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Freedom in the World 2014 - Greece

Overview:

The sovereign debt crisis, which emerged in Greece in late 2009, continues to shape the country's economic and political landscapes. Greece entered its sixth consecutive year of economic contraction in 2013. Although there are projections for modest growth in 2014, poor economic performance poses an ongoing challenge to political rights and civil liberties.

In May 2010, the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepped in to provide a €110 billion (\$135 billion) rescue plan in order to help prevent a Greek debt default. In return for this funding, the government was required to implement a number of austerity and modernization measures to make Greece's economy more competitive. These steps were met with a series of national strikes and protests. Greece's debt levels continued to grow as the economy contracted and tax revenues shrank.

Additional austerity measures were passed in July 2011 as a condition for the release of bailout funds, resulting in further protests and strikes. After a failed attempt to hold a referendum on the bailout package, Prime Minister George Papandreou of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) stepped down on November 11. Lucas Papademos, the former head of the Bank of Greece, was appointed to lead a new coalition government. In February 2012, his government passed additional austerity measures, thereby securing a second, €130 billion (\$170 billion) bailout that included a voluntary 53.5 percent write-off on privately held Greek debt.

Papademos resigned in April 2012, having shepherded through a series of politically unpalatable austerity measures, and May elections resulted in a hung Parliament. Following a second round of elections in June, the New Democracy party, which received 29.7 percent of the vote and 129 seats, was able to form a coalition government with PASOK, which captured 12.3 percent and 33 seats, and the Democratic Left (DIMAR), which took 6.3 percent and 17 seats. Antonis Samaras of New Democracy was named the new prime minister. This coalition passed yet another round of austerity measures in October in order to assure the release of funds from the EU and IMF.

On June 11, 2013, as the government was negotiating yet another round of austerity measures and facing increased demands that it begin firing public employees, the Samaras administration decided to abruptly close the doors of National Hellenic Broadcasting (ERT), the principle responsibilities of which were three public television stations, four national public radio stations, a satellite television channel, and a major state orchestra. That evening, ERT's broadcast signals went blank, and some 2,600 employees were laid off. A Greek government spokesperson, Simos Kedikoglou, assured citizens that a smaller, more efficient and more independent, broadcaster would emerge in September and that ERT's employees would be eligible to be hired by this organization. The closure, which was accomplished by a ministerial decree and without the full participation of the coalition government's two junior partners, PASOK and DIMAR, sparked a political crisis. Unions organized strikes and many members of the public rallied to the support of ERT employees, dozens of whom occupied the broadcaster's headquarters, producing pirate web broadcasts, until police forcibly removed them in November. On June 21, DIMAR pulled out of the coalition government in protest of the ERT closure. New Democracy and PASOK were able to reorganize their coalition, but their majority is now razor-thin. In August 2013, a transitional broadcasting entity, Public Television (DT), announced the hiring of 577 employees with short-term contracts and began regular broadcasts. The creation of a new broadcasting corporation is planned for 2014.

In its new formulation, the government passed an additional series of austerity measures on July 18. The continuous push for austerity has led to growing poverty and homelessness, with unemployment reaching 27.9% in June and youth unemployment reaching 62.9% in May.

The right-wing extremist party Golden Dawn, which entered Parliament in the June 2012 elections, capturing 6.9 percent of the vote and 19 seats, has sought to capitalize on the social unrest. Emboldened by increasing levels of public support, the party embarked on a campaign of violence aimed at immigrants, the political left, and members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community. Those targeted by Golden Dawn supporters have reportedly experienced inadequate police protection, and there has even been some evidence of police complicity in the violence. Following the September 18, 2013, murder of Greek rapper and anti-fascist activist Pavlos Fyssas, to which Golden Dawn supporter Giorgos Roupakias confessed, the government launched a crackdown on the party. Six parliamentarians, including the party's president, Nikolaos Mihaloliakos, were arrested on charges of belonging to or founding a criminal organization. Arrest

warrants were issued for dozens more party members. Mihaloliakos and two other members of the party's parliamentary contingent are being held in jail pending trial; the three other parliamentarians have been released, but are not allowed to leave the country. The legislators deny the charges against them and say that they are the victims of political persecution. The crackdown has also resulted in a shake-up of Greece's police forces, as the government has sought to root out officers affiliated with Golden Dawn.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 35 / 40 [\[Key\]](#)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

All 300 members of the unicameral Parliament are elected by proportional representation for four-year terms. The largely ceremonial president is elected by a supermajority of Parliament for a five-year term. The prime minister is chosen by the president and is usually the leader of the majority party in Parliament. The installation of an unelected technocrat, Lucas Papademos, as prime minister of an interim government of national unity in 2011 was condemned by many in the media as undemocratic.

The country has generally fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, and a system of compulsory voting that is weakly enforced. Since 2010, documented immigrants are allowed to vote in municipal elections.

In October, Parliament voted to strip the six arrested Golden Dawn lawmakers of their parliamentary immunity so that their prosecution could proceed. Although immunity was intended as a protection against politically motivated prosecution, its removal in the case was viewed as part of a larger effort to neutralize a significant antidemocratic force.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Greece's multiparty system features vigorous competition between rival parties. The political landscape since 1980 has been dominated by two parties, PASOK and New Democracy. PASOK's electoral fortunes have tumbled since the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis. It was surpassed in 2012 elections by the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), which is presently the main opposition party; the governing coalition unites traditional rivals PASOK and New Democracy.

Greece's largest minority population, the Muslim minority of the province of Thrace, is allowed full political rights and currently has three representatives in Parliament.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption remains a problem in Greece. In October 2013, former PASOK minister of defense Akis Tsochatzopoulos was sentenced to 20 years in prison in connection with the laundering of up to €50 million (\$67.8 million) in bribes from European armaments manufacturers. Sixteen of his associates were also found guilty. It remains to be seen if this groundbreaking trial will affect the level of political corruption in Greece. Greece was ranked 80 out of 177 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index, the worst ranking of any country in Western Europe.

Although there have been more prosecutions for tax evasion over the past year, Greek officials have largely avoided clamping down on tax evaders. The unwillingness of the Greek government to fully pursue tax evasion is demonstrated by the controversy surrounding the October 2012 publication, by journalist Kostas Vaxevanis, of a list of 2059 Greek citizens who transferred funds to the Swiss bank HSBC. The publication of the list—supposedly lost after being given to Finance Minister Giorgos Papakonstantinou in 2010—ignited a firestorm of criticism directed towards Greece's political class. After being acquitted in November 2012 of violating Greece's data privacy laws, Vaxevanis was re-indicted two weeks later. He was retried and again declared innocent in November 2013.

Civil Liberties: 48 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution includes provisions for freedoms of speech and the press. The closure of ERT in June diminished the diversity of voices in the public sphere and deprived the country of its only non-Athenian nationally distributed channel, the Thessaloniki-based ET3. Still, citizens enjoy access to a broad array of privately owned print and broadcast outlets, and internet access is unrestricted. There are, however, some limits on speech that incites fear, violence, and public disharmony, as well as on publications that offend religious beliefs, are obscene, or advocate the violent overthrow of the political system. Also, political interests occasionally attempt to squelch free speech; in addition to the prosecution of Vaxevanis, some journalists have been physically assaulted by police while covering anti-austerity protests over the past three years.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, though the Orthodox Church receives government subsidies and is considered the "prevailing" faith of the country. Members of some minority religions face discrimination and legal barriers, such as permit requirements to open houses of worship and restrictions on inheriting property. The constitution prohibits proselytizing, but this law is almost never enforced. Opposition to the construction of an official mosque in Athens remains substantial; Muslim inhabitants are forced to worship in improvised mosques.

Academic freedom is respected in Greece, and the educational system is free of political indoctrination. Private conversation is open and free.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by the constitution, and the government generally protects these rights in practice, though there are some limits on groups representing ethnic minorities.

Nongovernmental organizations generally operate without interference from the authorities, and workers have the right to form and join unions. Major anti-austerity protests and strikes have occurred frequently in recent years, including large-scale demonstrations during 2013. The vast majority of participants are peaceful, but the protests often turn violent as anarchist elements and the police confront each other.

The right of immigrants and immigrant advocacy groups to assemble is more problematic. Golden Dawn has attempted to intimidate and break up such assemblies. In some cases, the police have not adequately defended the rights of immigrants to assemble.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the constitution provides for public trials. Prisons suffer from overcrowding, as do immigrant detention centers. The end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013 saw a major crackdown on illegal immigration that was criticized by human rights organizations for being too indiscriminate, for inhumane conditions in the detention centers, and for the state's failure to implement an adequate system for processing asylum applications. Immigrants are disproportionately affected by institutional problems in the judicial system. Bureaucratic delays force many into a semi-legal status whereby they cannot renew their documents, putting them in jeopardy of deportation.

Acts of political violence continue to constitute a problem. During 2012, 154 acts of racially motivated violence were recorded in Greece, according to an April 2013 report by the Racist Violence Recording Network, with many of them focused in Athens and Patra, two of the epicenters of Golden Dawn activity. There is significant evidence of police complicity, with multiple reports of officers refusing to intervene. Golden Dawn also targets leftists and members of the LGBT community.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

The country's Romany community continues to face considerable governmental and societal discrimination. A 2006 law designed to address domestic violence has been criticized for not giving the state the power to protect the rights of women. Women continue to face discrimination in the workplace and hold only 21 percent of the seats in Parliament, a 4 percent increase over the 2009 election, but lower than Greece's Eurozone counterparts. The country serves as a transit and destination country for the trafficking of men, women, and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)

2014 Scores

Status

Free

Freedom Rating

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

2.0

Civil Liberties

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

2

Political Rights

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

2

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