LAOS and the Greek Extreme Right since 1974

Antonis A. Ellinas, University of Cyprus
Introduction

The Greek extreme right has largely escaped the avalanche of academic interest on the European extreme right. Apart from a few articles (Dimitras 1992; Kapetanyannis 1995) and some brief references in the international literature (e.g. Ignazi 2003; Mudde 2007), little is known about the multiple extreme-right groupings that competed in Greek elections in the past three decades (but see Kolovos 2005). Given the voluminous literature on the extreme right, this scholarly indifference might be somewhat surprising, but a quick glance at the electoral record aptly explains it. For, apart from a brief electoral spurt in 1977, the extreme right has failed to make a mark on the Greek electoral landscape, receiving less than 2 per cent in all subsequent national legislative elections until 2004. Some of the most authoritative studies on the extreme right have attributed the marginality of the Greek extreme right to a developmental ‘lag’ of recent Mediterranean democracies (Kitschelt 1995) and to the bitter memories of authoritarianism (Ignazi 2003). Indeed, until recently these analyses went some way to accounting for the failure of the Greek extreme right. But the recent advances of the extreme-right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) create the need to re-examine the conventional wisdom.

Set up in 2000 by a maverick politician of the conservative New Democracy (ND), LAOS shocked the political establishment with its performance at the 2002 municipal elections receiving 13.6 per cent in the most populous ‘super’ prefecture of Athens-Piraeus. The party got 2.2 per cent in the legislative elections in March 2004; 4.1 per cent in the European elections in
June 2004; and 3.8 per cent in the legislative elections of September 2007 (see Table 8.1). Most observers consider the last result to be an important breakthrough for LAOS because it gave the party ten seats in the national legislature. Like previous political formations that sought to challenge the dominance of ND on the right, LAOS came into being after George Karatzaferis’s departure from the conservatives, with which he was voted MP in Athens in 1993, 1996 and 2000. But unlike previous ND challengers, LAOS is directly comparable with West European extreme-right parties sharing their nationalist ideology and populist rhetoric as well as their anti-immigrant, xenophobic and anti-Semitic appeals. LAOS also has distinctive characteristics that reflect certain Greek particularities, like its emphasis on ‘national issues’ and, as its name suggests, its explicit religious appeal.

The purpose of this chapter is to sketch the trajectory of the Greek extreme right since 1974. The first section traces the evolution of the various extreme-right parties that surfaced in the post-authoritarian period. These parties shared a notable attachment to the old regime and a strong antithesis to post-1974 policies towards the king, the communists and the junta. The second section uses primary party documents to show the gradual transformation of the extreme right in the 1990s through the adoption of an explicitly nationalist ideological platform. The transformation of the Greek extreme right prepared the ground for the appearance of LAOS in the 2000s. The third section uses evidence from party documents and from interviews with party officials to discuss the ideology of LAOS. It also uses election and survey data to analyse the party’s electoral base. The fourth section seeks to account for the rise of the party, examining both demand and supply factors. With regard to the demand factors, it points to the existence of favourable socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions for the rise of the extreme right. On the supply side, it notes that the difficulty New Democracy has in dealing with ‘national’ or national
identity issues created opportunities for the rise of LAOS. It also highlights the communication resources made available to the party by the mainstream media. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the future of LAOS. It asks whether the party will follow the short-lived trajectory of previous ND challengers or whether LAOS will become a permanent force in Greek party politics.

<Insert Table 8.1 here>

The Post-authoritarian Extreme Right

As in post-war Europe, the transition of Greece to democracy in 1974 left behind a segment of the population that was still attached to the old regime and refused to accept the new political realities. This group, made up of ex-army officers, ex-officials of the Greek Colonels’ regime and die-hard anti-communists, became the core of the various extreme-right parties that appeared in the late 1970s and 1980s. They were largely led by older politicians who belonged to the pre-1967 political establishment. Rooted in the historical cleavages that shaped modern Greek party politics, the programmatic appeals of the post-authoritarian extreme right were largely a reaction to the policies set in place after 1974, especially those relating to the treatment of the Communist Party, the king and ex-junta officials. Unlike the contemporary Greek extreme right, which is more directly comparable with the European, the parties representing the post-authoritarian extreme right were not explicitly nationalist. Their programmes included implicit nationalist references, but more as a reaction to leftist internationalism than as a positive identification with the Greek nation. Their programmatic emphasis was on moral conservatism and, to a lesser extent, on economic liberalism.
The first party that came to be associated with the post-authoritarian extreme right was the National Democratic Union (NDU). It was formed in 1974, immediately after the transition to democracy, in reaction to the way the prime minister, Constantine Karamanlis, handled the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the Communists and ex-junta officers. Unlike most contemporary European extreme-right parties, the party supported Greek membership in international organizations. It was critical of the decision to withdraw Greece from NATO and it supported Greece’s entry into the European Economic Community (EEC). Moreover, the NDU rebuffed the ‘indiscriminate persecution of large numbers of nationally-minded citizens as well as the ruthless staining of reputations and the humiliation of the armed and security forces’ (Dimitras 1992: 261). Like all extreme-right parties during this period, the NDU was also morally conservative, pledging to protect the Helleno-Christian tradition. Although the leader of the party, Petros Garoufalias, was quickly branded as extreme-rightist by his political opponents, he insisted that his party was against any form of dictatorship and stressed his democratic credentials. In the November 1974 elections, the party got only 1.1 per cent of the national vote, as the majority of the Greek populace rallied behind Karamanlis’s conservative New Democracy.

It was only after 1974 that reactions against prime minister Karamanlis started to gain ground. Such reactions intensified after the Greek populace voted overwhelmingly against the monarchy in 1975, to the consternation of many conservative supporters. Along with Karamanlis’s legalization of the Communist Party and the handling of Greek foreign policy, dissatisfaction with government policies led to the creation of another extreme-right party, the National Camp. The party proved much more successful than the NDU, presenting a considerable challenge to the ND. Apart from its fervent anti-Communism, the party pledged to free jailed junta leaders, to achieve Greek membership into the EEC and to rid the economy of
state interventionism. The party benefited from extensive and favourable press coverage from
the Greek dailies *Estia* (Εστία) and *Eleftheros Kosmos* (Ελεύθερος Κόσμος), which were critical
of Karamanlis’s policies. Despite his efforts to brand the party as ‘neo-fascist’, the National
Camp capitalized on popular dissatisfaction with the government and received 6.8 per cent of the
1977 vote. According to one study, the party was over-represented among younger males,

By 1981, though, most of the National Camp’s members returned to the conservative ND.
The remaining members took refuge in the Party of the Progressives, a conservative grouping
that managed to get 1.7 per cent in the national elections and 2 per cent in the European
elections, winning a seat in the European Parliament. Like its two predecessors, the party
demanded the release of jailed junta leaders and emphasized the importance of classical and
Christian education for the revival of the Great Idea, a reference to older irredentist claims.
Moreover, the party rejected the government’s social and nationalization policies pledging,
instead, to limit state intervention in the economy and to strengthen private initiative. The party
was replaced by the National Political Union (NPU), a party nominally led by the imprisoned
colonel and former dictator, George Papadopoulos. Fiercely anti-communist and socially
conservative, the party centered its programmatic appeal on the release of its jailed leader.
Unlike its predecessors, the NPU contested several elections, those of 1985 and June 1989, and it
won a seat in the European Parliament in 1984. But its otherwise dismal results led to mass
defections from the party and to the formation of a new one, the National Party (NP).

[A]The Transformation of the Post-authoritarian Extreme Right
The founding of the NP in 1989 by a thousand NPU members set the stage for the ideological shift of the Greek extreme right. The most distinctive characteristic of this shift was the emphasis on nationalism. Realizing the need to broaden its appeal beyond the backward-looking claims of its post-authoritarian predecessor, the new extreme right discarded its earlier programmatic fixation on the release of imprisoned junta leaders. Instead, it fully embraced nationalism as the supreme value and the essence of its ideology. One of the most fervent advocates of this change was the leader of NPU’s youth group (and since 2007, a LAOS MP), Makis Vorides, who considered nationalism to be the missing link between the party and society. As he recalls:

[ext]Towards the late 1980s, I realised the need to change the demands of our movement [NPU]. We had demanded the release of the army officers who were involved in the junta, the return of the King, and the rehabilitation of the anti-communist struggle of 1945–49. All these smelled like mothballs to me! The King himself did not want to return! More importantly, our demands were historical, not social. I told EPEN that we must move on. The legal discussion of whether General Papadopoulos should be in prison or not is interesting but it does not really concern the society in general. The demands about the past blocked our future.7

The ideological shift of the extreme right was evident in the programme of the NP, which called for the subordination of individual rights to the interest of the nation, from where they are supposedly derived. The party asserted the right for ‘self-determination’ for Greek populations abroad and advocated the secession of non-liberated Greek homelands. More importantly, the
party paid close attention to developments in the rest of Europe, where extreme rightists started making significant electoral advances by capitalizing on anti-foreigner sentiment. Following the example of the French National Front – with the leaders of which NPU had a long-standing relation – Greek extreme rightists gradually extended their nationalist appeals to immigration. The NP introduced anti-immigrant statements into its 1990 programme, calling for the repatriation of foreign workers. Moreover, blending the moral traditionalism of its predecessors with anti-Semitism, the party blamed ‘world Zionism’ for corrupting ‘Helleno-Christian traditions’.

For nearly a decade, the transformation of the ideological profile of the Greek extreme right did not alleviate its electoral misfortunes. The NP failed miserably in the 1990 election, receiving 0.1 per cent of the vote. In the early 1990s, when the Macedonia issue broke out, nationalists had new opportunities to revive their waning political fortunes. Amidst the nationalist fervour that swept Greece over the Macedonia issue, Political Spring, an ND-splinter party that adopted a maximalist position on the matter, staged a significant breakthrough in the 1993 elections. Avoiding the traditional emphasis of the Greek extreme right on ‘Helleno-Christian’ values, the party built its credibility by insisting that the name ‘Macedonia’ is exclusively Greek. But besides this issue, Political Spring failed to establish a distinctive ideological profile and by the mid-1990s, when the salience of the issue started to wane, the party collapsed. Its early success had revitalized extreme-rightist efforts to gain electoral prominence. In 1994, Vorides and former members of earlier extreme-right groupings formed the Hellenic Front, identifying themselves as Greek nationalists and seeking to fight ‘national decadence’ and illegal immigration. Initially the party was inactive and it was only in 2000 that it started participating in national elections. Along with Front Line, a party headed by the unrepentant Holocaust-denier
Kostas Plevris, the Hellenic Front received 0.2 per cent of the vote. The two parties faced competition from Sotiris Sofianopoulos, a former host of a local TV programme in Argolida and a fervent nationalist. Initially founded in 1981, his Party of Hellenism called for a return to ‘Hellenic roots’ and presented ‘Hellenism’ as a substitute of capitalism, socialism and communism. Sofianopoulos revived the dormant party in 1996 and ran in the national legislative elections, receiving 0.2 per cent of the vote. In 2004, the Party of Hellenism and the Front Line joined LAOS, lured by the access Karatzaferis could grant them to his marginal TV station, Teleasty, and to his weekly newspaper, Alpha 1. In 2005, the Hellenic Front also joined LAOS.

LAOS

The transformation of the post-authoritarian extreme right in the 1990s laid the foundations for the emergence of LAOS in the 2000s. Founded in September 2000 in the midst of a political row over identity cards (explained below), the party shares many of the basic attributes of the West European extreme right. But it also has a number of distinct characteristics that reflect Greek particularities. Like most extreme-right parties in Europe (e.g. Mudde 2007), LAOS is explicitly nationalist, seeking to protect ‘the Nation, the Genus, the Faith, the History and the cultural identity’ of the Greeks. In its most recent programme, LAOS emphasizes the ‘Helleno-centric’ and ‘patriotic’ nature of the party. It states that its policies are inspired by ‘the Hellenic spirit, the Hellenic values and the Hellenic culture.’

This ethnocentric worldview is the basis for the party’s anti-immigrant, anti-American and anti-Semitic appeal. According to LAOS, illegal immigration is the biggest ‘wound’ in Greek society, undermining national security, increasing unemployment and causing crime. Angrily replying to questioning about her views on immigration, a candidate of the party for the
2004 national legislative elections put this quite succinctly: ‘I do not want an Albanian neighbour, but a Greek one. I prefer neighbours who will enter my house through the door at 6pm, not those who break into my house through the windows at 3am. If this makes me a extreme-rightist, then I am!’\textsuperscript{14} In his rhetorical outbursts, Karatzaferis reinforces such xenophobic claims by asking: ‘Compare and choose: a Greece of Greek Christians?\textsuperscript{15} Or, a Greece of Albanian illegal immigrants?’\textsuperscript{16} The anti-immigrant profile of the party has been bolstered by the absorption of the Hellenic Front in 2005, which was the most vocal opponent of immigration before it merged with LAOS. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed increased moderation from the party on the issue, in part because immigration has stayed on the sidelines of the mainstream debate. In its 2007 programme, the party rejects ‘the solution of the multi-cultural society’ and the welfare policies that ‘benefit Muslims and Gypsies by allowing them to live without the need to work.’ LAOS argues that Greece should use its cultural heritage and Greek education to make immigrant children ‘become Greeks in soul and in spirit.’\textsuperscript{17}

The party is not only against immigration but it is also suspicious of foreign powers, especially the United States. Its first programme maintains that the ‘party was founded because foreign powers want to impose a new situation on our people, foreign and extraneous to the traditions of our race.’ Seeking to tap into widespread anti-American sentiments among the Greek populace, Karatzaferis accuses the two main parties for ‘slave-like’ behaviour towards the U.S., which is leading the country ‘into a situation that is going to be worse than Nazism.’ Not surprisingly, the party is sympathetic to those who stand against the U.S. Karatzaferis boasts of having a picture of Fidel Castro in his office and to be an admirer of Hugo Chavez. He is also sympathetic to China, ‘the only power that can pose a credible bulwark against American hegemony.’\textsuperscript{18} As he reassures his followers, ‘I have not suddenly become a Communist but Fidel
is the symbol of resistance against the Americans, and the Americans are those plotting everything against Greece.¹⁹

The party’s suspicion of Western powers is connected with its fervent anti-Semitism. Its proclamation asks the party’s supporters to say ‘no’ to ‘the puppets of foreign and domestic Zionism.’ Such views are consistent with those of its leader, who in 1996, as an ND MP, tabled a formal question in the Greek parliament about the Jewish descent of the deputy foreign minister, Christos Rozakis. In May 2000, he claimed on his TV show: ‘We live in a country run by Jews. The prime minister is of Jewish descent. His grandfather was Aaron Avouris. George Papandreou has his grandmother, Mineiko, who was a Polish Jew. The entire government is run by Jews.’²⁰ In private discussions, members of the party go even further than their leader: ‘Six million deaths. This is overblown! Hitler, a Jew, surely persecuted the Jews. But such numbers are exaggerated.’²¹

While the primacy of nationalism in the party’s programme makes it comparable with the West European extreme right, LAOS has a number of characteristics that reflect Greek particularities and distinguish it from most of its West European counterparts. The first distinction relates to its explicit religious appeal. Given the historical association between the Greek nation and Greek religion, ‘faith in Orthodoxy’ constitutes one of the ‘founding stones’ of the party’s ideology. In his televised speeches and public appearances, Karatzaferis makes frequent reference to Orthodoxy and to the Greek Church, which he considers the ‘mother of the modern Greek state.’²² He is known to have had a close relationship with the late Greek Archbishop Christodoulos, with whom he agreed on issues like the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and the revision of history books. Due to the status and role of the Church in Greek politics, Karatzaferis often uses this relationship as a source of
legitimacy for his ideas. While setting LAOS apart from other West European extreme-right parties, the religious appeal brings LAOS closer to the post-authoritarian extreme right’s preoccupation with Helleno-Christian values. The second distinction relates to the emphasis LAOS places on foreign policy, especially on relations with Turkey, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Tension with each of these countries has been a source of nationalist mobilization in the 1970s and 1980s (with Turkey over Cyprus and the Aegean) and in the 1990s and 2000s (with Albania over the rights of the Greek minority and with FYROM over its name). The party seeks to capitalize on the high public resonance of these issues by holding hard-line positions on foreign policy, especially over Cyprus and Macedonia. In recent years, these ‘national’ issues have become the signature issues of LAOS, putting a lot of pressure on the conservative ND to take them into consideration.

Like most of its European counterparts, LAOS combines its nationalist ideology with strong populist and anti-systemic appeals. The party rejects the term extreme right, insisting that the placement of parties on a left–right scale is outdated. When asked, Karatzaferis rarely misses an opportunity to stress that ‘the party is on the Right on national issues and on the Left on social issues.’ LAOS makes a significant effort to appeal to leftist voters, especially low-earning workers, through fierce populist attacks on globalization, foreign chains and commercial banks. The emphasis the party places on social issues is sometimes reminiscent of left-wing or anti-plutocratic populism. In his first appearance in the Greek parliament in September 2007, the leader of LAOS asked the government to combat banks, which record the ‘biggest profits’ in Europe. ‘This is not the product of labour but the product of theft. Bankers are thieves, Mr Prime Minister, and you must send the attorney in to check on them’, he said.
Like many European extreme-right parties, the party supplements these populist outbursts with strong anti-systemic rhetoric. The party’s 2007 programme begins with a call for the ‘overthrow of the rotten establishment that oppresses our country, leading it to gradual de-Hellenization and enslavement.’ Moreover, the party programme refers to the form of Greek government as ‘prime-ministerial dictatorship’ and calls for various forms of direct democracy. The 2007 programme also proposes setting up an institutional mechanism for determining ‘political fraud’. Through this mechanism the party wants to ensure that party politicians meet their electoral promises and intends to penalize them with the retraction of their parliamentary status if they do not.

[B]Electorate

As in the case with many of the smaller West European extreme-right parties, the limited size of LAOS’s electorate makes it difficult to analyse its social base. Some evidence about the composition of LAOS’s electorate comes from the geographical distribution of its votes in the 2007 legislative elections. The party managed to increase its share of the vote in all prefectures, an indication of its stable growth across the entire country. LAOS exceeded its national average of 3.8 per cent in twelve out of the fifty-six prefectures receiving more than 5 per cent in the first and second prefectures of Salonica, Piraeus and Athens, as well as in Greater Attica. In these seven urban prefectures the party won eight of its ten seats, and more than half of its 271,763 votes. The party underperformed in Crete and in parts of Western Greece. The overproportionate support for LAOS in urban prefectures is comparable with that for West European extreme-right parties but contrasts with the 1977 results of the National Camp, which had received less than its national average in all seven prefectures.
An exit poll of 7,498 voters at the September 2007 elections provides further analytical insights into LAOS’s voter profile (see Table 8.2). According to the poll, the electorate of LAOS bears significant similarities with the general profile of extreme-right voters in Western Europe (Betz 1994; Betz and Immerfall 1998; Kitschelt 1995; Norris 2005). LAOS’s voters are predominantly young males, albeit more educated than their West European counterparts. In terms of their occupational profile, there is an over-representation in LAOS’s constituents among small-business owners, entrepreneurs, the self-employed and private sector employees and an under-representation among farmers, the first-time unemployed and retirees. Moreover, LAOS supporters are over-represented among late-deciders and among those placing themselves on the right of the left-right spectrum or dismissing left-right categories as meaningless. Like the other two small parliamentary parties, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), LAOS is grossly over-represented among protest voters.

Like most extreme-right parties at a comparable stage of development, the advent of LAOS in the 2007 elections harmed the moderate right more than any other political party. According to this exit poll, nearly 40 per cent of those who voted for the party in the 2007 elections had voted for the conservative New Democracy in the previous legislative elections, held in March 2004. Another 11 per cent had voted for the socialist PASOK and 17 per cent had not voted or had voted for the rest of the parties. Interestingly, nearly a third of LAOS’s voters in the 2007 elections had also voted for the party in the 2004 elections. Indeed, additional data show that the party kept 74 per cent of its 2004 voters, losing most of the rest to New Democracy. While this figure suggests that the party might be gaining a stable electorate, the percentage of loyal voters is lower than that of the three biggest parties.
[A]The Rise of LAOS: Possible Explanations

In line with the now voluminous literature on this topic, an attempt to understand this phenomenon needs to begin with a consideration of demand factors (e.g. Kitschelt 1995; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005). This necessitates an examination of the basic socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions that are often thought to affect electoral behaviour and voter support for the extreme right. In the case of Greece, there are a number of such conditions. In repeated polls, for example, Greece scores the highest in aggregate measures of xenophobia in Western Europe. According to Eurobarometer, almost seven out of ten Greeks think that immigrants are a threat to their way of life, by far the biggest percentage among the fifteen older member states of the European Union. Moreover, 11.7 per cent of Greeks think that a dictatorship could be preferable to a democracy while another 7.7 per cent think that it does not matter whether there is a democracy or a dictatorship (Vernardakis 2000: 317). In combination with one of the worst corruption records in Europe, this mix of xenophobic, nationalist and authoritarian attitudes among the populace would seem to feed extreme-right support. Socio-cultural attitudes aside, Greece has also had socio-economic conditions that are thought to favour the rise of such parties. Until recent years, Greece had stagnant growth, high inflation and one of the highest unemployment levels in Europe. Since the late 1980s, the country has also witnessed a sudden inflow of immigrants that now make up more than 8 per cent of the population. For those viewing voting behaviour as a function of economic interests, the combination of high unemployment and high immigration would seem to make Greece an ideal candidate for extreme-right advances.
Socio-cultural attitudes and economic conditions provide the structural setting for the recent advances of the extreme right, but the electoral spurt of LAOS cannot be fully understood without a consideration of the broader political environment within which the party operates. Much of the work on the extreme right considers the availability of opportunities in this environment to be an important determinant of extreme-right performance (e.g. Kitschelt 1995). In Greece, the availability of such opportunities relates to the difficulty of the conservative party in effectively addressing the signature issues of the extreme right. Since the early 2000s, there have been a number of such issues. One of the most notable ones was the political row in 2000 over the removal of references to religious affiliation from national identity cards. Although the conservatives initially supported Church mobilizations against this, by the 2002 local elections, LAOS managed to present itself as the most fervent defender of the Church’s position (Ellinas 2007). The party was rewarded with 13.6 per cent of the vote in the closely-watched election of the Athens-Piraeus super-prefecture.

The return of ND to government in 2004 after eleven years in opposition provided further opportunities for the electoral growth of the extreme right. While in opposition, the conservatives had more flexibility to manoeuvre on the issues that feed extreme-right support. But once in government, they became compelled to balance their electoral motivations with their governmental responsibilities. The tension between the two became obvious only weeks after the new government took office, in April 2004, over a UN plan for the reunification of Cyprus. Whereas the socialist PASOK was unambiguously supportive of the plan, ND avoided taking a clear stance on the issue, leaving LAOS as the most vocal defender of a ‘patriotic’ no to the UN proposal, only a few weeks before the European elections. Another issue was the resurfacing of a dispute with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in 2007 over its claim to
what the Greeks consider to be an integral aspect of their national identity, the name ‘Macedonia’. In fear of international isolation, the conservative government sought to avoid a hard-line stance against its northern neighbour, stressing the need for a ‘realistic’ solution to the problem and preparing the ground for political compromise. This left LAOS defending a maximalist position with a relatively high public resonance, especially in northern Greece. The party’s 2007 programme insisted that the new name should not include the word ‘Macedonia’ at all and that Greece should veto FYROM’s EU accession if this condition is not met.\textsuperscript{30}

The most important opportunity for the party was probably the political controversy that broke out in 2007 about a new history textbook for twelve-year-olds. Introduced in September 2006, the new textbook sought to eliminate the nationalist overtones of the previous textbook, especially in its references to Turkey. But the textbook soon came under fierce attack by the Church and by some conservatives for minimizing the suffering incurred by the Greeks under the Ottomans and during the flight of the Greeks from Smyrna (modern day Izmir, in Turkey) in 1922. The critics considered the revisionist views presented in the textbook to be unpatriotic and pointed to historical inaccuracies, questioning the credentials of its authors. The issue divided the conservative camp between those who demanded the immediate withdrawal of the book and those who rejected this on institutional grounds. Among the former were prominent members of New Democracy, like the Salonica prefect, Panayiotis Psomiades and the ND MP, Yiannis Ioannides. Responding to this criticism, the conservative government asked various academic bodies to send comments to the drafters of the textbook to be taken into consideration for future revisions. But the ND education minister, Marieta Yiannakou, refused to give in to pressures for the withdrawal of the book. Her insistence gained Yiannakou sympathy among the left but aggravated certain members of her party, who felt that the government was supportive of an
unpatriotic view of history. The ambivalence of the conservative government over the textbook issue allowed LAOS to emerge as the sole defender of an unequivocal demand to withdraw the book.

The difficulty ND had in dealing with these issues presented opportunities for the rise of LAOS, but the party might not have been able to capitalize on these opportunities and enter the political system had it not enjoyed excessive media exposure. As mentioned before, LAOS has had a significant advantage compared to previous extreme-right groupings in Greece, because its leader owns a national, albeit minor, TV channel that he uses to give the party wider visibility than its finances could otherwise afford or its thin organization would otherwise allow. More importantly, though, the party received considerable exposure from the mainstream media, especially during 2007, when the textbook and Macedonia issues became salient. So much was the publicity granted to LAOS, that it raised suspicion among political commentators that the party was patronized by socialist-controlled media. This suspicion was later vocalized and reinforced by the Greek Communists who accused the Socialists of ‘directing’ certain media to give LAOS over-proportionate exposure.31 While the Communists did not present any evidence to substantiate these claims at the time, subsequent data show that the national media gave much more attention to LAOS than its electoral standing would have justified. In the last month of the 2007 legislative elections, Karatzaferis received 9 per cent of all TV and radio references to political leaders; in the last week, Karatzaferis got 11 per cent of all references, more than the leaders of SYRIZA and KKE (Media Metrix 2007).

[A]The Future of the Greek Extreme Right
The electoral breakthrough of LAOS in 2007 can potentially transform the Greek political landscape. In the past few decades, parties like LAOS have consolidated their presence across a number of European countries, changing the basic contours of the political discourse and, in some cases, bringing about important policy changes. Will the extreme right become a permanent and sizable force in Greek party politics like the Austrian FPÖ, the Flemish Vlaams Belang and the French National Front? Or will its recent breakthrough prove as short-lived as that of the German Republikaner, the Dutch Pim Fortuyn List and the Swedish New Democracy? There are a number of factors suggesting that LAOS might prove to be a transient phenomenon, and disappear from the electoral map as quickly as it appeared. A number of other factors, though, suggest the exact opposite: that LAOS will consolidate its presence in Greek politics and become a credible contender for the conservative vote. It is worth considering both sets of factors.

Greek electoral history may be instructive for the future trajectory of the Greek extreme right. The two major formations that came to challenge the dominance of ND on the right – the National Camp in 1977 and the Political Spring in 1993 – failed to sustain their initial bases of support and quickly collapsed. After its notable 1977 breakthrough, the leadership of the National Camp was quickly co-opted by the conservatives and joined the ND ticket for the 1981 elections (Kapetanyannis 1995: 136). Similarly, the advances of Political Spring in the 1993 legislative elections and in the 1994 European elections proved to be ephemeral. By the 1996 legislative elections, party support collapsed sharply along with the salience of the single issue that brought the Political Spring to existence – the Macedonia issue. On both occasions, ND was able to recapture the political space and win back most of the constituencies lost to the two splinter parties. In line with this previous experience, it is tempting to view LAOS as a temporary
party that is likely to be absorbed by ND in the coming years, just as the National Camp and the Political Spring were. Like these parties, LAOS still lacks a solid organizational structure that would help it sustain and extend its initial electoral gains, and it continues to rely on the persona and the communication resources of its leader. So far, the party has relied largely on the media to communicate with voters, setting aside the important task of organizational growth. Seven years after its foundation the party still lacks the necessary structures to mobilize voters and to disseminate its newly gained resources. It also lacks the mechanisms to resolve intra-party conflicts. Unless the party builds its organizational capacity it will become vulnerable to conservative co-optation strategies and fall victim to infighting between its radical and more moderate members. Without solid organizational roots LAOS might simply replicate the short trajectory of other ND challengers.

While recent history points to the ephemeral nature of efforts to challenge ND’s dominance of the right, a number of reasons suggest that LAOS might prove to be more enduring than its predecessors. The first is ideological. Unlike previous ND challengers, LAOS has a comprehensive nationalist worldview through which it filters its programmatic positions on both foreign policy and domestic issues. This has helped the party establish credibility on ‘national’ and national identity issues that would make it hard for ND to trespass onto its programmatic territory. Nationalism is also the unifying theme that currently connects its somewhat heterogeneous parliamentary group. The second factor relates to the favourable opportunity structure LAOS confronts. The re-election of New Democracy in government with a very thin majority seriously hampers its capacity to manoeuvre in the competitive space and to recapture the electorate lost to LAOS in the 2007 elections. As long as ND stays in government, it will find it difficult to effectively address the signature issues of LAOS, without alienating its more
moderate constituencies or, in the case of Macedonia, its international allies. Unlike ND, LAOS can move freely in the competitive space and take tougher programmatic stances than the government on ‘national’ and ‘national identity’ issues. Moreover, the party has the potential to become a net beneficiary from the popular dissatisfaction with the government and from the disarray of socialist opposition. A third factor relates to its growing visibility in the mainstream media. This visibility might become a serious threat for the mainstream parties should LAOS choose to put immigration on the political agenda. Due to the high public resonance of the issue and widespread Greek xenophobia, this issue can provide the basis for the party’s future support.

References


[A]Notes

2 National Camp, ‘Proclamation of the National Camp to the Greek People’ Eleftheros Kosmos, 9 October 1977, p. 3.


5 EPEN, ‘Our political program: EPEN, The time has arrived!’ 1989.

6 Even before the appearance of the National Party, the United Nationalist Movement attempted to make nationalism the most distinctive characteristic of the Greek extreme right. The party clearly identifies itself as nationalist and seeks to turn Greece into a nationalist state through revolutionary action. Eνιαίο Εθνικιστικό Κίνημα, ‘ΕΝΕΚ: 15 Ιδεολογικές Αρχές’, άγνωστη ημερομηνία (party program) [ΕΝΕΚ: 15 Ideological Principles’ unknown date.]

7 Interview with author, Athens, February 2004.
Several interviews with leaders of the National Party’s successor party, the Hellenic Front, Athens, February–March 2004.

Εθνικό Κόμμα, «Εθνικό Κόμμα: Πολιτικές Αρχές», unknown date, p. 2 (party program)


Ibid.

Interview #5, Athens, February 2004.

This was one of the slogans of the Greek junta (Ελλάς Ελλήνων Χριστιανών).

http://www.iospress.gr/ios2002/ios20021020a.htm (accessed 28 September 2007). Ios is a group of investigative journalists who have written extensively on the extreme right and who have been interviewed by the author.


Discussion with the author, Limassol, Cyprus, July 2006.


Interviews in the party’s office with a high ranking party official and a self-identified historian, Athens, February 2004.

Program of LAOS, 2001, Ibid.

Meeting with the author, February 2004, Athens.


Ibid., p. 13.

For example, Eurobarometer 199, Autumn 2003, p. 28.


The Greek communists also rejected the UN proposal, albeit for different – anti-American, anti-imperial – reasons. On the day of the referenda in Cyprus over the UN plan, the official newspaper of LAOS, Alpha 1, proclaimed that the [Greek] Cypriots ‘stamp with their NO the refusal of Hellenism to unconditionally surrender to the plans and the demands of Americano-Zionists.’ See ‘Greeks are still in existence’ Alpha 1, p. 1 (‘Υπάρχουν ακόμα Έλληνες’ Άλφα 1, σελ. 1).


For example, ‘Ενίσχυση ΛΑΟΣ από ΠΑΣΟΚ καταγγέλλει η κ. Παπαρήγα’, Καθημερινή, 6 Ιουνίου 2007 [‘Papariga accuses PASOK of Reinforcing LAOS’]