

Hellas's right-wingers

While the whole of Greece is battling with a state of financial emergency, the political scene is witnessing the rise of extreme right-wing radicals: in 2009, the ultra-nationalist party known as Golden Dawn won just 0.3 percent in the elections, by 2012 it had already reached 6.9 percent. Where will the ongoing crisis lead?

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARO KOURI



Golden Dawn members march in protest in the Athen's district of Votanikos. They want to impede the construction of a mosque

M9, Summitron-M 28mm f/2.8 Asph. f/11, 1/125 s, ISO 160

Athens, Greece – Thousands of people stand outside the parliament buildings in Greece’s ancient capital: young adults, mothers with children, the elderly – the very diverse crowd holds torches and waves Greek flags in the air.

Affected by the economic crisis that has engulfed Greece, some feel excluded from society and are tired of political corruption, while others have traditionally been part of the country’s far-right. On this November afternoon, these people have come to show support for the jailed leader and other founding members of Greece’s far right-wing party, Golden Dawn. In September, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, the head

Greek military junta in 1974 that a democratically elected party leader has been sent to jail. According to a leaked police report, incriminating phone calls were made between the suspects before and after the killing. Even so, party members want to show their support, refusing to be intimidated by the November murder of two of their members outside the party’s offices in northern Athens. They were shot at close range with 15 bullets pumped into their chests and heads – execution style.

Meanwhile on stage, Thodoris Koudounas, one of those considered to be an intellectual in the group, takes to the podium and tries to animate the crowd.

“Once more, we’re up against everybody else,” he says, gradually raising his voice. “But for every moment that passes we grow stronger while they become weaker.” Dressed in black and wearing a hoody, he appears athletic and tireless despite his age, which is in the mid-50s. “Long live the leader, long live victory,” he says to finish off his speech.

No doubts. Among those watching is 31 year-old Virginia Papastamouli. Dressed in black and holding a lit torch, she chants slogans with the rest of the party supporters, “Blood, honour, Golden Dawn.” She is one of the women who support Golden

Young and growing stronger: according to the latest polls the average age of Golden Dawn members is 24. Women make up 25 percent of the party



Dawn: according to the latest polls women constitute 25 percent of party followers. Papastamouli has been a member of the party for almost a year and, despite the arrests and murders which have driven away many other followers, she continues to take part in every event, volunteering her time twice a week at the local offices.

A couple of days before the rally, Papastamouli is sitting at a friend’s computer, chain-smoking. She tries to access her Facebook page but discovers it is blocked. “I can’t believe this,” she tells a friend over the phone. “It’s blocked till the Facebook administrators decides what action to take.” Many Facebook users report on



of the controversial party, and thirteen others, were arrested on charges of creating a criminal organisation. It happened just days after the death of anti-fascist rapper Killah P, who, according to police, was stabbed in the heart by a member of Golden Dawn. This came as a surprise to everyone because until then, the party had seemed untouchable. In fact, the arrests mark the first time since the fall of the

Above: Pictures and candles placed in memory of the murdered party members – they were shot by unknown people on a passing motorbike. Right: Protests at Parliament Square in the centre of Athens. Party leaders were arrested. Among other things, they are accused of being involved in a murder

Clockwise from above: M9, Summicron-M 28mm f/2 Asph, f/2, 1/30 s, ISO 1250; f/2, 1/30 s, ISO 2000; f/2, 1/30 s, ISO 500



“Long live the leader, long live victory!” Koudounas cries at the end of his speech.

Golden Dawn members for using hateful language on their Facebook pages. “This has happened before. Now, I have the Golden Dawn flag as my profile picture and the photos of our two murdered young men as my cover picture.”

A diminutive lady in her 80s enters the living room. It is Maria, the mother of Papastamouli’s friend Nikos. She has continued living with her son since her sailor husband passed away. Their home is in the middle-class neighbourhood of Ilioupoli, a district populated by Greeks who fled Turkey in 1922 at the onslaught of the Turkish army. Once wealthy merchants, they arrived in Greece exhausted and impoverished, only to be treated like second-class citizens. The small, two-bedroom apartment where Nikos and his mother live is filled with ▶



old-fashioned furniture. A black and white picture of Maria's late husband looks down from the living room wall.

Guest of her son. "Could you make me a coffee?" Papastamouli asks. The old woman walks slowly but her mind moves quickly. "With or without sugar" she asks in turn. "One teaspoon," Papastamouli replies, exhaling the smoke from her cigarette and looking back at the computer screen. The old lady walks out to the

In the 2012 elections
Golden Dawn was
able to capture 21 seats
in parliament.

kitchen. She has learned to take care of her guests and Papastamouli is her son's guest. Nikos met Papastamouli at the Golden Dawn offices. After she was evicted from her apartment, he suggested that she come to stay with him and his mother for a few days. A few minutes later, Maria returns with a tray carrying Greek coffee, a glass of water and a traditional sweet she made herself, called 'sweet of the teaspoon'. She overhears Papastamouli talking about the "big problem Greece has because of illegal immigrants".

"Aren't they all just people, too? What's the point of giving out rations only to Greeks? Aren't the rest hungry?" Maria asks, half talking to herself and referring to the rations organized by Golden Dawn, only for Greeks. Papastamouli hears her and reels off the Golden Dawn litany. "There's racism against Greeks, not against immigrants," she snaps. ►

Thodoris Koudounas has been a party member since 1987. In addition to working as an electrical engineer, he writes political books and holds speeches, as seen here at the party offices

“Immigrants in Greece have everything easy. We have to protect the Greek.” The old woman leaves without responding further. “I don’t talk with my son about these things,” she murmurs.

Papastamouli was kicked out of her apartment because she owed more than 1000 euros in rent, electricity and water bills. Now she is homeless and unemployed, with a few years as a graphic designer to her credit. Those who enforced the eviction took her things from the apartment and left them outside. “I left the furniture in the apartment-building’s common area. I hope the cleaners don’t steal anything,” she says: “They’re foreigners.”

Virginia Papastamouli is out of work. She has been evicted and she does not have a family.

“I’ve sent hundreds of CVs to all kinds of jobs,” she explains, playing with her cigarette. “I’ve been evicted three times and I have no family. I have nobody. My father used to beat me when I was a kid and you can still feel my deformed skull.” She feels the back of her head and continues, “my stepmother kicked me out of her apartment a few years ago.”

Never ending crisis. Greece hasn’t seen any economic growth for the last seven years. Unemployment has almost reached 27 percent, while youth unemployment has sky-rocketed to over 60 percent. Suicides have risen more than 40 percent. At the same time, pensions and wages have been cut in half and new taxes are constantly being introduced. For the state insured, 2014 is introducing a hospital and



Together with other members, Virginia Papastamouli sings the party anthem with great fervour. She joined Golden Dawn a year ago

prescriptions fee. Voters are angry seeing their quality of life degrading – especially as new cases of corruption keep emerging.

Like many others, Papastamouli has found understanding with Golden Dawn. They got her a job cleaning the home of two wealthy Greeks twice a month for a total of 90 euros – money that is barely enough to cover the cost of her cigarettes. Still, she has also found Nikos: if it wasn’t for him and his mother, she’d be homeless and without food. “Today, I made her spaghetti with minced meat, her favourite,” says Maria, with a smile. “I heard it was her birthday, so I got the meat out of the freezer. Nowadays, I keep meat for special

occasions. I don’t have money for a gift anyway.” Meanwhile, Papastamouli gets ready to go to the Golden Dawn offices. After taking a shower and applying her make-up, she rushes to the bus. She can’t afford the 1.40 euro ticket, but she is lucky, there is no controller on the bus.

After a 30-minute ride, she reaches the offices in southern Athens. Two guards stand at the entrance stopping anyone who wants to enter, watchful in cases there’s another attack. They are strict if a person they do not recognize tries to enter, but they smile when they see Papastamouli.

A few floors up, higher ranking members of the party sit around a table in an

office at the back. Among them is podium speaker Koudounas. A guest for the evening, everyone comes to greet him, shaking his hand and asking him to autograph his book *Liberalism*, which he will be talking about later.

Anti-liberalism. Sitting straight and looking serious, there is silence among the 50 people in the audience as Koudounas starts to speak. “In liberalism, everyone has equal rights,” he says choosing each of his words carefully. “But liberalism doesn’t take people’s performance, their integrity, their character or their dignity into account at all. Therefore, the equality



Left: Papastamouli has no work, apartment or family. On the wall behind her it reads: ‘Grandfather, how many fascists did you defeat, so that I can also defeat as many’ – in memory of the fight against the Nazis in World War II. Above: Maria, mother of a friend, has taken Papastamouli in

Clockwise from the top: M9, Summicron-M 28mm f/2 Asph, f/2, 1/90 s, ISO 500; ; f/2.4, 1/45 s, ISO 500; f/4, 1/125 s, ISO 160

of human beings is the greatest injustice in relation to fair and natural inequality.”

Other than for the party, Koudounas works as a freelance electrical engineer, certifying apartments that, according to a new law, need an energy certificate before they can be rented or sold. Every day, he roams the city with a backpack on one shoulder and a Bluetooth earpiece in his ear. “We lead ascetic lives,” he says. ▶

The Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn) party was founded in 1985 in line with the newspaper of the same name that first appeared in 1980. The newspaper's symbol was an SS rune: Hitler, Hess and Goebbels were portrayed on the cover. Due to insufficient demand, the paper was closed down – a party was created a short time later



“The day is divided in two hours at the gym, two hours of reading, two hours of writing, and eight hours of work. And it’s not just me. This is how we’ve learned to live. When you’re fed up with the world, this way of life is the best choice.” After a long day of work, where he has to take public transport to get to the apartments that need certifying, he goes to the gym – one that is also frequented by other Golden Dawn sympathizers. The sign outside has a popular ancient quote, “a healthy mind in a healthy body”.

Koudounas has been with Golden Dawn since he met its leader Michaloliakos in 1987, when the group was still

propaganda about internationalism and globalization; and that’s how modern Greeks came to be what they are today.” Koudounas says that since democracy was re-established, Greeks have become “selfish” and “think they know everything,” which is why they find themselves in this economic and social crisis. “They became the most fanatic supporters of democracy – a democracy where they have rights but no obligations,” he adds in a despising tone. Now, his main activity is giving speeches to members of Golden Dawn, the party which first made it into parliament in June 2012 after winning 6.9 percent of the vote. The majority of the votes came

from the educated, middle-class who were the hardest hit by the crisis. “We didn’t expect things to go this way,” he said. “But the conditions were so decadent that it was logical people should come together under one ideology.”

Unexpected success. In the 2009 elections, just before the crisis first hit, Golden Dawn got a mere 0.3 percent of the vote. According to polls, Golden Dawn’s popularity later reached as high as 15 percent but that changed following the murder of Killah P, with the percentage dropping to between 6 and 8 percent. “We’ve started recruiting members everywhere, the

Food just for Greeks: this is the Golden Dawn’s aid programme in times of crisis. Anyone who wants to claim a bag of food must show some sort of ID



same way Hezbollah recruits members everywhere, from Lebanon to Iran. And the younger generation has multiplied in terms of numbers: the average age is 24.”

Koudounas goes on to explain how he sees the political situation in Greece and worldwide today. “What is called humanism, a free and open society, is a lie. There cannot be such a system. It inevitably becomes authoritarian and it starts fooling people, and societies become impoverished.” Talking about the links between Golden Dawn and Nazism, Koudounas says the “spirit of decline” had to lead the party somewhere. “When an ideologist sees a liberal system with values that extend from the far-left to the far-right, and sees that everything around him or her is falling into cultural decline, another alternative will inevitably be sought after. National Socialism is the only obvious choice as there’s nothing else that’s left.”

Koudounas plans to run in the next elections and says that whatever happens to the leader and other members of the party, he and Golden Dawn will keep on going and keep on fighting. “I’ll be running for office in Athens, where I grew up and where I’ve seen many changes for the worse,” he explains. And, what position will he stand for? “Whichever one they decide: I’m a soldier.” NIKOLIA APOSTOLOU

MARO KOURI

Born in Sparta in 1971, Kouri grew up in Athens. She studied visual communications, photography and history of art at the Focus School in Athens. Since then she works as a freelance photographer and has been published in Der Spiegel and NZZ, among others. This reportage for LFI was taken with a Leica M9, with a Summicron-M 28 mm f/2 and a Summilux-M 50 mm f/1.4 Asph.

NIKOLIA APOSTOLOU

Born in Athens in 1985, Apostolou studied journalism and digital media. Among others, she works for the New York Times and USA Today. Her main focus is the Greek financial crisis.



really small. “I met the leader at the Free Thought Bookstore and we became friends, since we were thinking of doing something,” Koudounas says, sitting at a café in Athen’s Ayios Panteleimonas central district, where there are many immigrants and a strong Golden Dawn presence. “It was the time after the political system reverted to democracy and when everyone was subjected to strong

Above: Golden Dawn’s headquarters. Men have gathered on the balcony in memory of the murdered members: flags have been hoisted and the party anthem is sung. Right: Koudounas trains for two hours every day – in a studio predominantly patronized by extreme right-wingers

Clockwise from the left: M9, Summicron-M 28mm f/2 Asph, f/2, 1/30 s, ISO 1600; f/2, 1/90 s, ISO 320; f/2, 1/60 s, ISO 800

