. 1. The Extremist Right (fascist, authoritarian, with elements of racism and xenophobia), 2. The Nationalist Right (racist and xenophobic), 3. The Populist Right (with a forceful, charismatic leader and a vague agenda), 4. The Religious-fundamentalist Right (with elements of xenophobia).[6]

Right-wing extremism [7] is an issue throughout Europe and is not limited to the south European states which register the pervasive effects of the current financial crisis at political-economic and a social

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[2] This essay is the summary form of a more extended academic work.

[3] Ralf Melzer & Sebastian Serafin (ed.) (2014) *Right-wing Extremism in Europe*, [Trans: Elisa Papadaki] Polis publishing. According to Michael Minkenberg and Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. p. 17.

[4] Ibid., p. 17.

[5] As has been astutely observed, this is a political ideology which revolves around the myth of a homogeneous nation. Ibid., p. 17.

[6] Ibid., pp. 19 and 21.

[7] According to Mudde Cas there are "fundamental differences" across the whole of Europe, between right-wing extremists (refusing the essence of democracy) and populist radicals of the Right (democratic if only in name) Georgiadou Vasiliki, Greece. *From the National Alignment to Golden Dawn. Right-wing populism and extremism in Greece during the crisis* in Ralf Melzer & Sebastian Serafin (eds.) (2014) *Right-wing Extremism in Europe*, Eliza Papadakis (trans.) Athens: Polis, 2014 p. 83 and Mudde Cas, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.31.

level. It may be said on the basis of recent developments, that the European Far Right is a steadily spreading phenomenon with a number of epicenters both in Central and Eastern Europe [8] and in many Western and Southern European countries.

Specifically in Greece, the road for the entry of Golden Dawn [9] party into parliament, was paved by the economic crisis, the corruption of the political party system and the ensuing consequences of those events as they interacted with a preexisting, diffuse substratum of nationalism in Greek politics. At all events, a critical analysis of the phenomenon of right wing extremism is deemed necessary to the extent that it appears to constitute an especially prominent challenge for European democracies.

This paper seeks to answer the following question: how can the variations in the political discourse of Golden Dawn be explained over time? A characteristic example of this variation can be seen if we compare the two following quotations, which come from speeches of Mr. Mihaloliakos, Leader of Golden Dawn, before and after his party entered Parliament:

We are living in a state of utter terrorism, as these professional liars and capitalists of the New Democracy party have condemned us to live within a totally decayed and failed political system. Syriza, Pasok, and New Democracy are all the same corrupt sycophants, who pretend that they defend democracy but are guilty of killing it (2012).

The responsibility of Samaras and Venizelos, as well as of all those who governed Greece all these years, is huge and the Greek people know that. Those in Europe who decided to enforce capital controls harmed not only the government of Alexis Tsipras, but also the whole Greek nation (2015).

My analysis is divided into three levels: in the first level, I count the number of times each variable is referred to (quantitative approach); in the second and third levels, I record the value sign (positive, negative, neutral, contradictory) and the intensity (charged or not charged) that characterizes references to each variable (qualitative approach). Through this process, I examine the presence of systemic and/ or anti-systemic elements in the political discourse of right-wing radical parties as well as its variation over time. The fact that Golden Dawn is a right-wing radical party which has attracted a lot of attention, though few have thus far analyzed its presence through a scientific lens, is the primary reason behind my choice to examine its political discourse. My conclusion is that the political discourse of Golden Dawn does not appear to acquire systemic characteristics but does manifest certain qualitative rifts and fluctuations during the time the present research was undertaken (2009-2015).

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[8] Cf. Georgiadou Vasiliki, Greece. *From the National Alignment to the Golden Dawn. Right-wing populism and extremism in Greece during the crisis*, p. 15.

[9] Golden Dawn is the Greek far right party.

Methodology – Research Design

The present study is undertaken as a quantitative content analysis, by means of which the investigation of systemic and anti-systemic features in the political discourse of Golden Dawn over time is attempted. The departure point and main axis of this research has been the examination of the speeches of Golden Dawn's secretary general during the elections of the 2009-2015 period. In the course of the project, it was deemed valuable to include an analysis of all parliamentary speeches by N. Michaloliakos between 2012 -2015. The aim was to render the sample more representative and to comparatively examine political speeches with a diverse aim and context. Accordingly, the political discourse of Golden Dawn was classified in two main analytical groupings: a. In the first, the party's pre-election discourse is to be found, in a variety of communicational formats (newspaper articles, pre-election gatherings, appearances in the Mass Media, first speech in Parliament and first speech at the municipal council, sound recordings of messages, announcements and short campaign messages) b. In the second, are included all of the party leader's speeches in Parliament (exempting unscheduled or very short commentaries). More specifically, all the samples of the party's political speech are analytically treated in chronological order; these also comprise the primary material of the present analysis (44 speeches).

Coding Framework – Variables

The coding of the material was realized by following and transcribing the speeches. The speeches under examination were processed by creating a coding framework wherein are counted: every reference, the value sign it bears and its attendant intensity. In detail:

I. REFERENCE: The repetition of certain subjects was observed in the speeches – references relating to specific subjects which made up the main axis of the speech analysis. A unit of analysis is a recurring dominant subject by which we mean a conceptual unit, which includes one or more interrelated issues. It is appropriate to mention here that this part of the analysis is based on the enumeration of the dominant subjects at the level of reference, i.e. beside each value (dominant subject) a code number is entered stating how many times reference was made in every separate speech. In this framework, based on the analytic aims of this research, the construction was considered appropriate of a series of values (in other words, an index for systemicity-antisystemicity) reference to which or repetition of which is counted in every speech separately, as well as in the total of the speeches examined. These were:

1. Voters 2. Mass Communication Media 3. History 4.Party system 5. Memorandum 6. Scandals 7. Current issues 8. Ideology- Nationalism 9. Illegal migration 10. Racism 11. Persecution of Golden Dawn 12. European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) 13. Clash – overthrow of status quo 14. State of legal justice 15. Law and order 16. Government 17. Foreign policy.
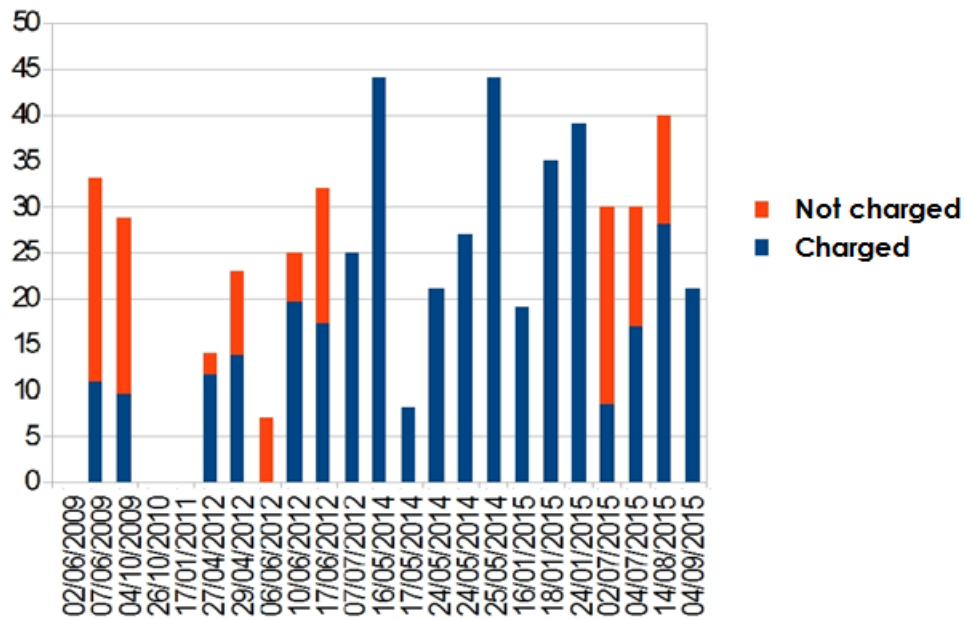
II. VALUE SIGN: Each of the aforementioned values is assigned: (1) when the references are positive; (2) negative; (3) neutral and (4) contradictory. Thus the value sign is determined of the variables being processed. It must be emphasized that the assigning of a value concerns the manner in which every variable is presented by the speaker.

II. INTENSITY: Further grading of each value takes place through the use of symbols: (+) when the reference is charged and (-) when it is not. A reference is taken to be charged when it includes any manner of characterization (ironic, denigrating, moralistic, hyperbolic, exalting), which invests the communication with high affect. Conversely, a reference is registered as not charged when the manner of its framing steers clear of such characterizations in favor of a more technical description, thus not arousing emotions in the listener. A bipolar model is thus created which offers the option of a qualitative analysis of the references being processed. It might be argued that this recording of the two tendencies ignores the intermediate intensities of the speeches under analysis. However, according to the present study, in the discourse of N. Michaloliakos only two distinct and diametrically opposed intensities are located and as such, only two tendencies are measured. Moreover, it is specified that when a referred value is graded with 2 (negative reference) it is not by virtue of that fact negatively charged, and the converse. In other words, a negative reference will not necessarily have a positive (charged) intensity, since every tendency is encountered in questions such as: Does the reference elicit emotions in the recipient? Is the reference traceable to a justification of moral origin? (Charged, +). By contrast, the negative reference (not charged) relates to questions such as: Is the reference built by means of substantiated or technical arguments, is it a merely descriptive relaying of facts? (Not charged, -).
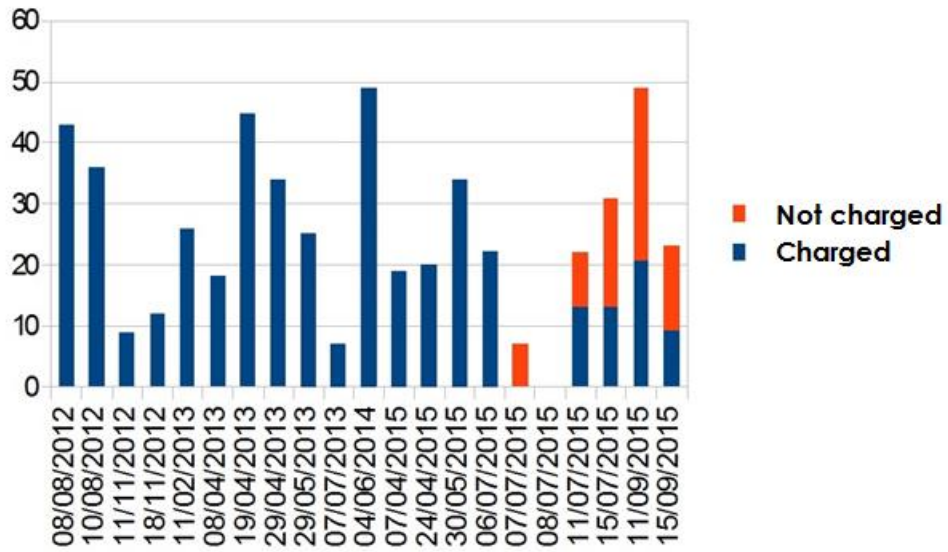
Results

TABLE 1. PARTY SYSTEM - REFERENCES/ INTENSITY [DIAGRAM A] [10]

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[10] A. The political discourse of Golden Dawn at critical points in time – during electoral battles (2009- 2015).

TABLE 2. PARTY SYSTEM – REFERENCES/INTENSITY [DIAGRAM B] [11]

Conclusion

From the examination of all the references, the classification of the political discourse of Golden Dawn in two analytic groupings (tables A and B) presents relatively small deviations and thereby gives us the occasion to analyze the speeches along the temporal axis with no need for further classification. So, by means of the comparison of speeches delivered at critical points in time and during electoral battles on the one hand and, on the other, speeches delivered in Parliament, we affirm the representativeness of the sample and conclude that the Golden Dawn's political speech, due to the small deviations of the comparative results, may be viewed as a unitary, analytic framework.

The values, which the highest percentages of references accrued, also comprise the main political agenda of Golden Dawn. In particular, according to the table of median percentages the values: party system and ideology-nationalism make up the largest part of references in the political discourse of N. Michaloliakos. Next, follow current affairs and the voters, the memorandum and the EU-International Monetary Fund, while the agenda of dominant subjects concludes with the values of the mass media and history respectively. It must be noted here that for the determination of the dominant themes a threshold of 5% was established and with that criterion, all the percentages of the aforementioned values exceed the given limit. The smallest percentages belong to the values of foreign policy and scandals, and the rest of the values are accessed equally with the previous levels. By means of a comparative examination of the values found in tables B and A, we see that the party system and ideology-nationalism make up the two central axes of the political discourse of the Head of Golden Dawn. Regarding the differences that can be observed, it may be said that N. Michaloliakos increases his references to the voters and the mass media when he is speaking outside of Parliament; In the speeches inside Parliament, their place is taken up by the values of current affairs, history and the memorandum correspondingly (values which do not exceed the 5% threshold in the first analytic group).

Every reference bears a value sign by means of which it can be further classified into subdivisions of analytic groups. As can be observed in the total of the values under examination, values such as the voters (a populist trait in Golden Dawn ideology), history and ideology-nationalism, draw most of the positive references and comprise the "We" group of Godden Dawn. In the light of this reasoning, the remaining values are defined in terms of opposition and bear mainly a negative value sign, comprising the group of "the others", with most typical examples the values of the mass media, the party system, illegal migration, the memorandum, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. At all events, we mustn't disregard the existence of certain references with neutral value sign. The presence of this value sign is mainly evident before the party's entry in Parliament and after the middle of 2015.

Finally, at the third level of analysis of Golden Dawn's political discourse the intensity of the aforementioned values is investigated. That is to say, on the basis of the classification of the two polar tensions that we have applied, the intensity of N. Michaloliakos' speech is classified as charged or not

charged. Out of the total, the greatest part of the speech giver's references appear charged, even though non-charged references also do occur at specific points in time. Placing the total of the references on a temporal axis, we see that the discourse of Golden Dawn's leader could be analyzed at three different time stages: the first concerns the period 2009-2012, the second 2012 until the middle of 2015 and the third starts after the middle of 2015. More precisely, during the first stage (2009-2012) the party's rhetoric is presented prior to its entry in Parliament, which is characterized by increased percentages of non-charged references. During the second stage (2012-2015), i.e. with the party's entry in Parliament, a vertical rise can be observed in the percentage of charged references. In the third stage, beginning July 2015, the percentages of charged and non-charged references are evenly distributed. It is to be noted that, while the two first stages belong to distinct temporal stages, the third stage is in progress and, as such, could not constitute a third, self-contained developmental stage.

The existence of a large crisis is the starting point of a sequence of interrelated rifts in the direction of the political system. The lack of trust towards political institutions, the dealignment-disenfranchisement within the party, the attendant punitive aspect of the vote and the desire to renew political leaderships are only some of the rifts that led to the appearance of polarized party pluralism.[12] Thus viewed, parties emerge and develop within the political system under consideration, which exert criticism on all directions of that system. With political discourse as a vehicle and through the perverting of concepts, the justified critique of specific persons, decisions and practices, devolves into the generalized and unsubstantiated critique of "all against all" *on which was built the identification of the entire anti-establishment strategy of Golden Dawn.*[13] This manner of homogenization and the launch of extensive criticism diffuse the ascribing of responsibilities and, in truth, contributes to their minimization. The political speech of Golden Dawn is inseparable from a dichotomous line reasoning by which the "We" group is identified with the politically incorruptible, [14] while the group of the "others" with the so-called establishment. As professor S. Kalyvas characteristically points out: *essentially, the bipolarity "memorandum– antimemorandum" is built on the corresponding opposition of "system-antisystem" where in the former, are included those people and mentalities that are supposedly responsible for the country's bankruptcy and in the latter, the politically incorruptible persons and the healthy points of view and ways of thinking.* In that sense, Golden Dawn attempts to ensconce itself as the system's official prosecutor, as it were, while constantly reinforcing its base of legitimacy, as expressed through its electoral power. Nevertheless, in time or, more correctly, at certain points in time, a relaxing can be observed of this extreme antisystemic critique, through ruptures of systematicity.[15] These ruptures in the rhetoric of Golden Dawn could possibly be considered circumstantial or could even lead to a gradual shift of the party's extreme positions towards the center.[16] At all events, the examination of the political

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[12] *In sum, the basic idea conveyed by the model that applies to the systems that I call extreme and polarized pluralism is, first, that the leverage acquired by a center pole discourages, and actually impedes, centrality; and, second, that the extreme parties of such systems prosper on more, not on less, polarization.* Cf. Sartori Giovanni, *Parties and Party Systems*: A Framework for Analysis, *p*. 121 and p. 312.

[13] Kalyvas Stahtis N., *Systemics, Antisystemics and Hypocrites*, newspaper Kathimerini, 7.10.2014, available at http://www.kathimerini.gr/754097/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/systhmikoi-antisysthmikoi-kai-ypokrites [accessed on: 07.10.2015].

[14] Ibid., *As is obvious, never having been a part of "the system" does not suffice to render your critique valid.*

[15] See Kalyvas Stathis, *Systemics,Antisystemis and Hypocrites.*

[16] Sartori Giovanni, *Parties and Party Systems*: A Framework for Analysis, pp. 122-123.

discourse of Golden Dawn, which is merged within an antisystemic strategy,[17] presupposes the concise delineation of the concept of "establishment". [18]

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[17] It is useful to distinguish, to begin with, between a broad and a strict definition of 'anti-system'. Over time the degree and the intensity of an 'anti-attitude' are bound to vary. Ibid., 117.

[18]*What exactly is the "establishment"? Greek politicians, institutions, the parliamentary system, capitalism? This conceptual confounding is dangerous [...] those who are crying out for a "complete dismantling of the establishment" who merely wish to replace it*. See Kalyvas Stathis, *Systemis, Antisystemics and Hypocrites*.

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