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Freedom in the World 2015 - Greece

Overview:

After six years of contraction, the Greek economy turned a corner in 2014, registering modest growth in the second half of the year. In April, the coalition government led by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras of the center-right New Democracy (ND) party secured €3 billion (\$4 billion) in sales of five-year bonds through private capital markets, marking the first such issue of public debt in four years and increasing confidence in Greece's economic outlook. The sovereign debt crisis continued to shape the country's economic and political landscapes, however. Poor economic performance, high debt levels, and the ongoing demands of Greece's three main lenders—the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund—for austerity measures and economic reforms posed a challenge to political stability.

On December 29, the failure of Parliament to choose a replacement for retiring president Karolos Papoulias triggered automatic parliamentary elections, scheduled for January 2015. Most analysts predicted a victory by the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), which pledged to end austerity policies and demand debt forgiveness.

Also during the year, a new antidiscrimination law raised penalties for attacks motivated by the ethnic origin or sexual orientation of the victim. However, the final legislation did not authorize civil unions for same-sex couples.

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 parliamentary supermajority for a five-year term. The prime minister is chosen by the president and is usually the leader of the majority party in Parliament.

Early parliamentary elections were held in May 2012, after the prime minister resigned over politically unpalatable austerity measures. The voting resulted in a hung Parliament, prompting new elections that June. ND led with 129 seats and formed a government with the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, or PASOK (33 seats), and the Democratic Left (17 seats). However, SYRIZA placed second with 71 seats, while the right-

leaning Independent Greeks took 20, the right-wing extremist party Golden Dawn took 18, and the Communist Party garnered 12.

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

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Greece's multiparty system features vigorous competition among rival parties. PASOK and ND have dominated the political landscape since 1980, though PASOK has rapidly lost ground in elections since the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis. In May 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections, SYRIZA secured more seats than PASOK or ND.

The operations of Golden Dawn have been weakened by a government crackdown since a party supporter murdered antifascist rap artist Pavlos Fyssas in 2013. Golden Dawn president Nikolaos Michaloliakos and two other members of the party's parliamentary contingent remained in detention in 2014 pending trial on charges of belonging to or founding a criminal organization. The prosecutions have not weakened Golden Dawn's electoral appeal, however, and it remains Greece's third-largest political party. It won 9.4 percent of the vote in the 2014 EP elections.

Greece's largest minority population, the Muslim community in the province of Thrace, is allowed full political rights and had three representatives in Parliament as of 2014.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption remains a problem in Greece, which was ranked 69 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. Tax evasion is a serious challenge, with an estimated 24 percent of economic activity going undeclared, compared with a European Union average of 19 percent. Although tax enforcement efforts have been more robust in recent years, the government has largely failed to prosecute tax evasion by economic elites.

Civil Liberties: 48 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution includes provisions for freedoms of speech and the press. However, the Samaras administration's closure of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) in June 2013 negatively affected diversity of opinions in the mass media. In May 2014, New Hellenic Radio, Internet, and Television (NERIT) became ERT's successor as the public broadcaster. In August 2014, Parliament passed a resolution streamlining the process for selecting members of NERIT's board of supervisors. Despite government assertions that NERIT would be shielded from political pressures, the European Broadcasting Union and others argued that the changes removed safeguards designed to prevent undue influence. In addition, representatives of the governing coalition appeared to meddle in the station's hiring practices and journalistic autonomy. In September 2014, charges of political interference in the selection of 132 journalists for NERIT led to a legal decision to investigate the issue. The following month, four members of NERIT's supervisory board, including its director, resigned after government officials tried to suppress a live broadcast featuring SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras.

However, citizens generally enjoy access to a broad array of privately owned print and broadcast outlets, and internet access is unrestricted. There are 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. Antidiscrimination legislation passed in September 2014 also criminalizes denial of the Holocaust and other genocides, including the World War I-era mass killing of Armenians in Turkey.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, though the Greek 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. Opposition to the construction of an official mosque in Athens remains substantial; currently, Muslims are forced to worship in improvised mosques. The constitution prohibits proselytizing, but this law is almost never enforced.

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

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association, and the government generally protects these rights in practice, though there are some limits on groups representing ethnic minorities. Golden Dawn has attempted to intimidate assemblies of immigrants and immigrant advocacy groups, and in some cases the police have not adequately defended the rights of immigrants to assemble. Major antiausterity 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. Nongovernmental organizations generally operate without interference from the authorities, and workers have the right to form and join unions.

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. Immigrants are disproportionately affected by institutional problems in the judicial system. The policing of immigration continues to be criticized for its indiscriminate nature and for inhumane conditions in detention centers. In addition, the state has failed to implement an adequate system for processing asylum applications. Bureaucratic delays force many immigrants into a semilegal status whereby they cannot renew their documents, putting them at risk of deportation.

Acts of racist violence are an ongoing problem. According to an April 2014 report by the Racist Violence Recording Network, 143 acts of racially motivated violence were documented in Greece in 2013. In response to Golden Dawn and increasing xenophobic violence, Parliament passed an antidiscrimination bill in September 2014 that toughened penalties for attacks motivated by ethnic origin or sexual orientation. However, the legislation has been criticized for failing to protect victims of hate crimes from deportation proceedings.

The country's Romany community continues to face considerable governmental and societal discrimination. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals encounter some discrimination, including occasional violent attacks.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Freedom of movement is unrestricted. Government bureaucracy exerts influence over the ability to start and operate businesses, and political parties have been involved in smoothing the process for their supporters. As a result, the field for business activity is not level for all participants.

Women face discrimination in the workplace and held only 21 percent of the seats in Parliament as of 2014. Domestic violence remains a problem. Greece 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](#)

2015 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

published on

