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ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗΣ & ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ  
HELLENIC FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN & FOREIGN POLICY

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# **Civil Society in Greece in the Wake of the Economic Crisis**

Athens, May 2014

A report submitted to the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Office in Athens and written with research assistance by the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)

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## Executive Summary

In the past, before the economic crisis, Greek civil society was underdeveloped vis-à-vis political parties and the state. The roots of its underdevelopment lied in the domination of civil society by political parties which operated party-led factions in major associations, such as labour unions and student unions, as well as in the patronage-based funding of associations and NGOs by Greek ministries. The underdevelopment of civil society was also owed to the strong bonds and trust shown among members of Greek families, which dampened chances of trusting non-relatives. Only some sectors of civil society, representing the interests of liberal professions and public sector employees, were developed.

After the crisis erupted, many social solidarity groups emerged in a spontaneous, informal fashion. In a manner reminiscent of Greece's large informal economy, collective actors preferred to sidestep official channels of registration with state authorities and create self-help groups and loose networks providing social assistance to vulnerable groups. In the meantime, in 2010-2013, traditional political parties, accused for mismanaging the state and the economy, lost their hold on civil society. This development opened up space for civil society protest, and large groups of citizens demonstrated peacefully, signed petitions and formulated alternative economic policy proposals, resisting higher taxation and spending cuts.

The economic crisis also provoked a type of civic activism which has not always been beneficial for democracy and which included physical attacks against politicians, occupations of government buildings, barricades in villages, frequent disruption of urban life, attacks by racist groups against migrants, and the sporadic destruction of public and private property by small radical groups.

Even though this type of civil society mobilization tested the limits of liberal democracy, overall in 2010-2013 there was a revitalization of civil society which enriched democratic life in Greece.

## Introduction

While debates on today's Greece often refer to the causes and effects of the crisis, a rarely asked question is where one may find the civil society amidst the economic crisis and the political dislocations that started in 2010. What was civil society's response to the crisis and what were the different forms which civic activism took? In which way did citizens exercise their collective rights? Did civil society limit itself to protests to government's austerity policies and how did civil society respond to the Greek's state's withdrawal from the welfare sector, owing to abrupt fiscal consolidation? Finally, were the different responses of civil society to the crisis compatible with liberal democracy or were there any responses which bordered on anti-democratic political mobilization?

Normally, civil society is closely related to the enhancement of democratic life, when for instance, citizens mobilize to collectively demand a change in state policies or when voluntary associations emerge and offer welfare services to the vulnerable groups hit by the economic crisis. Civic associations help democratic government become stable and efficient and promote social collaboration. In short, civil society makes democracy work.<sup>1</sup>

A robust civil society is required if a democracy shall function in an accountable, transparent and effective way.<sup>2</sup> 'Democracy' is understood here as a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal democracy, equipped with individual and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the relevant academic literature, see Larry Diamond, "Civil Society and the Development of Democracy", Working Paper 1997/101, Madrid: Instituto Juan March, 1997, available at [http://www.march.es/ceacs/publicaciones/working/archivos/1997\\_101.pdf](http://www.march.es/ceacs/publicaciones/working/archivos/1997_101.pdf) (accessed on 19.03.2013).

collective rights, political parties and elections as well as social interests evolving in a pluralist setting.

There may be however an aspect of civil society which is reminiscent of what John Keane, Lawrence Whitehead, Peter Kopecky and Cass Mudde, among others, have called the “uncivil society”.<sup>3</sup> The latter consists of groups which, in contrast to civil society’s values, fight rather than promote pluralism and diversity. Usually, these groups resort to violence to reach their objectives. Moreover, these groups may identify with the Left or the Right and may even violate human rights in order to implement what they believe is a higher-order cause (e.g. an ethnically homogeneous society, a stateless egalitarian society, etc.).

Indeed, as shown by Sheri Berman, in inter-war Germany civil society’s associationism was not associated with a well-functioning democracy. The Nazi party recruited activists from civic associations, political participation was gradually obstructed and civil society drew citizens away from parties, thus contributing to their weakening. Political institutions were unable to manage the mounting pressure from society. Under conditions of weakened political institutions, as the breakdown of the Weimar Republic in 1933 shows, the mobilization of civil society may not lead to more democracy, but to less democracy.<sup>4</sup>

One need not claim that contemporary Greece is comparable to Weimar Germany, in order to notice alarming phenomena which in 2010-2013 included physical attacks against politicians and barricades in villages that rejected policies affecting their area; frequent and often prolonged strikes, particularly by narrow social interests, such as pharmacists and owners of taxis and trucks who fought viciously to keep the access to

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3 John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998 and Lawrence Whitehead, “Bowling in the Bronx: The Uncivil Interstices Between Civil and Political Society”, *Democratization*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1997, pp. 94-114. Peter Kopecky and Cass Mudde, eds., *Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe*, London: Routledge, 2003.

4 Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic”, *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1997, pp. 401-429.

their professions firmly closed; frequent occupations, disrupting the functioning of ministries, state universities, public transportation, ports and national highways; attacks by racist groups against migrants; and the destruction of property by small anarchist groups.

This report discusses these issues, starting with an analysis of civil society and democracy after the 1974 transition from authoritarian rule in Greece. It proceeds to discuss the paradox of a weak civil society amidst a flourishing democracy and focuses on weak and state-dependent civil society organisations and anaemic voluntarism.

Then the report shifts to the transformations of the Greek civil society in the 2000s and analyses examples of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and networks, providing food, clothes, shelter, health care and education, as well as examples of social protests which have shaken the political system. Such protests include rallies organised by labour unions, professional associations and newly emerging social movements. The last section of the report elaborates on the challenges Greek civil society faces today.

The paper concludes that the awakening of civil society in Greece may be a mixed blessing. The legitimisation, visibility and usefulness of NGOs and informal networks have grown. However, social movements and professional associations may have not become more autonomous from the government and political parties than in the past. Moreover, the democratic credentials of some civil society associations or networks which emerged in 2010-2013 are doubtful.

### *Civil society and parliamentary democracy in Greece after 1974*

‘Civil society’ is often equated with the sum total of NGOs or with the ‘third sector’, as distinguished from the government and the private, profit-oriented sector. More concretely, civil society includes a vast array of professional associations and trade unions, charitable or religious associations, NGOs, non-profit organisations (such as public benefit

foundations and think tanks), social movements, informal community groups and networks.<sup>5</sup>

However, as social reactions to the on-going crisis in Greece have indicated, a wider definition would be more useful. After Greece's first bailout (May 2010), a host of civil society initiatives sprang in Athens, Thessaloniki, Volos, Katerini and other Greek cities. Such initiatives included protest movements, solidarity networks and self-help groups. All those did not appear as new formal, registered organisations but as loose circles of neighbours and peers, often sharing the same dire circumstances, like unemployment or loss of income.

In a democratic setting, it is important for the civil society to enjoy autonomy from the government and political parties in order to counter-balance the state. If civil society is suppressed, democratic procedures can become formalities as citizens' participation may be limited to participation in elections. A weak civil society which is not able to defend public goods (e.g. the environment, the freedom of expression) is associated with a low quality democracy.<sup>6</sup> In such a democracy, citizens lack a 'voice', recognisable by the authorities, and do not realise their full potential as participants in democratic life. The example of post-authoritarian Greece may illustrate this point.

In 1974-2012 in Greece the electoral system favoured the formation of stable, single majority governments. In contrast to other democracies of the 'third wave of democratisation', such as new democracies in Latin America and the Balkans, in Greece the conduct and results of elections were not disputed, while transitional justice was administered quite smoothly after the fall of the Colonels' regime. Political institutions, re-established after the seven-year long military rule (1967-1974),

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5 For a survey of different approaches to 'civil society', see John A. Hall and Frank Trentman, *Civil Society: A Reader in History, Theory and Global Politics*, London: Macmillan, 2005.

6 Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, "The Quality of Democracy. An Overview", *Journal of Democracy*, 2004, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 14-25.

accommodated open, albeit very polarized, competition among political parties.

However, only a few segments of civil society, consisting of well organised professions and occupations, grew, while the majority of other segments, including NGOs, informal networks and social movements besides the student and labour movement remained underdeveloped. The reason for civil society's underdevelopment lied in the early emergence of strong party organizations, which just after the democratic transition created their own factions.

Examples were the party-led factions within the labour movement, the civil service, the personnel of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the student movement and even the women's movement. As a result, parties were present in every single sector of civil society, stifling any autonomous collective action.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the central government also intervened by subsidising the functioning of selected NGOs, as ministers had a free hand in distributing funds to associations of their electoral district in a typical patronage fashion.

Such underdevelopment had a negative impact on the quality of democracy, particularly with regard to accountability, transparency and representation. There were very few checks and balances on the democratically elected government, which heavily influenced the functioning of the parliament, the justice system and the public sector, including the central public administration and the SOEs. There was no civil society control of political corruption. Successive governments took the interests of professional associations and public sector unions into account to a disproportionate extent - at the expense of the less well represented interests of large categories of the population, such as private sector workers, women, the young and the unemployed.

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7 George Th. Mavrogordatos, *In Between Pityokampes and Procrustes: Professional Associations in Today's Greece*, Athens, Odysseus editions, 1988 (in Greek).

## *State-civil society relations after the 1974 transition to democracy*

The Greek system of interest representation resembles a corporatist one, with a nationwide peak association (a ‘confederation’) for private sector workers and employees of SOEs (the GSEE confederation) as well as a second nationwide peak association for civil servants (the ADEDY confederation). These two confederations have high organisational density and represent permanent workers (the ‘insiders’). The two confederations are to a large extent funded by the Ministry of Labour and not by membership fees. The decision-making bodies of the confederations are internally divided along political party lines, reflecting the dividing lines in the Greek parliament. Factions of the conservative party of New Democracy (ND) and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) dominate the confederations, in which one of the left parties, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), also participates; the other left party, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), has created its own separate labour ‘front’. Less strong unions, such as unions of fixed-term workers and temporary workers, enjoy a lot less protection of their rights and this is even true for associations of women and migrants.

The Greek civil society operates freely, but civic associations do not attract adequate members or funds, and the state does not consider civic associations to be its natural interlocutors in the policy-making process. For instance, the Ministry of Development has established a formal consultative organ on consumer policy, the 'National Council of Consumers and Market', in which representatives of civil society partake. But this organ is rarely convened. The same happens with the corresponding organ of environmental policy, the 'National Council of Town Planning and Sustainable Development', formally hosted by the Ministry of Environment.<sup>8</sup>

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8 See the protest of WWF-Hellas in November 2011 against the treatment of environmental NGOs by the corresponding ministry in

The weakness of civil society is owed not only to the state-society relations discussed above, but also to internal problems of the Greek NGOs.<sup>9</sup> Although active in various sectors, such as environmental protection, social welfare and the consumer movement, most of NGOs have never become modern formal organisations. They were often loose circles of personal friends and associates and except for a few associations which were annexes of international NGOs (e.g. GreenPeace, Amnesty International), such groups lacked organisational structures and management skills, such as fund-raising and communication capacities. Within such loose circles of activists, decisions were rarely taken in a transparent manner and records of activities were not kept.

Moreover, the reputation of Greek civil society has been tainted by instances of corruption.<sup>10</sup> Corrupted practices have been associated with the emergence of fake civil society organisations, primarily set up by individuals with a business-like rather than a civic mentality. Such entrepreneurs of civil society have forged close relations with state funding agencies, for instance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' designated Agency for International Developmental Cooperation (YDAS), originally set up to distribute humanitarian and development aid to developing countries. Prosecuting authorities have intervened to unravel irregularities in the allocation and management of state funds.<sup>11</sup>

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[http://www.wwf.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=827:t-&catid=70:2008-09-16-12-10-46&Itemid=90](http://www.wwf.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=827:t-&catid=70:2008-09-16-12-10-46&Itemid=90) (accessed on 29.03.2013).

9 See Dimitri A Sotiropoulos and Evika Karamaggioli, "Civil Society in Greece: The Road to Maturity", 2005, available at [http://europe.cidem.org/documents/CSI-SAT\\_Greece\\_Report.pdf](http://europe.cidem.org/documents/CSI-SAT_Greece_Report.pdf), last accessed on 20.01.2013.

10 See extensive press coverage of this issue in <http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=475025> (accessed on 27.03.2013)

11 For a brief account of corruption associated with YDAS, see <http://www.oneearth.gr/cgi-bin/oneearth/pages/3rdpagenew.pl?arcode=120901120841&arcateg=MKO> (accessed on 26.03.2013).

## *Anaemic voluntarism in Greece*

With the exception of the period preceding the 2004 Olympic Games, when 58,000 volunteers worked for the preparation and conduct of the Olympic Games,<sup>12</sup> voluntarism has remained anaemic. While there is no precise estimation of the size of voluntary associations, available surveys show that Greeks normally do not engage in voluntary action. A European Union study, conducted by the Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in 2010, classified Greece among countries such as Italy, Lithuania and Bulgaria, in which less than 10 per cent of the population aged over 15 takes part in voluntary activities, whereas the EU average was 22 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

The European Social Survey has also confirmed that Greece is an outlier with regard to participation in voluntary associations. In the first round of this Survey, conducted in 2003, it was shown that Greeks rarely register in voluntary associations. When they do, they primarily join professional associations and labour unions (5 per cent of the survey's respondents in Greece) rather than charity, cultural, consumer or environmental associations.<sup>14</sup>

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12 See article in *To Vima*, available at <http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=462361>, accessed on 22.01.2013.

13 Page 7 of the published study available at [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf) (last accessed on 08.01.2013).

14 A summary of the results in Greek is available in the leaflet titled "Greece – Europe: Results of the European Social Survey", published in November 2003, EKKE, Athens, [www.ekke.gr/ess](http://www.ekke.gr/ess).

## Four Transformations of Greek Civil Society in the 2000s

The relations of the state and the civil society have changed over time. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the appeal of political parties and labour unions started waning. Political apathy may have dampened the organizational density of parties and unions, but left space for the development of civil society. Sports, environmental protection, education and culture as well as philanthropy were the sectors in which civil society mobilisation grew.

Due to the lack of an official registry of Greek NGOs as well as the informal character of some of the aforementioned activities, it is not possible to offer an accurate picture of the size of the NGO sector in Greece. Estimates of the number of NGOs vary between 800 and 30,000.<sup>15</sup> The Greek Centre for the Promotion of Voluntarism claims to have counted 1,800 active NGOs in 25 different sectors.<sup>16</sup> In the introductory report submitted to the Greek parliament upon the passage of a law in 2011 on social economy and social entrepreneurship (Law 4019/2011), it was stated that there were approximately 1,500 to 2,000 NGOs in Greece. Regardless of their numbers, NGOs helped to transform the landscape of civil society in Greece in the 2000s in four ways:

1) A first transformation which gave impetus to NGOs was the unprecedented rise of migration into Greece. Irregular migrants, i.e., migrants holding false papers or no papers at all, had entered Greece since the early 1990s, after the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe. In the 2000s whole families fled parts of South Asia, the Middle

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15 The first figure comes from the campaign titled 'The Campaign of 800 NGOs' which was organized in the mid-2000s in order to endow NGOs with constitutional guarantees. The latter figure, which is quite improbable, came out of unverified research conducted by a committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

16 See [www.anthropos.gr](http://www.anthropos.gr), last accessed on 22.01.2013.

East and Sub-Saharan Africa because of war and material deprivation. Passing through Turkey, they entered Greece, hoping to be able to move on to other EU Member-States. Gradually they grew in numbers and stayed on in Greece, creating a near-humanitarian crisis.<sup>17</sup>

Even though migrant inflow decreased after 2009, the living conditions of irregular migrants, who are already in Greece, became worse after the onset of the crisis. The state proved to be unable to manage this situation. Therefore, NGOs stepped in to help. Annex organizations of large international NGOs, such as ‘Doctors without Borders’ and ‘Doctors of the World’, took care of migrant children and ill persons. With regard to social care, there were also very active Greek NGOs, such as ‘Klimaka’ (Scale) and ‘Praksis’ (Action); orthodox Church-based NGOs, such as ‘Apostoli’ (Mission), and smaller voluntary associations. There were also some very visible NGOs active in child care, such as ‘Helpida’ (Hope), the ‘Hamogelo tou Paidiou’ (Children’s Smile) and the ‘Diktyo Dikaionaton tou Paidiou’ (Network for Children’s Rights).

In the area of human rights, there were NGOs with frequent presence in the Greek media, such as the Hellenic League of Human Rights, the Minority Groups Research Centre (KEMO), and the Marangopoulos Foundation, and less visible organisations active in the prevention of human trafficking and protection and support of migrants, the Roma and other socially excluded groups.

Some NGOs, like ‘Antigone’ and the Institute for Rights, Equality and Diversity (I-Red), were founded by Greeks, while others such as the Greek Forum of Migrants, by legal migrants. Racist incidents increased after the eruption of the crisis and today these associations seem to be fighting an uphill battle.

2) A second transformation was the increasing sensitivity of Greek society about environmental degradation. In the 2000s, the destruction of

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17 OECD calculates that there were 810,000 foreigners in Greece in 2010, including relatively small numbers of EU nationals.  
[http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/IMO%202012\\_Country%20note%20Greece.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/IMO%202012_Country%20note%20Greece.pdf) , last accessed on 27.03.2013.

forests and the coastline, due to uncontrolled illegal construction, became very visible. Citizens were also alerted by the spread of destructive wild fires, such as those in September 2007 that resulted in the death of 71 people in the Peloponnese.

Today, according to the Greek National Centre for Social Research, there are approximately 300 environmental organisations in Greece.<sup>18</sup> Among them, one finds small voluntary associations and annexes of large international NGOs, such as the WWF and GreenPeace. Most of these NGOs are located in Athens and Thessaloniki. However, some very active environmental organisations are based in small islands, such as in Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea, and mountainous areas, such as Western Macedonia and Epirus.

3) A third transformation was related to the fight against corruption. As their country came to the brink of default in 2010-2013, Greek citizens became aware of the extent of graft among the political elites and the civil service as well as the mismanagement of public funds. The Greek annex of Transparency International (TI) organized public events on corruption, while there emerged ‘watch dog’ groups which constructed websites in order to collect information on cases of political and bureaucratic corruption. Examples were the websites [www.teleiakaipavla.gr](http://www.teleiakaipavla.gr) (‘Once and for all’) and [www.edosafakellaki.gr](http://www.edosafakellaki.gr) (I gave a bribe’).

4) The fourth and last transformation was civil society’s response to the break out of the crisis. Since May 2010, when Greece resorted to the EC, the ECB and the IMF, the social situation in Greece has deteriorated, affecting not only the migrant population, but also the poorest Greeks.<sup>19</sup> Economic downturn was related to changes at the party system and civil society. In the October 2009 parliamentary elections, ND and PASOK, Greece’s major political parties in 1981-2011, had obtained together 77

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18 See <http://www.ekke.gr/estia/>, last accessed on 22.01.2013.

19 The unemployment rate in Greece grew from 8 per cent in 2008 to 26 per cent in 2012. See [http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0101/PressReleases/A0101\\_SJO01\\_DT\\_QQ\\_04\\_2012\\_01\\_F\\_EN.pdf](http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0101/PressReleases/A0101_SJO01_DT_QQ_04_2012_01_F_EN.pdf) (accessed on 27.03.2013)

per cent of the total vote (PASOK 44 per cent, ND 33 per cent). Two and a half years later, in the inconclusive election of May 2012, this combined share dropped to 33 per cent. In the meantime, periodic street demonstrations had shaken Greek cities, while social solidarity groups emerged. In other words, civil society mobilization became possible as citizens realized the failure of these two parties, alternating in power since 1981, to steer the country. This transformation is analysed in the following chapter.

## Focus Chapter:

### The Greek Civil Society in the Wake of the Crisis

#### *Social solidarity through the development of the NGO sector and informal social networks*

In 2010, in the context of drastic fiscal consolidation, the government passed a law which annulled tax exemptions for non-profit organisations, putting the latter in severe financial strain.<sup>20</sup> In August 2012, the government froze all state funds, earmarked for NGOs, through a letter sent by the Deputy Minister of Finance to all Ministries.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, NGOs and informal networks provided social assistance - with the few resources they obtained from municipalities, private sponsors and their members - to the poor, unemployed and homeless people. When such initiatives caught the attention of the mass media, there were higher than expected levels of donations. However, the lack of coordination between the initiatives became obvious in cases where medical help groups and humanitarian NGOs overlapped, tending to the needs of the same groups (e.g., the Roma).

The need for food, clothes and social services was partially met by new, informal networks of solidarity and self-help groups which did not possess an official administrative board or secretariat. Moreover, they were not registered at the First Instance Courts ('protodikeia'), as typical associations are required to. Such groups and networks have emerged either through the new social media or by placing announcements in the local press or in squares of neighbourhoods.

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20 Law 3862/2010.

21 See <http://www.tovima.gr/finance/article/?aid=471593> (accessed on 29.03.2013)

The activities of these groups and networks can be clustered in four categories, presented below in detail:

### *1) Exchanges of food, clothes and services*

After 2010 there were local initiatives which concentrated on the free exchange (rather than buying or selling) of goods and services. Research by Dimitris Bourikos and Myrtia Vellianiti has shown that in 2012, there were at least 22 such social solidarity groups in 17 cities.<sup>22</sup> Typically, people used an empty flat or a warehouse as their meeting point and space to collect goods. Meetings involved not only exchanges, but also cooking together and distributing food.<sup>23</sup> Solidarity and exchange networks appeared in neighbourhoods of Athens and Piraeus, but also in the rest of Greece (e.g. in the cities of Patras, Volos and Corfu, in the islands of Crete, Kalymnos, Lesbos and Euboea, and in the less developed regions of Evrytania and Rodopi).<sup>24</sup> Municipal authorities also mobilised citizens by setting up municipally-based 'social grocery stores'. The mayor made some space available, while citizens and private companies contributed canned food and other consumer goods.<sup>25</sup>

### *2) Provision of food and services to people in need*

The Greek Orthodox Church is prominent among organisations which operate local soup kitchens. The church cannot be counted among typical examples of civil society organisations because its priests are on the state's payroll, while the state monitors ecclesiastical matters through a secretariat within the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Yet, in 2010-2013, the church provided food and clothes to the poor in the

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22 Personal communication with Dimitris Bourikos and Myrtia Vellianiti, Athens, 28.03.2013.

23 For example, an informal organization called 'skoros' (moth), located in Exarcheia, organizes meetings every evening after 18:00 and offers goods and services to participants. See <http://skoros.espiv.net/about>, last accessed on 16.01.2013

24 Information provided by Myrtia Vellianiti and Georgia Gleoudi who conducted relevant research in November – December 2012.

25 Dimitris Bourikos has found that there are 59 social grocery stores in 36 cities. Among those, 15 are located in neighbourhoods of Athens, while 9 in Thessaloniki.

manner NGOs usually do in other countries. The church's soup kitchen in Athens was well known and popular, as was the soup kitchen of the Municipality of Athens.

Similar but smaller scale services were offered by informal groups which either collected food and gave it to NGOs or directly distributed food which was left over at restaurants or households. Examples were the groups 'Mporoume' ('We can'), 'Love Cooking' and 'Desmos ('Tie').<sup>26</sup> The NGO 'Klimaka', provided basic services to the homeless, such as temporary shelters, food, blankets and medicine.<sup>27</sup>

### *3) Provision of health care*

Except for the organisations of doctors which had been active already before the crisis ('Doctors without Borders', 'Doctors of the World'), new health care provision groups emerged after 2010. With the help of municipal authorities, which usually provided the necessary office space, doctors put together collaborative medical practices, where they treated patients for free. These 'social infirmaries' (in Greek, 'koinonika iatreia') emerged between December 2011 and the late months of 2012 and relied on the voluntary work of doctors and nurses. Today, they can be found in several neighbourhoods of Athens and many other cities. As Dimitris Bourikos has shown, there are 33 social infirmaries in 29 cities, seven of them in Athens and four of them in Thessaloniki.<sup>28</sup>

### *4) Community and educational work*

Solidarity groups, offering training to the unemployed and tutorials for pupils, emerged in various cities. Parents' associations and school teachers usually initiated these groups in middle- and working-class neighbourhoods.

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26 See for instance, the website of 'Mporoume', <http://www.boroume.gr/> accessed on 27.03.2013.

27 See <http://klimaka-socialservice.blogspot.gr/> accessed on 26.03.2013.

28 Personal communication with D. Bourikos, Athens, 28.03.2013.

Voluntary initiatives, like the ‘Ginetai’ Workshop (‘It can be done’ Workshop)<sup>29</sup> to offer training in management skills, have therefore emerged. A popular informal group which emerged in the wake of the crisis was the ‘Atenistas’.<sup>30</sup> It first appeared in Athens in 2010 and then spread to another 11 cities. Atenistas is a community-focused network engaged in charity work, cultural events and recycling, combined with maintenance work in run-down streets and squares of Athens. The group, which appeals to the educated urban classes, claims having 50 thousand Facebook supporters.<sup>31</sup>

### *The variety and limits of protest*

Protests in Greece in 2010-2013 indicated that Greek citizens have turned away from political apathy, a growing characteristic of post-authoritarian Greek democracy since the late 1980s. The crisis resulted in various groups of citizens, affected either by tax increases or salary cuts or both, gathered frequently in the squares of Greek cities in order to peacefully protest against government measures. Already before the parliamentary elections of May and June 2012, in which the country’s two major political parties, ND and PASOK, realized that they had lost the support of the majority of their voters, it was clear that citizens had changed their political preferences. The massive mobilisation of protesters at various moments, e.g. in May 2010, in June 2011 and February 2012, was a clear indication that Greek civil society had woken up. The government and security forces did not intervene in these instances, unless protesters turned violent or attempted to invade the parliament's building in Athens.

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29 See <http://www.slideshare.net/kooboo/the-ginetai-project> accessed on 28.03.2013

30 See <http://atenistas.org/> accessed on 28.03.2013. In other cities the organizations imitating the original one have adopted names such as ‘Thessalonistas’ in Thessaloniki and ‘Patrinistas’ in Patras.

31 Indeed, on the basis of the author’s own field research, it seems that their public events are well attended.

### *The rhetoric of civil society's protest*

Civil society's protest is not a new phenomenon in Greece. Since the 1974 transition to democracy, protests have been fuelled by shifts in income policy as well as the unequal access to public sector jobs and welfare transfers, which were periodically distributed by successive governments on the basis of non-transparent, patronage criteria.

What has changed after the crisis was the rhetoric and scale of civil society's protest. While citizens fought to protect their rights and living standards, they used the traditional populist rhetoric which was now combined with anti-Europeanism. Populism has been diffused in Greece since the early 1980s when the PASOK party first came to power and started inflating the public debt, a tendency followed by the ND party which succeeded it in power in the early 1990s. Since then, the same pattern of promising jobs and social transfers to the people and seeking to finance the relevant policy measures by borrowing funds from abroad has been continued by successive governments. In fact, not only ND and PASOK, but also parties of the Left excelled in the same populist rhetoric.

Already in the beginning of the on-going crisis, populism took the familiar form of simplistic distinctions between the people on the one hand and the Greek and foreign elites on the other hand. Moreover, even though the majority of citizens demonstrated peacefully, in some cases political cynicism and alienation took extreme forms and degenerated into sporadic verbal and even physical attacks against members of the political class, held responsible for Greece's plight.

### *The variety of civil society's protest*

Just after the first rescue package was agreed between Greece and its creditors, social protest became violent. Small groups of protesters passed the border between legitimate democratic mobilization and criminal activity. In May 2010, during the first one in a series of general strikes, three bank employees in Athens lost their lives as demonstrators of an anarchist group torched a bank branch. The fact that no one was

apprehended for this crime confirmed the impression of a very weak state, unable to manage or respond to the social protest.

In the fall of 2010, owners of trucks resisted the socialist government's decision to provide new licences for trucks, thus opening what still is a 'closed shop' profession. They parked their vehicles along major thoroughfares of cities and national highways, causing further deterioration to the already grave daily traffic congestion. In the winter of 2010-2011, public bus drivers, working for state-owned public transport, went on strike for selected days of every single week, resisting the government's decision to transfer more personnel to other SOEs.

Twice, in 2010 and 2011, owners of pharmacies resisted the government's plan to grant licences for new pharmacies in order to open what continues to be another 'closed shop' profession. Pharmacists closed their shops a few days each week, causing the appearance of long lines in front of their shops.

In July and August 2011, taxi owners angrily resisted the government's reversal of its earlier decision in 2010 not to grant any new taxi licences. They used their taxis to block both the circulation in the city centres and the access to ports and airports. In the port of Piraeus, taxi owners even spilled oil on the streets of the port, rendering the asphalt a gliding mirror and effectively preventing coach buses, which carried tourists from cruise ships, from moving at all.

What the aforementioned examples show is that there are interest groups which have transgressed the usual limits of labour disputes, in order to resist any changes in the patronage-based allocation of regulations which govern certain market niches in Greece. The same examples tell us that the state was not only unable to manage a severe economic crisis, but that it had also been reluctant to discuss a new 'social contract' between state authorities and different interest groups; and to manage social protest in ways other than the frequent clashes between special police forces (the MAT) and demonstrators.

In this context, the new feature of civic activity after the onset of the crisis was the emergence of social movements, appealing to different occupational and age groups across-the-board. People organised

themselves in various groups and mobilised against the government not for homogeneous but for very different reasons, which are briefly outlined below.

### *The 'indignant people' movement*<sup>32</sup>

The most visible social movement after the onset of the crisis was the movement of the 'indignant people', gathering in the square in front of the Greek Parliament in 2011. The reasons behind the emergence of this movement lied in the complete loss of confidence in parties, labour unions and the media. As research by Vassiliki Georgiadou has indicated, participants of the 'indignant' movement believed that all other channels of political expression and participation were closed off to them and that the government had stopped listening to the people.<sup>33</sup>

The emergence of protest movements in Spain, labeled 'indignados' in the early months of 2011, against the austerity measures of the Zapatero government, helped to incite a similar movement in Greece. Notably in May 2011, Spanish protesters showed a poster with the sentence 'be quiet, the Greeks are asleep' during one of the protests in Madrid. Soon after, movements of 'indignant citizens' appeared in Athens and Thessaloniki. In Athens, they literally camped in front of the Greek parliament for approximately two months, between late May 2011 and mid-July 2011. Afterwards, their daily protests gradually died out.

The number of participants in the daily protests is difficult to assess, as organizers of the protests and the police gave vastly different estimations: there may have been between 5,000 and 150,000 protesters during demonstrations organised by this movement.<sup>34</sup>

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32 Sergi, Vittorio and Markos Voyatzoglou (2013), "Think globally, act locally? Symbolic memory and global repertoires in the Tunisian uprising and the Greek anti-austerity mobilizations" in Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox, eds., *Understanding European movements*, London: Routledge, pp. 220.

33 See the results of the field research conducted by Vassiliki Georgiadou, which are summarized in a newspaper report available at <http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=467898> (accessed on 29.03.2013).

34 Research conducted in the Greek media by Akis Sakellariou, November 2012.

Participants practiced different forms of direct democracy (general assemblies of all those who were present, local referenda). They favoured direct political participation as the primary form of representation, disputed the labels 'Left' and 'Right' as signposts of the political landscape, rejected the major political parties (ND and PASOK) and even showed tolerance of violence against politicians.<sup>35</sup> The movement fizzled out in the mid-summer of 2011, primarily because of tiredness and lack of a common policy response to the crisis. Despite periodic outbursts of anti-parliamentarism, this movement has left a legacy of innovative participation.

### *The 'Won't Pay' Movement*

Other social movements which actively challenged government policy measures emerged in the winter of 2010-2011 across Greek cities. The most widespread one was the 'Won't Pay' movement which gathered momentum in the autumn of 2010, after the public transportation companies in Athens and Thessaloniki announced increases in the price of bus tickets and the privately-owned companies, maintaining Greece's national highways, did the same with regard to tolls.

To a large extent, this movement was spontaneous, but would have not spread to so many different locations, unless it had not been supported by parties of the opposition, primarily parties of the Left, which rode on the waves of discontent after 2010.

The 'Won't Pay' movement lasted roughly from November 2010 to September 2011. Despite the wide publicity it received from mass media, it was not able to attract wide support. Initially, about 15 per cent of drivers, using national highways, refused to pay the tolls. This percentage share went down to 8 per cent after February 2011. However, many (between 30 and 45 per cent) truck drivers refused to pay, allegedly to support the movement.<sup>36</sup> In practice, this was an opportunity for owners

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35 Research by Vassiliki Georgiadou, mentioned above in footnote 31..

36 Research in the Greek press by Akis Sakellariou, conducted under the guidance of the author of this report, Athens, January-April 2012.

of trucks to lower the costs of running their business. There is no information on the share of passengers who used public transportation without a ticket available, but riding without paying the fare had been popular even before the onset of the crisis. It acquired an anti-government ‘varnish’, after increases in transport fares were announced in the autumn of 2010.

A different kind of ‘Won’t Pay’ movement emerged in September 2011. This movement appeared when the government imposed a new tax on landed property. The tax would be proportional to the size of property owned and would be included in the electricity bills of the DEI (the state-controlled Public Power Corporation).

### *Squatters: protest movements occupying buildings and destroying property*

Although the occupation of buildings was not a new phenomenon, particularly in high schools and universities, it acquired new proportions after the crisis. Public sector employees, protesting against salary cuts, occupied ministries in Athens. Frequent targets of such occupations were the Ministries of Finance, Development, Health and Labour as well as university campuses. The communist-led labour confederation (PAME) periodically attained international publicity by occupying the Acropolis and piers at the port of Piraeus.

While each occupation lasted for very few days, occupations in general lasted roughly for eight months, between February and October 2011 and culminated before the November 2011 government turnover in which the PASOK government of G. Papandreou handed power to a tripartite coalition of PASOK, ND and the right-wing ‘Popular Orthodox Rally’ (LAOS) party, led by the technocrat L. Papademos.

There were also examples of anti-government mobilisation associated with violence. An extreme example was the movement of residents of the Keratea village (to the south east of Athens) who in 2010 and 2011 resisted the installation of a waste management plant in their area. They dug in a deep ditch at the major thoroughfare, passing outside their village, and thus temporarily barred circulation between Athens and the

south east part of the Attica region and also erected barricades to block access to their village. A similar example was the movement of the residents of Skouries village in the Halkidiki prefecture of Northern Greece in 2012-2013. The villagers opposed the installation of a new gold-mining operation by a private company in their area. They erected barricades, blocked access to their village and supported a group which invaded the company's property and torched trucks and machinery.

One cannot interpret party-led sit-ins, occupations of buildings, the erection of barricades and collective damage of state and private property as signs of the revitalization of the civil society during the crisis in Greece. While locally, for instance in certain Ministries, civil service unions mobilised in order to react to salary and pension cuts and may have done so regardless of the political tactics of parties of the opposition, overall this type of social protest probably reflected Greece's very polarised political culture, pitting the Right against the Left.

As a result of the acuteness of this polarisation, which can be traced back to the Greek Civil War, the inflammatory party contests before the breakdown of democracy in 1967 and the almost thirty year long feud between PASOK and ND in 1974-2012, political fights ran out of control. From 2010 to 2012, the rational exchange of arguments was replaced by deleterious personal attacks, the spread of false accusations, the diffusion of misinformation on the opponent and even outbursts of violence.

However, not all civil society's protests can be interpreted in the context of the long tradition of political polarisation. The size of the austerity measures after Greece's first bailout (May 2010), replicated with new measures of the second bailout (February 2012), was quite large. The Greek government reduced the budget deficit and avoided sovereign default by taking extremely unpopular measures affecting the incomes and pensions of public employees and lowered pensions and the minimum salary in the private sector. But the higher-income groups were not as severely affected as the others. In other words, such measures would have anyway provoked the mobilisation of both politicised and non-politicised citizens.

### *An 'uncivil' civil society?*

A final example of negative civil society mobilisation, which is much smaller in size than civil society's anti-austerity protests and the plethora of social solidarity groups, is the appearance of racist groups. Such groups, often led by militants of the neo-nazi 'Golden Dawn' party, have roamed neighbourhoods where foreign migrants live. In 2012-2013, in the neighbourhood of Aghios Panteleimonas Acharnon, in Athens, residents formed 'vigilante' type groups which have effectively prevented migrants from using public spaces, like a children's play ground. Racist groups have attacked foreign migrants, harming or even killing them and under the guidance of the neo-nazi party announced that they would provide food and other goods not to anyone in need, but to Greeks only. Recently such groups started attacking left-wing protesters. An escalation of this kind of violence occurred in September 2013 when a militant of the neo-nazi party stabbed a Greek popular hip-hop singer to death. Clearly, racist mobilization is not compatible with the activities of civil society in a democratic setting.

## Focus Chapter:

# Challenges for Greek Civil Society During the Evolution of the Crisis

### *Did the crisis help civil society gain autonomy from political parties?*

The crisis caused a gradual entanglement of non-partisan protest movements with parties of the opposition, on the right and on the left of the Papandreou (October 2009-November 2011) and Papademos (November 2011-May 2012) governments.

The entanglement between civil society mobilisation and political party penetration can be traced in the evolution of mass rallies in Athens in 2010-2012. Research by Maria Koussis has shown that at least 31 consecutive protest events took place in the span of 24 months.<sup>37</sup> Among the protests, 24 were organized by labour unions and social movements to protest against the government's austerity measures. The remaining seven protests were demonstrations organised periodically to commemorate past events (e.g. the 17<sup>th</sup> of November uprising of the Polytechnic School students against the Colonels' regime).

Participation in the protest events fluctuated: it was comparatively small in the early period of the crisis, but reached a peak in May 2011 (when the government put forward the so-called “medium-term fiscal strategy program 2013-2016”), in September and October 2011 (when the government was drafting an austerity budget for two consecutive years,

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37 Maria Koussis and Costas Kanellopoulos, “Large Scale Mobilizations against Austerity Policies and the Memoranda, 2010-2012” (in Greek), paper presented at the political science conference on the 'Crisis in Greece', Centre for Political Studies, Panteion University, Athens 14-15 January 2013.

2012-2013) as well as in January and February 2012 (when the government announced additional austerity measures).

These three peak moments of social mobilisation coincided with the apex of political mobilisation of the parties opposing the government. Non-partisan mobilisation, led by social movements and labour unions, had preceded the involvement of political parties in the protest against the successive austerity packages, but as the crisis evolved participation in demonstrations was organised by parties of the opposition and grew significantly. This pattern was probably owed to several reasons: first, after the initial protests which sprang in the wake of the first bailout (May 2010), a certain fatigue overtook movement participants who were not formal party members and saw that their reaction did not alter government policy. The same people changed their priorities by focusing on personal strategies necessary to adapt to a situation of declining income and dwindling welfare services. Social movements of the type mentioned in the previous section did not last long, because they lacked the resources, discipline and leadership of a typical political organisation.

Protest movements which initially gained a lot of publicity and momentum, rallying together citizens of different political persuasion, like the 'Won't Pay' movement, gradually lost steam as parties of the left managed to transform specific protest events into larger anti-government, often anti-EU mobilisations. Further on, the large protest movements witnessed their cause being diverted by small politicised movements. Examples of the latter were anarchist groups, usually operating from university campuses, which led and continue to lead a low-energy life, flickering now and then, in between the large scale outbursts of social protest mentioned above.<sup>38</sup> In brief, as time went by, parties of the opposition dominated movements in protesting against the government.

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38 An example is the so-called “collectives for free transportation” which organize meetings in the Polytechnic School of Athens (e.g. on 10.01.2013)

## *Did the crisis revitalise Greek civil society and what are civil society's prospects?*

The crisis has opened a window of opportunity for Greek civil society which however has not been fully exploited yet. Owing to austerity measures, the Greek state is being rolled back and thus civil society has a chance to develop and strengthen its role vis-à-vis the government and the parties which used to keep it under control. For the moment, this opportunity was seized less by NGOs and more by informal groups and networks. It is unknown whether such groups and networks will outlast the crisis. It will depend on the duration of the crisis, on the fluctuation of demand for their services and the supply of funds, time, and skills by citizens and private sponsors to those informal collective actors.

Notably, however, Greeks did not join solidarity networks in large numbers. In 2011 only 14 per cent of Greeks participated in voluntary activities, in contrast to 26 per cent of Italians, 15 per cent of Spaniards and 12 per cent of Portuguese (EU-27 average: 24 per cent).<sup>39</sup> In the same year only 7 per cent of Greeks devoted money to community activities, whereas 33 per cent of Italians, 21 per cent of Spaniards and 23 per cent of Portuguese did so. Greeks on the average devoted 3 per cent of their time to community activities; Italians devoted 14 per cent of their time, Portuguese 10 per cent and Spaniards 18 per cent.

There are various reasons for this pattern: first, the primary social institution on which Greeks fall back in times of crisis is neither the welfare state nor the NGOs. It is the extended family which offers shelter, food, social care, and pocket income to old, fragile or unemployed family members. This role of the family stems from a very traditional culture, left over from the pre-war times when Greece was a traditional agricultural society. Second, as noted above in the section on voluntarism, there is little tradition of voluntary and community work in

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39 Data obtained from the European Social Survey, as reported in Greece by the Greek National Centre for Social Research (EKKE).

Greece. Yet, one cannot fail to see signs of revitalization of civil society, evident in the variety of social solidarity groups mentioned in the beginning of the previous chapter.

Before the crisis, NGOs depended on the personal commitment of a few activists who may have now been 'worn out' as the crisis demanded their shifting of attention to family matters and economic survival. NGOs also depended on state funds, distributed by ministries and SOEs (e.g., state-controlled banks sponsoring cultural and educational associations). But state funds were now almost completely depleted. It is then all the more necessary to underline that, after the crisis erupted, many NGOs fought against such adverse conditions, survived and are now active in offering help to those who need it the most.

## Conclusions

The emergence of civil society in the wake of the economic crisis was a positive development. Compared to the pre-crisis period, more citizens participated in collective efforts to preserve the living standards of the population and exercise their rights. Civil society responded to the crisis, not only through protests aimed at reversing government policy, but also through efforts to provide help to the victims of the economic crisis. This was a turn in the evolution of civil society.

Before the onset of the crisis in Greece, NGOs were weak vis-à-vis political parties and the government - with the exception of well-organized unions of SOEs and professional associations. For a long time, labour unions, the student movement and other associations were internally divided along the lines of political party competition. The confederations of employees and NGOs were financially dependent on funds, obtained by the government. As it was mentioned in the section on state-society relations, most NGOs were not involved in the policy-making process.

Acute antagonisms among the major parties and a polarized political culture prevented the emergence of an autonomous civil society. As it was noted in the section on state-civil society relations after 1974, Greek society traditionally evolved around family life, which has been an additional factor impeding the development of civil society.

NGOs not only suffered from financial dependence on the Greek state, but also encountered other problems, such as the lack of a skilled staff, efficient management structures and transparent procedures. NGOs' dependence on the state resulted in phenomena of corruption in NGOs. This was owed to the favouritism and clientelism with which successive governments managed the Greek state, weaving patronage-based, non-transparent relations with NGOs. Before the crisis, for a long time, the Ministries of Education, Employment, Health and Social Welfare were

the exclusive programme partners of NGOs. As a result, when the crisis dawned upon the Greek society, newly emerging civic groups and networks took their distances from the state and NGOs.

However, things changed in the wake of the crisis. Today there are two new trends. The first trend is a plethora of informal groups and networks which have risen as collective responses to the crisis. Informal groups consist of loose circles of like-minded citizens or neighbours, sharing a cause. These groups and networks seem to share the concern that, as the crisis unfolds, state authorities are unable to offer a range of services either because of the lack of funds or skills. The second trend is the growth of protest movements, mobilising to resist cuts in public spending, salaries, pensions and welfare benefits. However, there are also racist groups, probably organized by militants of the neo-Nazi 'Golden Dawn' party. They have also emerged and started attacking foreign immigrants, but have not gained popularity nor have they undermined civil society. If the justice system and the rest of state authorities act according to the law and monitor any violations committed by 'Golden Dawn' militants, such racist groups will be marginalized.

The prospects of civil society in Greece in the wake of the economic crisis look brighter than in the pre-crisis period. The self-awareness of citizens has been raised with regard both to their rights and to their ability to help one another in hard times. A dormant civil society before the crisis has been turned into a civil society conscious of the need to protect human rights, including rights to pensions, health care and social assistance, and more importantly to demand that the voice of citizens is heard before policy measures take their final shape. On the other hand, while social solidarity groups cannot and should not replace the welfare state, the fact that vulnerable groups can resort to such civil society initiatives while the government rolls back the welfare state, shows that civil society in Greece has potential which has remained unexplored and can be further developed in the future.

In conclusion, even though since 2010 there have been outbursts of violent social conflict and racial discrimination, overall civil society mobilization has contributed to the deepening of democracy and social

cohesion. It remains to be seen whether these developments will outlast the crisis in Greece.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following people: S. Vogt, Head of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Office in Athens, for her invitation to write this report and her feedback; an anonymous reviewer for comments; El. Phocas, Deputy Director of ELIAMEP, for encouragement; and A. Sakellariou, G. Gleoudi, M. Vellianiti and Y. Panouris for research and technical assistance.