

CASE STUDIES OF INTERACTIVE RADICALISATION

Greece



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DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality


**Case studies of interactive radicalisation
Greece**

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Executive Summary

This report examines hostile responses from the extreme-right in general, and Golden Dawn (GD) in particular, towards Islam, Muslim immigrants and the construction of an official mosque in Athens from 2000 onwards. The main questions that this report aims to address are the following: What kinds of hostile responses from the extreme-right towards Islam, Muslims and the mosque have taken place? How have these responses been formulated? Is Islamophobia a key feature of these responses? What forms do these responses take - physical violence, hate speech or both? What is the role of historical memory, grievances and conspiracy theories in the formulation of these responses? Have Muslim communities responded to these provocations from the extreme right and could this be regarded as cumulative extremism? The analysis took place through the use of a variety of material in order to understand the way in which the extreme-right milieu responds to the issue of Islam and Muslims in Greek society. The themes discussed in this report are: 1) anti-immigration and GD's anti-Islamist turn in 2000s; 2) the role of grievance; 3) conspiracy theories; 4) the struggle for public space, namely the issues of the mosque, religious holidays and refugees; and 5) the role of violence.

The report concludes, firstly, that the evidence to date clearly shows that Islamophobic discourses, hate speech and violent attacks towards Muslims are found within Greek society in various forms. Muslims have been targeted by the extreme right for at least the past ten years, and GD is one of the major players in this field. Over the past 15 years GD has made a significant shift from scapegoating immigrants from the Balkan region, particularly Albania, to scapegoating Muslims and Islam as a religion.

Secondly, the report finds that grievance has played a crucial role in this shift and in the hostility - verbal and physical - towards Muslims. Such grievances have been constructed around the attention paid to Muslims by the political system and government either through the construction of the mosque in Athens or policies of integration of immigrants and refugees. This, GD argues, takes place at a time when Greek cultural, national and religious identity is being lost. Together with the abovementioned grievances, conspiracy theories also play a crucial role triggering reactions from GD and other extreme-right groups. The conspiracy theory central to the vast majority of extreme-right discourse, is that behind the rise of Muslim immigrants and refugees arriving from Turkey to Greece there is a plan to alter the composition of the Greek population. Together, both grievances and conspiracy theories could be considered the main causes for the hostile response to Muslims from GD and the extreme-right.

This study has found, thirdly, that GD has been mobilising hostility, at a more general level, towards the presence and visibility of Islam in the public space. This includes opposition to the construction of the mosque in Athens, religious celebrations in large Greek cities and the presence of Muslims in Greek neighbourhoods. This has taken two forms: the organisation of demonstrations and occupations of public spaces against what has been called the 'Islamisation of Greece'; and over the last 10-15 years, direct acts of violence towards Muslims, their sacred places, and places where immigrants live (e.g. camps).

Finally, this study finds that despite the hate speech and violent acts which have taken place against Islam and Muslims (detailed in the report below), a violent reaction on the part of the various Muslim communities has not been documented. On the contrary, it seems that Muslims and official Islamic organisations have been trying to absorb any feelings of grievances or experiences of inequality caused through this perpetration of violence and racist speech. This suggests that, in this case, the processes anticipated by the theory of cumulative extremism have not materialised. This report explores the reasons for that.

1. Introduction

This report explores the hostile reactions of the extreme-right, and GD in particular, towards Islam, Muslims and the construction of an official mosque in Athens. Immigration has historically been one of the key-themes for the global extreme-right milieu. However, since the 1990s (although it could be argued that this date goes back to the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979), Islam and Muslims have also been at the centre of furious debates among the extreme right. Certainly, after 9/11 Islam became the main target of the extreme-right, and GD has followed this international trend. The role of history, the immigration context in Greek society, as well as the knowledge of Islam among Greek people are three important dimensions to address before considering issues around the Islamic mosque and the hostile reactions towards Islam and Muslims. This historical approach will set the broader framework for the better understanding of the case study, highlighting both the importance of memory and also of the social and political context. The main questions that this report will address are the following: What kinds of hostile responses from the extreme-right towards Islam, Muslims and the mosque have taken place? How have these responses been formulated? Is Islamophobia a key feature of these responses? What forms do these responses take - physical violence, hate speech or both? What is the role of historical memory, grievances and conspiracy theories in the formulation of these responses? Have Muslim communities responded to these provocations from the extreme right and could this be regarded as cumulative extremism?

The discussions about Islam and Muslim immigrants in Greece, as well as on the construction of a mosque in Athens, have been dominating the public sphere and have been at the forefront of public debates, for the past ten years. These discussions have been influenced by both the rise of the extreme-right and the economic crisis (2010-2019). This particular case study was selected for two main reasons. Firstly, it was selected because Islam and Muslims have become the main target of hostility of extreme-right political parties and groups, a large number of right-wing conservatives (e.g. political parties, MPs, journalists, etc.) and even in some Greek-Orthodox circles, including figures of the Orthodox Church of Greece and other Greek-Orthodox groups.¹ Secondly, it was chosen because these hostilities have come to a head in heated debate over the construction of the mosque in Athens, which remains the only European capital without an official, purpose built mosque despite the legislation enabling its construction being passed in 2000 and a revised version coming into force in 2006. The selection of this case is consistent with the approach of the DARE project and relevant to the project's parallel research on online radicalisation and the ethnographic study of the extreme-right and anti-Islam(ist) milieu. In this sense, this study provides important context to contemporary expressions of right-wing extremism in Greece, illuminating in particular the role of grievances, conspiracy theories and violence.

2. Setting the scene

2.1 The role of historical memory and the role of Turkey

The first important dimension to consider, as noted above, is the historical and social context of Islam and Muslims in Greece. Debates about Islam are deeply rooted in, and strongly intertwined with, the experience of the long Ottoman occupation (1453-1821) and the collective national interpretations of this. The rule of the Ottoman Empire is considered a serious trauma and an important juncture for the creation of the collective identity of the Greek people, which is still present in the dominant memories

¹ More on the reactions of these Greek-Orthodox circles against Islam and Muslims and a more in-depth analysis of the religious factor in these debates will be presented in the ethnographic analysis of the extreme-right milieu (WP7) of the DARE project.

of the national 'self' and 'other'. This was further reinforced by continuing conflicts between Greece and Turkey, such as the Greek-Turkish war of 1897, the 'Asia Minor Catastrophe' of 1922, and the Turkish invasion in Cyprus in 1974, to mention the most important ones. Hence, for many Greeks, Turks, who are of course Muslims, are fundamentally the enemy that has persistently threatened Greece's sovereignty and conspired against the country's freedom. Thus, hostile response to, and the reproduction of a kind of fear about, Islam must be read against these broader historical legacies of the creation of the Greek nation-state after centuries of Ottoman rule and have clear religious connotations. This experience of state-building has shaped a dichotomous long-standing discursive opposition between the national Christian-Orthodox 'self' and the religious 'other', specifically the Muslim 'other'. This very brief historical background is essential for understanding contemporary hostility towards Islam and Muslims in Greece (Sakellariou, 2015: 45).

This historical past might have an impact on the formation and role of grievances, especially among the extreme-right. Although the Greeks fought and won in the liberation war of 1821, the defeats which followed, and the continuing tensions with Turkey, can be considered as playing a role in the debates about Islam and Muslims. Immigration issues are related to this - immigrants and refugees are arriving to Greece exclusively via Turkey which has triggered debate about the role of Turkey in this, and even conspiracy theories that Turkey wants to Islamise Greece, through immigration. At the same time Muslims are being equated with Turks, who in the imaginary of the extreme-right, are considered as Greece's fundamental enemies and as inherently evil.

2.2 Contemporary context

The second key dimension concerns the immigration context in contemporary Greece. It is important to distinguish between different Muslim communities in Greece. Firstly, the Muslim minority of Thrace, located in the northeast part of Greece, consists of about 120,000 Muslims. They inhabit the region together with a Greek Christian majority (Tsitselikis, 1999; Ktistakis, 2006; Katsikas, 2012).² This group constitutes 'old Islam', and is distinct from recent waves of Muslim immigrants who are considered as 'new Islam' (Tsitselikis, 2012). The second group is generally composed of Muslim immigrants, who, far from being a homogenous group, come from a variety of nationalities and ethnicities. It is this group, it has been suggested by (primarily) conservative and extreme-right political actors, which has undermined the homogeneity of Greek society and lacks the basic criteria for inclusion in it i.e. the language, the Christian-Orthodox religious belonging and the common cultural heritage. Although other ethno-religious communities already existed in Greek society, their number was rather negligible until 1991, when, thousands of immigrants began to arrive in Greece following the collapse of communism in neighbouring Albania. Greek society has subsequently seen substantial increases in Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Indonesia, among others (Antoniou, 2003; Triandafyllidou and Kokkali, 2010; Triandafyllidou and Kouki, 2013), arriving to Greece via Turkey. However, and due to the Syrian war and other conflicts in the Middle-East and Asia, the situation exploded from the summer of 2015 onwards since when thousands of refugees and immigrants have been gathering for many days and sometimes weeks in various regions of Greece, although mainly the

² Thrace's Muslim community, along with the Greeks of Constantinople in Turkey, was protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which exempted them from the mandatory population exchanges between Greece and Turkey. Signed in the aftermath of Greece's defeat in Asia Minor, the Treaty included a section on the 'Protection of Minorities', which contains a series of provisions to guarantee the rights of the minority populations in both countries. Despite the protection, Muslims of Thrace have faced integration obstacles, discrimination and social exclusion due to their religion, but also due to their ethnic background, which is mostly Turkish.

Aegean Islands and on the borders with Balkan countries, waiting to be transferred to other European countries.³

The third parameter crucial to understanding the pull of Islamophobic discourses, is the low level of knowledge about Islam among the Greek population. A survey on Greeks' views on Islam and Muslims, conducted by a private company in 2010, found that Greeks had very little knowledge about Islam; 77 per cent of the respondents knew nothing about Islam and 83 per cent of them had never read the Quran. The survey also found negative attitudes towards Islam: 51 per cent of the respondents believed that Islam was more likely to lead to violence than other religions; 53 per cent considered that the relations between Islam and the West are bad or quite bad; 67 per cent answered that there is probably a clash between Islam and Christianity nowadays; and 55 per cent foresaw a clash between Christianity and Islam in the future. Comparing Christianity and Islam, 83 per cent said that Christianity respects women more than Islam while 73 per cent considered Christianity to be more peaceful than Islam. When it came to the context of Greece, 27 per cent believed that the country is threatened by Islam. Nearly half, or 46 per cent, disagreed with the construction of an Islamic mosque in Athens. This shows a significant upward trend in opposition to the mosque; up from 34 per cent just a few years earlier (2006), when the majority (52 per cent) were reportedly in favour of its construction⁴.

In a more recent survey (April 2015) 40.8 per cent of the interviewees said that they would be bothered by the establishment of a mosque in Greece (yes/ probably yes) as opposed to 58.6 per cent who said no and probably no.⁵ Furthermore, when people were asked if they would be disturbed by the construction of a mosque in the area they live, 45.1 per cent replied yes or probably yes, while 54.4 per cent answered no or probably no (Dianeosis, 2016a). Finally, according to another survey regarding the current refugee crisis (January 2016) it appears that the words 'Islam, Muslim, Jihad' have negative connotations and that a terrorist attack in Greece is possible according to 39 per cent of the interviewees (Dianeosis, 2016b).⁶ In addition to this, in a survey about immigrants and refugees by the National Centre for Social Research (conducted in summer 2016), 41.2 per cent of interviewees agreed with the position that Greece should not allow any immigrant Muslims to come and live in the country, while 41 per cent argued that the government should allow entry only to a small number.⁷

The above data demonstrate that Greek society is poorly informed about Islam; this creates fertile ground for those, especially political agents, who want to cultivate fear against Islam and Muslims. In

³ As of December 2015 more than 800,000 refugees and immigrants had arrived in Greece searching for a path to other European destinations. For more information see <http://www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015-iom> (last accessed 7 August 2019). This flow was suddenly halted in March 2016 when Eastern and Central Europe countries decided to close their borders, even to Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and these people were trapped in Greece. Today it is estimated that more than 60,000 refugees and immigrants have been blocked in Greece (data of February 2017). From January 2019 more than 65,000 immigrants and refugees have entered Greece with a rise observed in the last days of August and early September, see <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴ See <http://www.publicissue.gr/1395/islam-2009/> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁵ In a following survey (2017) of the same company the percentages were 41.8 per cent yes/probably yes and 57.4 per cent no/probably no <http://www.dianeosis.org/2017/03/tpe-2017-all-graphics/> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁶ Similar negative views were reported in the latest Pew research <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁷ See <https://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/zoyme-ton-mytho-mas-gia-toys-metanastes> (last accessed 7 December 2019). Similar findings can be found in another survey in which 58 per cent of Greek respondents said that immigration from Muslim countries should stop <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration> (last accessed 7 December 2019).



the context of the arrival of large numbers of refugees and immigrants as well as terrorist attacks by the so-called Islamic State, there is an evident rise in negative views and fear of Islam and Muslims. However, the three historical and contextual dimensions considered above are essential to understanding the hostile reactions to Islam and Muslims presented below; they are not excuses for them but to ignore them would be to leave an important gap in the analysis.

The final contextual issue to take into account concerns ongoing issues around the construction of a mosque in Athens. The historical, legal and political issues surrounding this debate have been studied, with sometimes illuminating results (Antoniou, 2010). Currently, the only official mosques open to Muslims exist on the islands of Rhodes and Kos and also in Thrace in Northern Greece, which, since 1923, has been home to a Muslim community who are Greek citizens. However, in many parts of Greece, mosques from the Ottoman era can be found, many of them historical monuments of great cultural and architectural importance. Some of these mosques are open but used only for cultural purposes such as museums (e.g. in Central Greece, in the city of Trikala), while others are closed and at risk of going to ruin. Restoration work has commenced on some of the mosques in disrepair (e.g. in Northern Greece, in the city of Didymoteicho). Indeed, two mosques can be found in central Athens, both of them from the period of the Ottoman Empire, although neither used for religious purposes. One is the mosque of Mohammed the Conqueror, which was built in 1458, and the other is the mosque of the governor of Athens at that period, called Tzisdarakis (Zoumpoulakis, 2002: 105).

The history of the construction of a mosque in Athens began in the late 1970s and continues until today (Tsitselikis, 2004: 281-290). In 1978 the Saudi Arabian King, Khalid, asked for the construction of a mosque in Athens and received a positive answer from the Greek Prime Minister at that time. After much discussion, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered a piece of land in Maroussi, a municipality near Athens, but the mayor and the citizens protested and the plan was cancelled. In 1984, students from Sudan asked for permission to construct a mosque in Goudi, a central area in Athens, but this time the response was more controversial. Whilst the government refused to give permission, it guaranteed the function of a mosque under the precondition of the maintenance of social peace in the area, where it was going to be built. Finally, in 1992 another location was suggested by the Greek government; an estate in Koropi, a municipality outside Athens (more than an hour's distance). This suggestion was rejected by the ambassadors of the Arab states. Meanwhile, Muslims in Greece have found their own locations; former storehouses, derelict houses and factories have been turned into prayer houses in order to observe their religious duties.

The first law related to the construction of the mosque can be traced back to 1880 (30th of May/1st of June, 'On the gratuitous allotment of national land for the construction of a Turkish Mosque in Piraeus') when the Greek government allotted a site in Piraeus for a mosque to be built. However this law was never enforced. After the Balkan Wars the issue came up again, and according to the 3rd protocol (article 4) of the Convention of Athens (1913), Greece was obliged to build a mosque in Athens and four more in other regions of Greece, wherever it was necessary. This resolution was also never implemented. In 1934, the law 6244 (Official Gazette, A' 274, 17/25.8.1934), resulted in the decision to build an Egyptian mosque and also the establishment of an Islamic Foundation, i.e. an Egyptian Institute, for the scholars of the government of Egypt in Greece. The Greek government offered a site in Athens, with the goal of improving Greek-Egyptian relations and thus also the situation of the Greek community in Egypt. As expected, this law also was never enforced. After many years and under internal and external pressure (increased by the forthcoming Olympic Games of 2004), a new law was passed (2833/30.6.2000, Official Gazette A' 150, article 7, 'On the placement of the Islamic Cultural Centre') on the construction of a mosque, jointly with an Islamic Centre in Athens for the promotion of Greek-Arabic relations. The Ministry of Agriculture decided the location of the mosque should be in a region far from the city centre near the new airport of Athens. After much negotiation, and the interference of the Orthodox Church

(Sakellariou, 2011: 81-85), this law fell into abeyance as well. The latest legal attempt was made in 2006 with the latest legislation about the Islamic mosque of Athens (3512/2006, Official Gazette, A' 264, 15/12/2006). This law did not specify the site of the mosque, but after much discussion it was decided to be built in Votanikos, a central area of Athens. Although this law was passed thirteen years ago, it is only very recently that the mosque has been completed. After many delays and protests, the mosque was ready to function around Easter 2019. However, while the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs visited the site in April 2019, the official opening is still pending. The political change that took place after the elections of 7 July has, according to some Muslim organisations, played a role in the delay, while there is no official information about, or any timetable for, the opening.

3. Sources, Data collection and Analysis

3.1 Data collection

The main research methods used in this study of hostile responses to Islam, Muslims and the construction of the mosque in Athens, in particular the GD's reactions, are those of literature review, archival research, and Internet research. The literature review focused on existing publications looking into the presence of Islamophobia in Greece during recent years (Sakellariou, 2016; Sakellariou, 2017, Huseyinoglu and Sakellariou, 2018), the situation of Muslims in Greek society (Tsitselikis and Sakellariou, 2017; Tsitselikis and Sakellariou, 2018) and the mosque issue (Tsitselikis, 2004; Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2009; Sakellariou, 2011). This also included the collection of surveys and public opinion polls about the views of Greek people on Islam, Muslims and the construction of a mosque in Athens.

Archival research included the collation of newspaper articles about Islamophobic incidents in Greek society and the reactions to the construction of the mosque, and also the collection of relevant legislation on the mosque issue, from the nineteenth century until present day, and the analysis of the Greek Parliamentary Proceedings (2012-2019). This included the parliamentary speeches and statements of GD parliamentary representatives about Islam, Muslims and the construction of the mosque of Athens. This material was enriched by the collection of texts and announcements by GD, through the party's two main webpages - the official one, www.xryshaygh.com, and the youth branch one, www.antepithesi.gr.⁸

After an initial reading for overall familiarisation, the collated material was analysed through the method of the classic thematic content analysis (Maingueneau, 1991; Grawitz, 2001; Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002; Guest, 2012). The categories created were required to have value and meaning from an analytical point of view and also to be compatible with the theoretical reasoning of the research, to be consistent with the objectives of the analysis (Mason, 2002; Gibbs, 2007). Based on the themes identified as well as the the research questions initially devised for this part of the DARE project, Section 4 (Key Findings) is structured around the following categories/themes: 1) anti-immigration sentiments and GD's anti-Islamist turn in 2000s; 2) the role of grievances; 3) conspiracy theories, 4) the struggle for public space; and 5) the role of violence.

⁸ After the July 7, 2019 elections GD's webpage was crashed down after a web attack according to the party and opened in a new domain <http://www.xrisiavgi.com/>. The youth branch webpage since then is still out-of-order. The truth is that the webpage is not functioning due to inter-party conflicts between the leadership and the administrator of the site. For more on this see the news report https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/207050_i-teliki-lysi-toy-nikoy-mihaloliakoy (last accessed 12 December 2019). This created a serious problem in accessing the actual material today, but all references made in this report have been downloaded by the author in previous times and archived and in that sense they are available.

4. Key Findings

4.1 Anti-immigration and GD's anti-Islamic turn in 2000s

As mentioned in the first report on the formation of the extreme-right milieu (D2.1), GD has always openly declared that Aryans and the white race are the superior race and that Greek civilisation is more important than all others. In that sense, a biological and cultural racism was openly supported and reproduced. Based on this, it was not surprising that GD expressed strong anti-immigrant views and sentiments when, in the 1990s, immigrants from the Balkans and Eastern Europe started to arrive in Greece in large numbers. The group's reaction escalated into violent attacks against Albanians. However, this gradually changed. From the late 1990s and in the 2000s, immigrants and refugees from Asia, the Middle East and Africa started to arrive in Greece in greater numbers than before.⁹ These populations also then became a target of GD. When 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks occurred (e.g. Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005) and more recently those of ISIS, Islam was 'declared' the new and main enemy threatening the white race and Greece as a country and nation.

Since 2010-2012, GD has mainly targeted Muslims both, physically and discursively. This included arson attacks against prayer houses, occupations and demonstrations where the official mosque of Athens was due to be constructed and the dissemination of aggressive texts on the 'deadly' and 'dangerous' character of Islam, particularly after terrorist attacks in western countries. Over the last ten years GD has been the most prevalent agent of Islamophobia in Greek society. The party aims to create an intense fear of Islam through ideological or news texts, which are uploaded to their website or published in the party's newspaper.

According to GD, Islam is incompatible with western values and Muslims cannot be integrated into western societies. They believe it is necessary to change this multicultural approach 'otherwise wars will erupt in western cities'.¹⁰ This fear that GD creates is directly related to immigration. The party argues:

At least 80 per cent of the asylum seekers are men under the age of 30, almost all of them Sunni Muslims and in their vast majority they support every kind of extremist-terrorist organisations within Islam.¹¹

In this respect, immigrants and refugees are considered as invaders, as a Trojan horse, arriving in order to occupy Europe. The party praises initiatives taken by other European countries, for example Austria and Denmark, to close down mosques and deport political leaders and imams or ban the wearing of the burka in public places. It also supports political leaders such as Matteo Salvini in Italy and Victor Orban in Hungary, among others, for their courage to stand up against the 'Islamisation of Europe'.¹²

⁹ As it has been supported social mobility of Albanian immigrants might have also assisted in their gradual acceptance by the Greek society and as a consequence to the rise of targeting Muslims (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris, 2018).

¹⁰ G. Linardis, 'Islam is impossible to coexist with the western civilization', 5 January 2018, <http://www.xrisiavgi.com/enimerosi/view/to-islam-einai-adunato-na-sunuparjei-me-ton-dutiko-politismo> (last accessed 10 January 2020).

¹¹ G. Linardis, 'The Trojan horse of Asian and African invasion in Europe', 13 January 2018, <http://www.xrisiavgi.com/enimerosi/view/o-doureiios-ippos-ths-eisbolhs-asiatwn-kai-afrikanwn-sthn-eurwph> (last accessed 10 January 2020).

¹² Giorgos Mastoras, 'Austria responds to Islamisation deporting imams and closing down 7 mosques', 8 June 2018), <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/h-austria-apanta-sto-politiko-islam-apelaunontas-imamhdes-kai-kleinontas-7>; Giorgos Mastoras, 'The Prime Minister of Hungary passionately: There are no Muslim refugees, but Muslim invaders in Europe', 9 January 2018), <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/labros-oprwthupourgous-ths-ouggarias-gia-emas-den-uparchoun-mousoulmanoipr>; 'Unemployment-immigrant invasion-

However, this reaction against Islam and Muslims relates also to the way GD views Islam. GD considers Islam as violent in nature. The bomb attack in Volgograd, Russia (2013), for example, triggered different debates on the 'barbaric and horrific characteristics of Muslim fanaticism'.¹³ Members of the party continuously criticise multicultural societies, for example those in Scandinavia, especially after clashes which erupted between second-generation Muslim immigrants and the police (in Sweden 2013), and argue that this multicultural model has failed. Furthermore, they stress that multiculturalism will have a negative impact in Greece and will lead to the loss of the Greek national, and of course Christian-Orthodox, identity. These arguments regarding the violent character of Islam and the consequent threat for Europe and Greece come to the forefront after every terrorist attack that takes place in Europe e.g. in Paris (January and November 2015), in Brussels (March 2016), in Manchester (May 2017), in London (March and June 2017) and elsewhere. After the Manchester arena attack, GD MPs argued in the Greek Parliament that, 'all mosques are actually nurseries of Islamist terrorists' and that 'Greek authorities should not allow the construction of a mosque because their religion teaches them to hate us' (Parliamentary Proceedings, Session PKE [125], 25 May 2017, 47 and passim). Furthermore, GD's general secretary stated after the June 2017 London Bridge attack, 'we need to close the borders in order to protect our people. The day before was Paris, yesterday London, tomorrow where will these crazy [people] of Islam attack?'¹⁴

Alongside the references to bomb attacks around the world, GD strives to create a climate of fear through the use of the phrase 'soon in Greece', implying that there will soon be many casualties from a terrorist attack that, sooner or later, will occur in Greece. Anything that happens in a Muslim country, from a rape or a murder, to violent acts in Syria, is used in order to reproduce panic in the society, through the use of words such as 'massacre', 'Islamist cannibals', 'barbaric Islam', 'obscurantist Islam', 'Muslim monsters', etc. They frequently use the words 'terrorism, terrorist, terroristic', in such a way as to influence their audience to believe that 'the relationship between Islam and terrorism proves itself every day'.¹⁵ Finally, they reference the names of Islamic cities like Kabul, Kandahar, Islamabad, etc. alongside stories relating to terrorist attacks or the place of women to evoke fear among the general public that the large numbers of Muslim immigrants will turn Greece into a Muslim country sooner or later, with all the drawbacks that such a transformation will entail: violence, killings, rapes and brutality. In the party's discourse, Islam's goal is to strengthen and disseminate Islamic religious and cultural traditions, and its main weapon is jihad.¹⁶ GD consider Muslims as uncivilised, disrespecting of women or human rights, with an education based exclusively on 'the green small book with the golden letters on the front-cover, which leads to extreme actions and terrorism, because for them, the Quran is the only real book and all the others are lies'.¹⁷ Such views and discourses about Islam and Muslims, arguing that

identity crisis- only nationalists have the answers', 11 October 2018, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/anergia-metanasteutikh-eisbolh-krish-tautohtas-tis-apanthseis-echoun-mono>, and Giorgos Mastoras, 'In Denmark they ban the use of burqa in public places', 1 June 2018, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/sthn-dania-apagoreusan-thn-chrhsh-mpourkas-se-dhmosious-chwrous>, (last accessed 7 August 2019).

¹³ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/oi-tsetsenoi-ths-cia-pisw-apo-ta-tromokratika-chtuphmata-sthn-rwsia#ixzz2qvd4CER1> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

¹⁴ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/n.-g.-michaloliakos-kleiste-ta-sunora-prostateuste-ton-lao-mas-binteo> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

¹⁵ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/sunergasia-islamikos-fontamentalismos-kai-tromokratia#ixzz2qvwkV4Fa> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

¹⁶ http://www.antepithesi.gr/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1192:islamikoi-pyrines&Itemid=288 (last accessed 7 August 2019).

¹⁷ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/h-ellhnikh-aristera-kai-to-islam#ixzz2qvwKaFpb> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

Islam is predominantly a political ideology, a totalitarian doctrine aimed at dominance, violence and suppression, are dominant among other European extreme-right parties (van Kessel, 2016: 68); GD reproduces these within the Greek setting, making the necessary adjustments for context.

The above attitudes of GD towards Islam and Muslims can be approached through the theory of politics of fear and moral panics. According to Furendi (2006), the usage or over-usage of the term ‘fear’ does not indicate simply a reaction to a specific danger, but the use of broader cultural metaphors for interpreting and making sense of various experiences through a narrative of fear. The culture of fear increases the role of instability and exacerbates distinctions between the friendly ‘us’ and hostile ‘others’. These emotions may be deliberately used for political gains, but also in building a kind of national homogeneity and solidarity. While, in recent discourses, the culture of fear is frequently connected to the rise of Islamist fundamentalism and the global war on terrorism, its roots descend from ancient times (Mölder, 2011). The major purpose of these discourses of fear is to promote a sense of disorder and a belief that ‘things are out of control’, implying that someone needs to take back control. As it is argued (Ferraro, 1995: 12) ‘fear reproduces itself or becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy’ and is ‘being exploited by numerous claims-makers, including politicians, who promote their own propaganda about national and international politics’ (Altheide, 2003: 10).

Political fear is the apprehension felt by people of some harm to their collective well-being or the intimidation wielded over men and women by governments, political parties and/or political groups. Robin (2004: 16) states that political fear can work ‘when leaders or militants can define what is or ought to be the public’s chief object of fear’. Political fear of this sort almost always preys upon some real threat but politicians and other leaders have much leeway in deciding which threats are worthy of political attention and which are not. It is they who identify a threat to the population’s well-being, interpret the nature and origins of that threat, and propose an approach for addressing it, making particular fears items of public discussion and mobilisation. Indeed, it could be argued that, similar to other western countries, specific political agents within the Greek political spectrum, mainly of the extreme right and primarily but not exclusively GD, play on these concerns of Greek society, capitalising on the fear about Islam (Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy, 2016).

The concept of politics of fear is related to the concept of moral panics. Modern times in general are ‘the age of the moral panic’ (Thompson, 1998: 1) and the media continually warn of the possible dangers of moral laxity. These dangers evoke different things at different times – panics over crime, youth, anti-social behaviour, ‘sexual permissiveness’ of the 1960s, subversion of traditional family values, the image of the young black mugger, and many others. Such panic plays and capitalises on the fears of the majority (Thompson, 1998; Cohen, 1972; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Nowadays, this panic is increasingly shifting towards ‘aberrant’ behaviours of Muslims, constructing a panic about a specific religion or what could be named a ‘religious panic’. Indeed, it is accurate to argue that ‘Muslims in the West have emerged as the new “folk devils” of both popular and media imagination’ (Zempi and Chakraborti, 2014: 24). This is quite clear in the Greek case since some media, social media, extreme-right groups, conservative politicians of the Right, and Greek-Orthodox priests elaborate and reproduce this kind of panic about Islam and Muslims.

4.2 The role of grievances: ‘Losing our national and religious identity’

It has been argued, that the visceral opposition to and demonisation of Islam lies is central to the contemporary extreme right’s ideological profile and political message (Kallis, 2015). This is clearly the case for GD, since the threat of Islam is one of the major issues for the party to discuss publicly. This threat, moreover, has biological, demographic and cultural aspects.

Asian peoples invade Europe threatening to alter the synthesis of its population. After that, the spirit of Islam and its traditions will dominate. Within a multicultural world the winner will be the

race, the population that will dominate over the other. Now, Muslims fight to dominate biologically and become a majority in Europe. The shrinking of the White World has been prepared. Unfortunately, Europe faces a serious situation.¹⁸

Islam is considered the Trojan horse through which a ‘New World Order’ will be constructed and established. The party argues that ‘Jihad, with its 1400-year tradition, put its foot into Europe and, of course, into Greece and is preparing to conquer the continent and our country’.¹⁹ According to GD, Europe and Greece face the danger of Islamisation through the rise of the Muslim population and a lack of control regarding immigration.

[The number of] Muslims in Europe has doubled within one generation and by 2025 one third of newborns will be Muslims. These numbers cannot be questioned. Today Muslims in Europe are a minority but very soon will be the majority. [...] In Greece, if this rise of immigrants continues, Muslims will be around 30-50 per cent of the population within one generation. [...] This settlement of another race, the third-world, barbaric Muslims is the geopolitical weapon of American-Zionists in order to destroy the country’s national cohesion.²⁰



Plate 1: GD’s newspaper: ‘No to the Islamisation of our country’

From the above excerpt (see also Plate 1) it is clear that the threat of Islamisation is the major concern of the party. Interestingly, this is related to conspiracy theories connecting immigration with American-Zionism, a theme discussed later in this report. After the electoral breakthrough of GD in 2012, such discourses became more powerful and were propagated through the Greek parliament. Islamisation

¹⁸ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/to-islam-pro-twn-pulwn-ths-eurwphs#ixzz2qveZwwMC> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

¹⁹ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/echthros-entos-twn-pulwn-to-islam-doureios-ippos-ths-neas-tajhs#ixzz2qvf1gaCx> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

²⁰ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/pleiopshfia-tha-einai-suntomws-oi-mousoulmano-i-sthn-eurwph#ixzz2qvf9Kj1i> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

became the principal threat to national identity. One of GD MPs argued that ‘Greece will become Islamised and Greeks will listen to the muezzin from the minarets experiencing in this way a new Ottoman occupation’. But he added that GD will fight against the Islamisation of Greece because this is something that contradicts Greek tradition and culture (Parliamentary Proceedings, 27 April 2015, Session KH [28], 49; Parliamentary Proceedings, 8 May 2015, Session AH [38], 264). GD presents itself as the only political force that will ‘clean up the country’ and fight against Islamisation, which according to the party’s views has already started in Greece through the thousands of Muslim immigrants who are not going to become integrated. Ilias Panagiotaros, another GD MP, argued that not even one per cent of these immigrants would become integrated in a radio interview in January 2017.²¹

Because of the Ottoman past, GD has become the major player expressing concerns that connect the fear of Islam with Turkey. Indeed, GD MPs did not miss any opportunity to vocalise fear and religious panic whenever there is a parliamentary discussion regarding the construction of a mosque in Athens, the immigration issue or any other issue that might be slightly related:

Our country was always surrounded by enemies of which the most important was Turkey. [...] Muslim Islamists have again invaded our country during the last years contributing this way in the degradation of our nation more easily since the enemy now is inside. [...] At the same time we want to build a mosque. Behind this is actually Turkey, which wants to turn Saint Sophia in Constantinople into a museum or a mosque. [...] In Cyprus hundreds of thousands of churches are ruined and turned into stables, warehouses, etc. Here in Greece whether with European or our own funding we rebuild mosques, [Ottoman] baths and everything that revives Muslim barbarism and invasion in our country [...] (Parliamentary Proceedings, Session AO [39], 28 November 2013, 3081).

The party also complains about the government, which it regards as too open towards Turkey:

You want to eliminate values like fatherland, religion, family, Orthodoxy. You are the best companion of our enemy, Turkey, which is very happy seeing hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants coming to Greece (Parliamentary Proceedings, Session EB [62], 24 June 2015, 264).

Based on the above it can be argued that GD presents Islamisation as the main threat in Greece because of the thousands of immigrants and refugees who cross the borders with Turkey and come to Greece, either to stay, or as a passage to other European countries. GD targets Turkey in order to present it as the major enemy of Greece and as a paradigm for the Islamic barbarism and brutality of the Ottoman rule and other conflicts between the two countries in the past. Further to that, GD’s discourse is composed of grievances when it comes to the protection of Greek national and religious identity and culture. These grievances have two aspects. The first is mainly related to the historical past and the role of Turkey. As mentioned above, GD argues that, instead of supporting the Orthodox Church and religion through the protection of Christian monuments, the government rebuilds Ottoman mosques around Greece. At the same time, the government is accused of being too friendly towards Turkey, a Muslim country and an enemy of Greece. The second is related to the so-called threat of cultural alienation from the arrival of Muslim immigrants and refugees. Here too GD expresses grievances regarding the lack of protection for the homogeneity of the Greek national and religious identity, arguing that the Greek nation will be eliminated in the coming decades. GD has resorted to the use of conspiracy theories in order to support arguments that demonstrate their grievances.

²¹ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/o-hlias-panagiwtaros-sto-radio-enanti> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

4.3 Conspiracy theories

As mentioned in the report on the historical context of the extreme-right milieu, conspiracy theories played a crucial role in GD's establishment and gradual expansion. In the years after the party's electoral success, three main conspiracy theories have been elaborated and disseminated through the party's communication channels. The first is the conspiracy on the new pan-religion,²² which the 'New World Order' and Zionists²³ seek to implement around the world, according to GD. This means that all other religions, as well as nations, will be eliminated in the melting pot of globalisation. According to this theory, some dark forces are trying to erase the differences between religions and create one religion for everyone. This also means that Orthodox Christianity, which GD is trying to protect, is threatened and should be further defended. It is interesting to keep in mind that GD used to be a fundamentally anti-Christian, anti-Jewish and pagan party, which characterised Christianity as the religion of peace and cowards. However, after the party's shift towards the Orthodox religion, this conspiracy theory, originally reproduced by Church and theological groups came to the forefront and was embraced by GD.

A second theory concerns the economic crisis since, according to GD, foreign powers including Zionists, Jewish people and figures like George Soros²⁴ want to destroy the Greek nation and the most effective way to do this was through the implementation of the severe austerity measures. In this theory, which GD claim is based on information from a high-ranking member of the Hungarian Masonry, Greece was selected because it symbolises Europe and had an economy which was easy to destroy. Following on from this argument, they claim that Europeans who belong to the Zionist elite use Greece as an example to persuade the manipulated and victimised masses that, unless the 'Greek problem' is resolved, Southern Europe will be financially destroyed, ultimately leading to the collapse of the whole European financial structure. Furthermore, it is argued that those who have designed the collapse of Greece are aware of the symbolic importance of Greece for Europe, the 'White Man' and Civilisation.²⁵

Finally, a third theory is related to the immigration and refugee issue. According to this theory, which is also related to the economic crisis, western powers, together with Jewish people and George Soros (again), have made a plan to fill Greece with thousands or millions of immigrants in order to alienate the Greek race and Islamise the country.²⁶ This is considered as the second 'weapon' foreign powers use, in addition to the economic crisis, in order to attack and destroy Greece through other means than war.

²² 'Towards a new World Religion', 31 December 2012, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/sto-dromo-pros-mia-nea-pagkosmia-thrshskeia> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

²³ 'Zionists' ploys towards one global pan-religion', 20 June 2013, <http://www.xrisiavgi.com/enimerosi/view/siwnistikesperiballontikes-anhsuchies>, and 'They inaugurated the 'tree of peace', a symbol of pan-religion', 21 September 2019, <http://www.xrisiavgi.com/enimerosi/view/egkainiasan-to-dentro-ths-eirhnhs-ena-sumbolo-ths-panthrshskeias>, (last accessed 19 December 2019).

²⁴ George Soros has become a central figure in the broader extreme-right milieu and the protagonist of the conspiracy theory that argues that he is behind the large waves of immigration that are set to replace the white population in the West. This 'Great Replacement' theory claims white people are being replaced by immigrants and will ultimately be eliminated. See for example <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/09/white-genocide-great-replacement-theory> (last accessed 5 December 2019).

²⁵ Ch. Meidasas, 'The homicidal plan 'Greek Crisis'-Why Greece was selected?', 21 September 2013, <http://www.xrisiavgi.com/enimerosi/view/to-anthrwopoktono-schedio-ellhnikh-krish-giati-epilechthhke-h-ellada>, (last accessed 19 December 2019).

²⁶ 'Soros's propaganda fails: The vast majority of Greeks ask for the immediate deportation of all illegal immigrants', 23 March 2019, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/apotugchanei-patagwdws-h-propaganda-tou-soros-h-suntriptikh-pleiopshfia-twn> and 'Ch. Pappas: The solution of the demographic problem-A national government of Golden Dawn now in order for our race to survive', 5 March 2019, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/chr.-pappas-lush-dhmografikou-ethnikh-kubernhsh-chrushs-aughs-twra-gia-na-e> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

This is also a conspiracy theory related to Turkey, as according to GD it is Turkey's plan to conquer Greece through Islamisation. These three conspiracy theories are, of course, interrelated because they have a common purpose, i.e. to taint the Greek nation, and to undermine Greek-Orthodox religion, Greek culture and the Greek population, because everybody envies Greece.

Similar to other extreme-right milieus, GD builds upon and reproduces conspiracy theories which are comparable to those of National-Socialism with regard to Zionism and Jewish people. By presenting Greece as a victim of Jewish people, great powers, and individuals like George Soros, GD is likely to attract more supporters. Indeed, all studies on this issue in recent years have shown high rates of anti-Semitism in Greece,²⁷ providing fertile ground for GD to elaborate and reproduce such conspiracy theories.

4.4 Struggles over public space: The mosque, religious holidays and refugees

Protecting public space is a high priority for GD and, as in other European countries where conflicts over mosques have taken place (Cesari, 2005; Alievi, 2009), preventing the construction of a mosque in Athens a priority (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2009; Anagnostou and Gropas, 2010). As mentioned already, the lack of a proper mosque in Athens has meant that Muslims operate prayer houses independently. Recent unofficial estimates put the number of prayer houses in the country at around one hundred. These are usually illegal places or they function officially under a different type of permit e.g. of a cultural centre or an association which also includes a prayer house. They are often located in basements or old garages and storehouses and are situated in neighbourhoods with large immigrant populations near the centre of Athens.

GD has organised large demonstrations against the construction of the Islamic mosque in Athens and openly spoken against its construction either through the party's websites or through its newspaper (Plate 2), their main slogan being 'No, to an Islamic mosque, neither in Athens, nor in any other place'.

²⁷ See for example <https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/anti-semitism-in-greece-a-country-report> and <https://gr.boell.org/en/2017/08/01/antisemitism-greece-today-executive-summary> (last accessed 10 January 2020).



Plate 2: GD’s newspaper: ‘Mosque in Greece? Neither in Athens nor anywhere!’

They have also raised questions in parliament about the funds which will be used to construct the mosque because, at the same time, they argue that ‘ancient Greek temples and Greek Orthodox churches remain abandoned’. Additionally, they propagate the fact that many Orthodox churches in Turkey are in ruins or are being turned into mosques. In May 2015, after the government passed an amendment to the existing legislation on the construction of the mosque of Athens, GD reacted and voted against it, as they have done in all the subsequent amendments (August 2016; May 2017). They also declared their disagreement to the construction of the mosque during their annual commemoration rally for the fall of Constantinople on May 29.²⁸

GD have organised a series of rallies in the location where the new mosque will be built in Athens, protesting against the demolition of a small Orthodox temple existing in the place.²⁹ For example, in October 2018, together with a committee of locals, they organised a rally objecting to the mosque at the location, in Votanikos. The call for the rally could be found on the party’s website: ‘our region can’t afford any additional degradation; we don’t want to become a centre of illegal immigration; we can’t afford more unemployment and criminality; our region should not be Islamised’.³⁰ Similar demonstrations have continued to be organised, while slogans against Islam, Muslims and the construction of the mosque have been graffitied at the site selected for the new mosque.

²⁸ ‘The Hellenic Dawn for Athens Says a Sound NO to the Mosque in Votanikos’, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/hchhro-ochi-ths-ellhnikhs-aughs-gia-thn-athhna-sto-tzami-sto-botaniko> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

²⁹ ‘Demonstration against the demolition of the holy temple in Votanikos’, 5 September 2018 <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/sugkentrwsh-diamarturias-gia-thn-katastrofh-tou-i.n.-panagias-eleutherwtria> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

³⁰ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/ochi-sthn-islamopoihs-ths-ellados-sugkentrwsh-diamarturias-sabbato-22-10-1> (last accessed 7 August 2019).



Plate 3: From a demonstration in Votanikos in 2018. Visible are a banner of 'Golden Dawn' and next to that another with the phrase 'Stop Islam'



Plate 4: The graffiti on the wall near the construction site translates as, 'Fuck Islam'.



Plate 5: The entrance of the construction site for the official mosque in Athens with Christian crosses attached to the railings and the writing 'Christ has risen'.

On other occasions, when Muslims have gathered to celebrate Ramadan or the birth of the prophet Mohamed or Ashura in the central squares of Athens, in sports stadiums, or in other city centre locations, GD has reacted by arguing that it is not acceptable to allow Muslims to celebrate in public places. On the occasion of the celebration of Ashura they noted:

Another year when the city of Piraeus has turned into Afghanistan (sic). As usual during the last years, hundreds of Shiites from around Attica gathered in Piraeus in order to participate in Ashura [...] These hideous acts are not honourable for Greece, since these fanatic Islamists use knives and sharp blades in order to inflict injuries upon them [Shiites] in the very centre of a large city like Piraeus.³¹

Members of the party consider Muslims to be a biologically inferior race and believe there is a chasm, between Greek civilisation and Islam. Their suggested solution to any differences is that all immigrants, should leave Greece as soon as possible, because they contaminate the society and threaten its very existence: 'This is enough! It is time to get our Homeland back. [Support] GD in order to clean up the place!'³²

During the electoral campaign for the second elections of 2015, a GD MP, Ilias Kassidiaris, visited the island of Kos, where thousands of immigrants and refugees were arriving, and argued that the citizens of Kos should vote for GD to prevent their island becoming 'Pakistan',³³ meaning a place full of Muslims. This kind of rhetoric is very common in the party's public discourse and is used to intimidate society and present Islam and Muslims as a threat to Greece, arguing that instead the public space should be 'cleansed' of any Islamic element. The same arguments were presented in September 2015 during a discussion in the Municipal Council of Athens, where GD has had a presence since 2010. In this

³¹ It is worth mentioning that GD seems not to understand the differences in Islam since the party connects Ashura with Afghanistan, although Afghans are mainly Sunnis. <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/kampoul-o-peiraias-mousoulmanoi-lathrometanastes-automastigwthhkan-mera-mes#ixzz2qveGBVHc> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

³² <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/enimerosi/view/h-kubernhsh-genitsarwn-prochwra-thn-anegersh-tzamiou-sto-botaniko> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

³³ Stohos, 'If You Vote for SYRIZA You Will Become Pakistani', 26 August, 2015, accessed 14 December, 2015, http://www.stoxos.gr/2015/08/blog-post_6624.html (last accessed 7 December 2019).

discussion the mayor of Athens was accused of supporting ‘illegal’ immigrants and turning huge parts of Athens into ‘Islamabad’.³⁴

In April 2016, GD organised a rally in Piraeus, the port of Athens, in protest against the Islamisation of Greece in response to the refugee crisis (plate 6). The party’s call suggested that the Islamisation of Greece was underway with Greeks becoming a minority within their own country which is therefore why ‘we need to resist this de-hellenisation of our country’.³⁵



Plate 6: GD’s demonstration in Piraeus: ‘NO to the Islamisation of our country’

The above illustrates that GD is extremely interested in the public space and does not accept that Muslims and Islam have place in it. In addition, the party tries to make its presence clear and strong particularly in Athens, organising rallies and demonstrations in order to claim back public space. Although these are not openly violent activities, they could be considered as acts of symbolic violence, based on the theory of symbolic power and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991, 2001) since they seek to eliminate the presence of Islam in the public space. Furthermore, such activities have become the principal instrument or part of the broader framework for the exercise of physical violence against Muslims and some of the places where they live or pray.

4.5 The role of violence

In addition to the symbolic violence expressed through texts and demonstrations, there are three main aspects to the violence against Muslims. The first concerns attacks perpetrated on mosques and prayer houses in Greece. These have been in the form of (infrequent) arson attacks, graffitiing the walls or throwing pig heads and have taken place in prayer houses and mosques around Greece e.g. on the island of Crete and in Komotini, in Northern Greece where a native Muslim minority lives (Plates 7 and 8).³⁶ Similar violent attacks against basement prayer houses, for example, attacks using Molotov bombs,

³⁴ ‘Kasidiaris to Kaminis: You Turned Athens into Islamabad’, accessed 14 December, 2015. <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/kasidiarhs-se-kaminh-ekanes-thn-athna-islamampant...-eisai-lathrodhmarchos> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

³⁵ <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/sugkentrwsh-enantia-sthn-islamopoihsh-ths-patridas-mas-peiraias-paraskeuh-8> (last accessed 7 August 2019).

³⁶ ‘Arson Attack in a Prayer House for Muslims in Heraklion’, *Flashnews*, 23 November, 2015, <http://flashnews.gr/post/250367/epithesh-me-gkazakia-kai-krotida-se-xwro-proseyxhs-moysoylmanwn-sto-hrakleio>, and ‘A Mosque in Komotini in Flames’, *Newsbeast*, 17 April, 2015, <http://www.newsbeast.gr/greece/arthro/811114/stis-floges-tzami-stin-komotini> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

which have resulted in people being injured, or throwing paint and pig heads at these sites, have been reported also in Athens.³⁷



Plate 7: Arson targeting a mosque in Komotini, Western Thrace, April 2015.



Plate 8: Defamation of the outer wall of the Iasmos Mosque with the anti-Turkish slogan 'Fuck Turkey'

The second aspect consists of physical assaults perpetrated against immigrants and refugees, the vast majority of whom are Muslims. It should be noted that due to the lack of a central agency monitoring Islamophobic assaults and violations it is difficult to categorise current incidents as clearly Islamophobic. Nevertheless, since there are many violent attacks against Muslim immigrants and refugees it would be amiss to disregard them. In unofficial personal discussions with leading figures of Muslim groups and refugee organisations, as well as with ordinary Muslims, there have been reports of attacks on Muslim women and the veil. These incidents were described as verbal assaults about the veil but not physical attacks. However, during the establishment of refugee camps around Greece, after what has been called the 'refugee crisis', a series of violent incidents started to take place. In February 2016, for example, an arson attack took place in Giannitsa, Northern Greece, by unknown perpetrators in two former military

³⁷ 'Arson attack against a Muslim prayer house in Aghios Panteleimonas', 23 May 2009, <https://www.in.gr/2009/05/23/greece/empristiki-epithesi-se-xwro-proseyxis-moysoylmanwn-ston-ag-panteleimona/> and 'They left a pig head outside of the Hellenic-Arabic Cultural Centre', 17 October 2014, <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/419181/afisan-gourounokefali-exo-apo-to-ellinoaraviko-morfotiko-kedro/> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

camps that were listed as hosting camps for refugees.³⁸ In February and March 2016 there were three incidents recorded of pig heads being thrown at refugee camps in Shisto (Plate 9), Veroia (Plate 10) and Pella, Northern Greece.³⁹



Plate 9: A cross and a pig head in Shisto hot spot (March 2016)



Plate 10: Pig heads thrown at a refugee camp site in Veroia (March 2016)

In other instances, attacks were targeted at immigrants and refugees. Attacks against immigrants, for example, during the second half of 2017 were on the rise in Aspropyrgos, a region near Athens, mainly targeting Muslims from Pakistan. It is estimated that around 70 or 80 such attacks took place during 2017 and, there has been evidence to suggest that they originated in the local offices of GD in the

³⁸ 'They put fire in two military camps that refugees are going to be hosted', *tvxs.gr*, (February 28, 2016), <http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/ebalan-fotia-se-dyo-stratopeda-sta-giannitsa-poy-tha-stegasoyn-prosfyges> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

³⁹ 'They impaled a pig head in Shisto hot spot', *propaganda.gr*, (February 23, 2016), <http://popaganda.gr/pop-news/karfosan-gourounokefali-sto-schisto/>, 'Tension at the hot spot in Veroia-They threw pig heads', *tvxs.gr*, (March 26, 2016), <http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/entasi-sti-berioia-gia-kentro-prosfygon-petaksan-goyroynokefali-binteo> and 'Pella: They threw pig heads so that refugees don't go', *tvxs.gr*, (March 5, 2016), <http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/petaksan-goyroynokefales-se-stratopedo-gia-na-min-pane-oi-prosfyges&dr=tvxsmrstvxs> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

region.⁴⁰ After October 2017, a new extremist group emerged in Athens, under the name of ‘Crypteia’, inspired by an ancient Spartan group and it probably consisted of GD’s former or even current members. They claimed responsibility for an attack on the house of an Afghan boy who was chosen to participate in the celebrations of the national holiday of the 28th of October by holding the Greek flag. They also claimed an attack against two Muslim immigrants, one of them an Imam, in November 2017.⁴¹

During 2018, violent attacks against immigrants continued in major Greek cities such as Athens and also on the islands hosting refugee camps. In September, in Lesbos a 9-year-old girl was attacked because she was wearing a headscarf, but she was Greek and non-Muslim, and apparently wore the headscarf for medical reasons.⁴² This event offers a critical aspect on how rising Islamophobia targets all those who appear to be a Muslim, based solely on their appearance. Lesbos has seen a rise of extreme right, mainly GD supporters, with anti-immigrant and Islamophobic attitudes during the last couple of years. In April 2018, Afghan refugees, including women and children, gathered in the central square of Lesbos to protest about the delay in receiving their asylum cards. During the night, they were attacked by extreme-right groups. Racist slogans such as ‘burn them all’ were heard and 28 people were injured and hospitalised.⁴³ Since 2018, there has been a climate of conflict on the islands of Chios, Lesbos, and Samos and many attacks have been recorded, not only against refugees, but also against NGO activists and journalists covering the issue.⁴⁴ Another attack, using bats on unattended refugee children in Oraiokastros, in Macedonia, was documented in September 2018. The attack resulted in the serious injury of one of the children who was hospitalised.⁴⁵ Similar attacks have also been reported in Athens. In May 2018 in Peristeri, for example, an attack resulted in the injury of an immigrant.⁴⁶ Finally, on 22 March, an arson attack took place against the offices of the Afghan Migrant and Refugee Community of Greece, in central Athens (Plate 11). The extreme-right group ‘Crypteia’ also claimed responsibility for this attack.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ ‘70-80 racist attacks only in Aspropyrgos in 2017’, (October 9, 2017), *Ta Nea*, <http://www.tanea.gr/news/greece/article/5476327/exoyn-ginei-70-80-ratsistikes-epitheseis-mono-ston-aspropyrgo-to-2017/> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴¹ ‘Crypteia: The fascist group that attacks on immigrants’, *The Toc*, 28 November 2017, <http://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/omada-krupteia-i-fasistiki-organwsi-pou-xtupaei-metanastes> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴² ‘Lesbos: Attack against a 9-Year-Old Girl Wearing a Headscarf’, *Nooz*, 6 September 2018, <http://www.nooz.gr/greece/1509831/lesbos--epithesi-se-9chroni-poy-foroyse-mantili-> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴³ ‘Mytilini: Fascist Attack against Immigrants - They Were Shouting ‘Burn Them Alive’’, *news247*, 23 April, 2018, <https://www.news247.gr/koinonia/mytilini-fasistiki-epithesi-enantion-metanaston-fonazan-kapste-toys-zontanoyis.6605096.html>, (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴⁴ ‘Chronology of Xenophobic Attacks in the Islands during the Last Six Months’, *Efimerida ton Sydakton*, 1 November, 2018, <https://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/hronologio-xenofovikon-epitheseon-teleytaio-examino-sta-nisia>, (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴⁵ ‘Racist Attack with Bats against Refugee Children in Oraiokastros’, *tvxs.gr*, 7 September, 2018, <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/ratsistiki-epithesi-me-ropala-se-prosfygopoyla-sto-oraiokastro>, (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴⁶ ‘Racist Attack against an Immigrant in Peristeri’, *To Pontiki*, 14 May, 2018, <http://www.topontiki.gr/article/273126/ratsistiki-epithesi-kata-metanasti-sto-peristeri-ton-erixan-sto-edafos-kai-ton>, (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴⁷ The UN Refugee Agency, 23 March, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/gr/6650-l> (last accessed 7 December 2019). Crypteia in Ancient Sparta was something of a secret police organised by the Spartan elites in order to terrorise the slaves, especially their leaders and those who were brave enough to start uprisings. For that purpose, young Spartans with knives were sent out during the night to assassinate slaves in order to create fear among them.



Plate 11: The attack against the Afghan Immigrant and Refugee Community of Greece on March 22, 2018

Finally, the Muslim Association of Greece (MAG) made a public announcement, that they had received a threatening phone call in January 2018 from ‘Crypteia’, stating that they are a group that burns, beats, and kills immigrants, mainly Muslims, and that MAG is among their targets.⁴⁸ All the above incidents are verified by NGOs and independent agencies. According to the Racist Violence Recording Network’s annual report, a rise of violent attacks against immigrants and refugees has been observed during 2018.⁴⁹ The most serious incident was the murder of a Pakistani immigrant in Athens in 2013 by two GD members, who were convicted of murder and sentenced to 21 years imprisonment in 2019.

5. Cumulative Extremism

The abovementioned violent events⁵⁰ together with the reproduction of Islamophobic discourses and hate speech, although not as high as in other European countries, create a climate of fear and hate towards Islam and Muslims. It is important to note that such hate speech and violent activism against Islam and Muslims is not prevalent in Greek society, where a large part of the population has welcomed and largely accepted Muslim immigrants and refugees despite initial reluctance in some cases. However, it is also true that Islamophobic discourses and practices are routinely documented in Greek society and thus, it could be anticipated that Muslims might themselves react negatively to this situation. As Esposito (2019: 29) has suggested ‘rampant Islamophobia in American and European societies and the political rhetoric and actions of some Western governments make Muslim minorities feel that they have no place, no level playing field, and become second-class citizens who are demonised and too often seen as guilty until proven innocent’ (Esposito, 2019: 29). Moreover, during the last few years, research

⁴⁸ Muslim Association of Greece, <https://www.facebook.com/Muslim-Association-of-GreeceMAG> (last accessed 7 December 2019).

⁴⁹ ‘Annual report 2018’, http://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/RVRN_report_2018gr.pdf (last accessed 17 November 2019).

⁵⁰ Violent events did not stop during 2019, but there are still in the process of collection. See for example ‘They attacked against an immigrant close to Panteion University’, *To Vima*, 25 July 2019, <https://www.tovima.gr/2019/07/25/society/epitethikan-se-metanasti-konta-sto-panteio-panepistimio/>, and ‘Racist attack against refugees in Vilia, they attacked against small children’, *in.gr*, 18 March 2019, <https://www.in.gr/2019/03/18/greece/ratsistiki-epithesi-se-prosfyges-sta-vilia-xtypisan-mikra-paidia/> (last accessed 10 January 2020).

focusing on how the rise of violence from extreme-right groups, on the one hand, or Islamist extremist groups, on the other, can lead to an equally violent response from the other. This has been described as reciprocal radicalisation or cumulative extremism (Eatwell, 2006; Busher and Macklin, 2015; Knott, Lee and Copeland, 2018) or reactive co-radicalisation, which ‘refers to the phenomenon of a perception of a religious “other” as being an inherent threat whereby, in response, an extreme action is undertaken that, relative to the religion or cultural norms of those responding, is abnormal’ (Pratt, 2019: 50).

One of the main tasks of this report was to examine if, and how, the theory of cumulative extremism could be applied in the Greek context. Reviewing the literature on this process of cumulative extremism or reciprocal radicalisation two main issues are raised. First, the vast majority of the discussion on cumulative extremism is focused on the UK context and experience although incidents such as the attack against a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019 or in a Norwegian mosque in the same year could suggest some process of global, macro-level cumulative extremism. Although, in such cases the perpetrators are not members of a specific group, and they seem to act individually, it has been argued that these individual acts of violence can perhaps better be understood not as isolated acts, but as part of a cumulative continuum of ‘collective’ extreme-right violence (Macklin, 2019a: 26). Such acts, evolved through a digital eco-system, are fuelling a cumulative momentum, which serves to lower ‘thresholds’ to violence for those engaged in this space, as one attack encourages and inspires another, creating a growing ‘canon’ of ‘saints’ and ‘martyrs’ for others to emulate. However these do not actually form an example of cumulative extremism (Macklin, 2019b). This, of course, does not imply that what has been called the vicious circle of Islamist and extreme-right extremism (Ebner, 2017) does not exist. However, such an argument might fit better when primarily examined on the macro (global) level and not on the local level.

In relation to the relevance of the concept of cumulative extremism to Greek society, this study has demonstrated the existence of violent extremism of extreme-right groups (either GD or others) that might be expected to produce a response of violence on the part of those targeted. In this final section, therefore, we consider how Muslims in Greece, either individually or collectively, have responded to the hate speech and violent attacks experienced and whether these responses have included either symbolic or physical violence. First of all, it is important to mention that Muslims, as a religious group, have only used demonstrations or other means of social activism as a tool to claim their rights in three cases. The first took place in May 2009, after a controversial incident when a police officer tore up the copies of some pages/verses of the Quran during a police investigation, giving rise to a storm of protest.⁵¹ The second was with a series of public prayers in 2010 in the city centre of Athens, in order to protest against the lack of an official mosque in the city despite the law permitting this since 2006. The third instance took place in December 2019, when a man of Greek nationality started to curse Allah in the area of Omonia square in central Athens where many Muslims operate their stores. The man was arrested for racist hate speech by the police. After this incident Muslims, gathered outside the local Police Department to demonstrate and organised another rally a few days later.⁵² Such cases of mobilisation among Muslims are rare and always within the legal and social framework of the host society.

⁵¹ Georgia Dama, ‘Unger Overflows’, *Eleftherotypia*, 26 May 2009, 18-19 and Georgia Dama, ‘We exist either you like it or not’, *Eleftherotypia*, 30 May 2009, 44.

⁵² ‘Disturbance in Omonia: A man was imprecating Allah and Muslims are protesting’, *Newsbeast*, 3 December 2019, <https://www.newsbeast.gr/greece/arthro/5719401/anastatosi-stin-omonoia-andras-evrize-ton-allach-moysoylmanoi-kanoy-n-sygkentrosi-diamartyrias>, and ‘Demonstration for the man who was imprecating Allah’, *Newsbeast*, 13 December 2019, <https://www.newsbeast.gr/greece/arthro/5769177/poreia-gia-ton-andra-poy-evrize-ton-allach-stin-omonoia-i-islamofovia-einai-ratsismos>, (last accessed 19 December 2019).

There are other occasions, however, that immigrants and refugees participated in demonstrations, together with anti-racist/anti-fascist groups, NGOs and leftist groups and parties, in order to protest about the rise of racist violence, hate speech and Islamophobia. Another form of activism is the effort made by some Muslim groups e.g. the Muslim Association of Greece to lobby political parties and the government in order to protect Muslims' right by constructing the mosque of Athens or establishing a Muslim cemetery. Therefore, they tend to follow a more mainstream approach, used by other groups and NGOs in order to achieve their goals. Despite the fact that Muslims are not a unified group (Sunnis, Shiites, and from various national backgrounds), they seem to have primarily decided to follow a peaceful and mainstream path in order to claim their rights. This path does not prevent Muslims from protesting when they consider it necessary, but there has never been any violent reaction on their part after an extreme-right incident has taken place. The Greek police and secret services have implied that former members of the so-called Islamic State have passed through the Greek borders - something the Greek media have built their moral panic about Islam on – but no violent attacks perpetrated by such individuals have taken place nor any plans for such an attack in the future uncovered.⁵³ The possible reasons for this lack of any violent response are discussed in a separate report (relating to the ethnographic dimension of the DARE research). Here, drawing on existing evidence, we can conclude that cumulative extremism does not appear to exist in Greek society.⁵⁴

6. Conclusions

The main conclusions from the above analysis can be summarised as follows. Firstly, the existing evidence clearly show that Islamophobic discourses, hate speech and violent attacks are found in Greek society in various forms. Muslims have been targeted by extreme right groups for at least the last ten years, and GD is one of the major players in this field. The violent reactions from the extreme right are centred on two main issues, namely the construction of an official mosque in Athens and the so-called immigration/refugee issue. This situation is similar to what is happening in other Western countries in recent years, where Islam is seen, by the extreme right, as an invader and an enemy which has nothing in common with the West and a clear 'us and them' division is created (Marzouki and McDonnell, 2016: 2-7). Greece therefore, is no exception, although the gravity of the incidents is not as serious as in France, Germany or the UK to mention some other examples. The situation in Greece is interesting because of the significant turn made by GD in the last 15 years, from the scapegoating of immigrants from the Balkan region and Albania in particular, to the current targeting of all Muslims, and Islam as a religion.

Grievances have played a crucial role in this turn and in these reactions, verbal and physical, against Muslims. Such grievances have been constructed around the attention paid to Muslims either through the construction of the mosque in Athens or policies of integration of immigrants and refugees. According to GD, Muslims have been welcomed into Greek society which they believe to be to the detriment of the Orthodox religion and the Greek-Orthodox identity.

Together with the abovementioned grievances, conspiracy theories also play a crucial role in the reactions from GD and other extreme-right groups. The main conspiracy theory which seems to be

⁵³ 'Greek authorities arrest suspected ISIS member, report says', *ekathimerini*, 30 May 2019, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/241080/article/ekathimerini/news/greek-authorities-arrest-suspected-isis-member-report-says> (last accessed 17 September 2019).

⁵⁴ For a brief explanation of why such violent attacks by ISIS on Greek soil have not taken place see <https://www.eliamep.gr/en/%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%AF-%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%82-%CE%B4%CE%B5%CE%BD-%CE%AD%CF%87%CE%B5%CE%B9-%CF%80%CE%BB%CE%AE%CE%BE/> (last accessed 17 September 2019).

central in the vast majority of the extreme-right discourses is that the rise in numbers of Muslim immigrants and refugees arriving from Turkey to Greece is the result of a plan to alter the composition the Greek population. According to this conspiracy theory, this plan has been designed and is executed either by Zionists and Jewish people or Turkey, the latter considered a historical enemy of Greece. It is believed that the main reason for this is that all the great powers envy Greece for its history and culture, although in the case of Turkey, this effort to alter the composition of the Greek population is another means of war against the Greek nation.

Both grievances and conspiracy theories could be considered to fuel the reactions from GD and the extreme-right towards Muslims and these are formulated in two ways. On a more general level GD has been reacting against the presence and visibility of Islam in the public space. This includes the construction of the mosque in Athens, religious celebrations in large Greek cities, the presence of Muslims in Greek neighbourhoods, etc. One form of reaction has been the organisation of demonstrations and occupation of public spaces against what has been called the 'Islamisation of Greece'. However, a more violent form of reaction has been also obvious during at least the last 10-15 years. This violence has been directed towards Muslims, sacred places, and places where immigrants live (e.g. camps).

Finally, and more importantly, follows the question of reciprocal or cumulative extremism/ radicalisation. Despite the fact that Muslims in Greece have been targeted by many extremist groups, with hate speech and violent acts taking place against them, despite the grievances with regard to their rights which do exist and have been expressed, violent reactions from the part of Muslims are still not visible. On the contrary, it seems that Muslims and their official organisations have been trying to absorb any grievances or negative feelings caused by this perpetration of violence and racist speech. In that sense, as no violent reactions by Muslims, either individually or collectively, have been reported, cumulative extremism seems not relevant in this Greek case study.⁵⁵ However, since the conditions for cumulative extremism are prevalent, this raises the question of why is it not present here? One explanation for the lack of cumulative extremism could be that the incidents against Muslims, including violent attacks, have been repeatedly documented, they are not so numerous or severe as in other countries. Another explanation could be that grievances and stigmatisation in other countries have been in existence longer since Muslim communities have deeper roots. In Greece, apart from the Muslim minority in Thrace, Muslim immigrants in large numbers are actually a quite new phenomenon of only the past 15-20 years. One final explanation is that Greece was never a colonial power and had good relations with the Arabic states until the 1970s and 1980s. This is a political explanation, which has not been scientifically measured among Muslims in order for one to be able to argue that this background is actually of crucial importance and therefore it remains only a hypothesis.

⁵⁵ Such a conclusion refers only to the case of the extreme-right and GD in particular with Muslims. However, when it comes to the clashes between GD and anarchists there might be a space for further research on cumulative extremism. After the group's formation, regular violent attacks against leftists and communists have taken place as well as clashes with anarchists in the streets of Athens. From one point of view it could be argued that cumulative violence/extremism worked in this case although an escalation of violence has not been observed. Since the late 1980s, but mainly since the 1990s a series of lethal attacks have been recorded against political and ideological opponents using knives and bats to beat them almost to death. On the other hand, in many cases GD members have been attacked by anarchists in a kind of non-declared war in the streets of Athens city centre. In 2013, after GD's electoral success in 2012, two GD members were murdered outside the Party's offices in a region near Athens, and the attack was claimed by an extreme-left organisation. This attack came almost two months after an anti-Fascist hip-hop artist, Pavlos Fyssas, was fatally stabbed by a self-confessed member of GD in a working class area of Athens. However, this murder of GD members did not lead to an escalation of violence on the part of GD.

Overall, the case described in this report and the assumption about cumulative extremism between the extreme-right, notably GD, and Muslims in Greece shows that this is a case of non-escalation of violence. This finding could offer new insights and reflection on existing approaches suggesting racist provocation, violent clashes etc. lead inexorably to violence. Taking this into consideration, it could be useful for other similar cases to be studied. Instances where violence has not occurred are probably more frequent than instances in which violence has been the outcome – or at least sustained violence, that could lead to the existence of cumulative extremism. From this perspective violence does not automatically lead to further violence, in a so-called upward spiral as some journalists in particular, but also some scholars, believe and further elaboration and research is necessary in order to examine the relationship more thoroughly.

7. References

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