

## Country Report

# Greece

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This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. It is part of a series covering 23 countries (listed below) on four continents. More basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in these states is available in our Country Profiles series. This report was produced by GREASE, an EU-funded research project investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

### **Countries covered in this series:**

Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

<http://grease.eu.eu>



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**The EU-Funded GREASE project looks to Asia for insights on governing religious diversity and preventing radicalisation.**

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in over 20 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Raciunas from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

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## **Introduction**

For Greeks religion plays a fundamental role in defining the national identity. In historical terms, national ideology and Orthodoxy (alongside with language and ancestry) has shaped what is known as membership in the Greek nation (Tsitselikis, 2012: p.8). What is more, the attachment to Orthodoxy as the key element of the national identity formation makes difficult to draw a distinction between Greek ethnicity and religiosity (Halikiopoulou, 2011).

Such historical and political contingencies have forged a genuine model of the religious governance whereby Orthodoxy has an especially prominent place in the public sphere and in dominant citizenship discourse (Fokas, 2012: p.403). It is not a coincidence that until 2010, the definition of citizenship had been based almost exclusively on the *jus sanguinis* principle, mostly motivated by a need to re-confirm the notion of Greek superiority (Triandafyllidou and Kouki, 2013: p.714; Gemi, 2019). In addition, the historical legacy related to the nature of nation formation in the Balkans; the dominant nationalistic discourse; the extremely strained relations with neighbouring countries and the co-existence with ethnic minorities on either sides of the borders, have diachronically shaped the Greek approach to ethnic and religious differences. In this vein, the notion of 'difference' is conceptually founded on two closely intertwined levels: ethnicity and religion which in turn are broadly applied to both minorities and immigrants (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2009: p.960). Apparently, the "historical anxiety" of the Greek state fuelled by traditional tensions in the Balkan led to the gradual minoritization and nationalization of the 'Other' (Baltsiotis, 2011: p.18), a process which resulted either in its compulsory assimilation or exclusion from the Greek nation-state and its political community.

In this context, Greek national identity has been historically constructed in opposition to a religious 'Other' and the Muslim one, in particular. Hence, Muslim populations belonging either to "Old Islam" or "New Islam"<sup>1</sup> have been historically identified with Turkey and the Turks (Hatziprokopiou and Evergeti, 2014). On the other hand, while the Orthodox Church is viewed as tolerant towards diversity, it persistently retains its privileged position as a national church (Triandafyllidou and Kouki, 2013: p.714). The privileged position of Orthodox Church as a national institution is clearly embedded in the legal order. In this respect, the relevant legal acts and policies on religious matters take into consideration the political interest of the Greek Church in first place (Tsitselikis, 2012: p.9). Interestingly, despite the fact that religious freedom is safeguarded by the constitution, the Orthodoxy remains the "prevailing" religion in Greece. What is more, the privileged position of the Church of Greece gives it the right

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<sup>1</sup>In literature the term "Old Islam" refer to the Muslim minority living in Thrace as to distinguish them from those (mostly immigrants) who have recently settled in Greece and compose the "New Islam".

to have a say to the activities of all “known religions”<sup>2</sup> (Hatziprokopiou and Evergeti, 2014), and other state affairs, such as the curriculum and textbooks for the class of religious education and morning prayer in Greek schools. Although Greece has a long experience in managing the Islamic religious institutions due to the historical presence of “Old Islam”, it has been very reluctant to provide equal religious rights to the “New Islam”. Apparently, the reason lies in the strong view of Greece as a Christian Orthodox nation, where the presence of Islam is perceived as a rival cultural element that could potentially threaten and destabilise the homogeneity of Greek ‘ethnos’ (Skoulariki, 2010: p.302). It is not a coincidence that in a recent study of the Pew Research Center (2018) three-quarters of Greeks consider being Orthodox Christian important to being truly Greek, while nearly nine-in-ten say Greek culture is superior to others (2018: p.6).

Today, co-ethnics from former Soviet Union and Albania along with immigrants coming mostly from Islamic countries (i.e. Pakistan) account for more than 9 percent of the total resident population (Greek Ministry of Immigration Policy Statistics, April 2019). A notable increase since 2015-2017 in asylum seeker and undocumented migrant arrivals from Middle East (particularly from Syria and Iraq), Asia and Africa via Turkey coincided with the deterioration of the economic and political crisis and the historical rise of extreme right political forces. In fact, the rejection of the religiously ‘other’ lies at the core of the racist ideology articulated by the neo-nazi Golden Dawn party. Meanwhile, the increase of Islamophobia, the hate-speech rhetoric, and the rise in anti-Semitic and anti-immigrants attacks denote that religious intolerance in Greece is on the rise. It is impressive, however, that not a single Islamist terrorist attack has taken place in the country, and there are no recorded cases of organised Islamist radicalisation on Greek soil (Skleparis, 2017).

This report provides for a critical overview of Greek state-religion relations and the prevailing approach to govern religious diversity in Greece. It is based on desk research as well as fieldwork. The fieldwork, which was conducted between February and March 2019, involves interviews with seven key informants, including experts and representatives of three largest Muslim associations operating in the greater area of Athens.

In view of the above, this report is organised in three sessions. It begins with a short overview of the country’s profile in terms of religious demography and human geography of religious communities in Greece. Then, the second session elaborates on the historical background of state-organised religion relations, while examining how the governance of religious diversity and tolerance has shaped the legal and institutional framework of inter-religious co-existence in Greece. It also addresses the particular challenges that Greece has faced in recent times such as the construction and the operation of the mosque in Eleona and the Muslim cemetery in Schisto, the judicial authorities of muftis, and the debate on Sharia law. The final session embarks on discussion on the emerging trends in radicalisation and islamophobia that can

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<sup>2</sup> The term “known religion” is referred in Article 13, paragraph 2 of the Greek constitution. According to the Council of State and the Supreme Court, it denotes any religion that is public, with no secret rituals or dogmas, which do not constitute an unlawful union, or a fictitious association or organization with illegal aims, and its purpose must not negatively affect public order or morals.

potentially lead to violence such as the hate speech rhetoric articulated by Greek clerics and the role of the neo-nazi party Golden Dawn.

### **Religious demography and human geography of religion communities**

Greece is considered as demographically a homogeneous country. The two fundamental elements that support the fabric of ethnic homogeneity are found in the common language and religion (the Greek Orthodoxy) of the population (Anagnostopoulos, 2017). As the “prevailing religion” by virtue of article 3 of the Constitution of Greece, the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ is a legal entity of public law. In demographic terms, it is estimated that in the population at 10.8 million, approximately 81 to 90 percent is Greek Orthodox, 2 percent Muslim, 4 percent atheist, and 0.7 other religions (State Department, 2019: p.3). Among the religious communities, **Muslims** are the largest religious community followed by **Roman Catholics** and **Jewish community**.

The **Muslim population** consists of two legal categories. Those who are Greek citizens and belong to a traditional religious minority who enjoy special legal status on the basis of a 'historical settlement' (“Old Islam”) (Tsitselikis, 2012: p.535). The second category includes foreigners who are not Greek citizens and have the legal status of aliens (allodapos) (“New Islam”). The two groups represent diametrically different cases which makes Greece perhaps the only European Union member state where Islam is configured in these two forms (Tsitselikis, 2012: p.19).

The Greek Muslim population that belongs to “Old Islam” constitutes a number of distinct communities including approximately 100,000-120,000 individuals living in Thrace and descending from the Muslim minority officially recognized in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne<sup>3</sup> (ECRI, 2015: p.33) with 50 percent having Turkish origin; 35 percent Pomaks, and 15 percent Roma<sup>4</sup> (Anagnostopoulos, 2017: p.104). The Muslim minority of Western Thrace has its own religious institutions, including approximately 290 mosques and minority schools (both regulated by the Greek state), several associations and unions, and full civil and political rights. These are, however, territorially confined in the area of Thrace which means that when members of Thracian Muslim minority move to Athens (or elsewhere) they lose the legal access to provisions and rights attached to their status. Muslims also enjoy a judicial system known as Sharia Law<sup>5</sup>, which has created controversies with the constitutional law

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<sup>3</sup> The protection of the religious minority of Greek Muslims is based on three international treaties: the Treaty of Athens (14 November 1913), the Treaty of Sèvres of (10 August 1920), and the **Lausanne Peace Treaty** (24 July 1923) (ECHR 2018, p.15). Under the Treaty of Lausanne the Greek State recognised the existence of only one minority on Greek territory, namely the ‘Muslim’ minority of Western Thrace in north-eastern Greece. The ‘Muslim inhabitants of Western Thrace’ and the ‘Greek inhabitants of Constantinople’ were expressly excluded from the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey that took place under the Lausanne Treaty (ECHR, 2018: p.21).

<sup>4</sup>The majority of Pomaks (approximately 30,000 persons) are Sunni Muslims and they are considered to be Slavophone Islamised Greeks. The Roma population of Western Thrace (their number varies between 5,000 and 18,000) is mostly Muslims, while they have a minority status according to the Lausanne Treaty (Anagnostopoulos, 2017: p.108). Each one of those groups has its own unique cultural background with religion being the only common element among the population of the Muslim minority of Thrace.

<sup>5</sup>Sharia law is a modified judicial system originating from the Ottoman millet, dealing with matters of marriage, divorce, alimony, guardianship, and inheritance of Thracian Muslims, all examined by their local Mufti. There are three courts in Western Thrace which recognize Sharia located in the regions of Xanthi, Komotini and Didymoteicho.

because of its conflicting interpretation in relation to the gender equality and other provisions and conventions on human rights (Anagnostopoulos, 2017: p.114).

Meanwhile, there is another historic Muslim community of the Dodecanese Islands, but its status does not fall under the Lausanne protection system (Kurban and Tsitselikis, 2010: p. 7). A cascade of historical events and tense relations between Greece and Turkey forced them to leave their homes and migrate to Turkey, which in turn deprived of their Greek citizenship and property (Kaurinkoski, 2012: p.74). Since the mid-1990s, however, the situation has been significantly improved on several domains. It is worth mentioning that Article 19 of L. 3370/1955<sup>6</sup> which deprived the Greek citizenship from the members of Muslim community was abolished in 1998 and replaced later by the L. 3284/2004 (27432).

With respect to “New Islam”, according to the Ministry of Immigration Policy statistics, immigrants from South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa represent 10,1 percent (56,027 out of 554,269) of the total immigrant population in Greece (April 2019). These are mainly staying in the country as immigrants and asylum seekers, while living in clustered ethnic communities’ mainly in urban centers or in reception facilities (State Department, 2019a: p. 3). According to interviewees, approximately 150,000 – 200,000 Muslim migrants from South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa reside mostly in greater Athens area and its western suburbs (Interviews 5 and 6). Additionally, following the events related to refugee crisis in the period 2015-2017, the Asylum Service statistics (March 2019) refers to 62,418 asylum seekers mainly from Muslim countries that are actually in the country (p.4).

Meanwhile, immigrants from South Asia, particularly from Pakistan and Bangladesh, constitute the largest Muslim community of “New Islam” in the country. They are predominantly employed in the low skill and low cost sectors of the economy: agriculture, construction, textiles, services and trade (Gemi, 2018). As a result of the economic crisis that hit the Greek economy, it is estimated that over 90,000 Pakistani and Bangladesh have left the country in search of employment in other European countries (Interview 5). Albanians, who constitute 66 percent (365,687 out of 554,269) of Greece’s immigrants and who theoretically come from a neighbouring country with a predominantly (70 percent) Muslim population, appear to be either converting to Orthodoxy or non-practicing Islam at all.

According to the key informants there are one hundred mosques where they practise Islam, among which only three are officially registered while the rest operate unofficially under the label of cultural associations. Of those, 97 mosques belong to Sünni Islam and three to Shia denomination (Interviews 2 and 6). While in the early years fewer prayer sites gathered much more ethnically diverse audience, later on there is a growing fragmentation of informal mosques along ethnic lines. This may reflect the existence of different Islamic traditions among immigrants of the same ethnicity (Interview 5 and 6). Faced with mounting difficulties in relation to religious practice, after years of controversies over the official established mosque operating in Athens, currently the mosque is ready to be soon inaugurated in the neighbourhood of

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<sup>6</sup>L. 3370/1955, Code of Greek Citizenship abolished, see L. 3284/2004 (27432). Available in Greek from: [http://eudo-citizenship.eu/NationalDB/docs/GRE%203370%201955%20\(original\).pdf](http://eudo-citizenship.eu/NationalDB/docs/GRE%203370%201955%20(original).pdf)

Eleona, not very far from the central Athens. At the same time, however, there is no Islamic cemetery in Athens and Muslim immigrants are therefore forced to use the cemeteries in Western Thrace for their funerals or to cover the cost of transporting the bodies to the place of origin with the help of migrant communities and co-ethnic entrepreneurs (Interviews 4 and 5). As for 20 hectares of land allocated for a Muslim cemetery in Schisto near Athens<sup>7</sup> for the burial of Muslims, no progress had been made so far.

The religion community of **Greek Catholics** number about 50,000 members (0.5% of the population) (The Catholic Church in Greece, 2019)<sup>8</sup>. Apart from the permanent residents, considerable is the 'temporary presence' of other Catholics, who arrived in Greece as economic or political refugees. According to the Catholic Church (2019), the total population of "Old" and "New" Catholics in the country is estimated at 350,000. The majority of Catholics is established in Athens, while a large number of Catholics live in the Cyclades, mainly in islands of Syros (8,000) and Tinos (3,000). Meanwhile, the Polish and the Filipinos are the largest emigrant communities, with approximately 80,000 and 40,000 members respectively, while there is a significant number of immigrant Catholics originating from Iraq, Ukraine, Africa, and Asia (The Catholic Church in Greece, 2019).

According to evidence, the number of the **Jewish community** is estimated at approximately 5,000 individuals (State Department, 2019a: p. 23). Today, there are nine Jewish Communities located in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa, Chalkis, Volos, Corfu, Trikala, Ioannina and Rhodes<sup>9</sup> (KIS, 2019). Local Jewish communities are represented by the Central Jewish Coordination and Consultation Council. The Chief Rabbi is chosen by the Jewish community and his appointment requires the approval of the Greek Minister of Education and Religious Affairs (Anagnostopoulos, 2017: p.110). Under the L.2456/1920 "*On the Jewish Communities*" the Jewish community has the right to establish itself as a legal entity provided that there are more than twenty Jewish families in a certain locality and there is also a synagogue. It also enjoys the right to establish educational institutions and their curricula, provided that it does not impinge on national legislation and ensure the sufficient training of the Greek language.

There are about 80 religion entities formally registered in the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs (Interview 2). Among them the Greek Orthodox Church, the Jewish community, and the Muslim minority of Thrace have the status of official religious legal entities as "*Legal Body under State Law*" under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion Affairs. In addition, the Greek Orthodox Church, Muslim minority of Thrace, Jewish communities, and Roman Catholic Church receive government benefits that are not available to other religious communities (State Department, 2019b: p.1).

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Evangelical Christian groups, and Ethiopian, Coptic, Armenian Apostolic, and Assyrian Orthodox Churches acquired the

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<sup>7</sup> This was allocated to Muslims by the Greek Church back in 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Available from: <http://www.cathecclesia.gr/hellas/index.php/catholic-church-in-greece>

<sup>9</sup> KIS - Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece. Available from: [https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=411&Itemid=74](https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=411&Itemid=74)



status of religious legal entities under the L.4301/2014<sup>10</sup> “*Organization of the Legal Form of Religious Communities and their organizations in Greece*”. The same law also provides for groups seeking recognition to become religious legal entities under civil law. Under the status of the religious group, they are allowed to administer houses of prayer and worship, private schools, charitable institutions, and other non-profit entities (Article 7).

## **Legal and Institutional Framework Governing Religion and Diversity**

### **The Legal Framework**

The Greek constitution recognizes Orthodoxy as the “prevailing religion”<sup>11</sup>. It states freedom of religious conscience is inviolable and provides for the enjoyment of civil rights and liberties that do not depend on the individual's religious beliefs<sup>12</sup>. The constitution provides for the freedom of worship that shall be performed “unhindered and under the protection of the law”. It prohibits proselytizing and that allow for the prosecution of publications that offend Christianity or other “known religions”<sup>13</sup>, while no rite of worship is allowed to “offend public order or the good usages”.<sup>14</sup> According to the Article 13 of the Greek Constitution “the ministers of all known religions being subject to the same supervision by the State and to the same obligations toward it as those of the Greek Orthodox religion”. It also states that individuals shall not be exempted from their obligations to the state or from compliance with the law because of their religious convictions.

The Greek state provide direct support to the Greek Orthodox Church, including funding for religious leaders’ salaries, religious and vocational training of clergy, and religious instruction in schools. Similarly, the government-appointed muftis and imams in Thrace are paid directly from the state budget as are those of all civil servants. In November 2018 under a deal reached between the then Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Archbishop Ieronymos of the Church of Greece, the state will in the future transfer an annual state subsidy to a special church fund for the payment of priests’ salaries. The deal foresees for the state to pay an annual lump sum of around 200 million euros into a fund to be managed by the church and thus, they would no longer be civil servants. The initiative was part of a broader review of the Greek Constitution with the aim of making Greek politics “more democratic and progressive” (New York Times, 16/11/2018). The agreement also foresees a settlement to a decades-old dispute over property between the Greek state and the Church, which is one of the country’s largest real estate owners (Reuter, 6/11/2018). In 14/02/2019 Greek parliament held the first vote on which constitutional amendments will be voted on in the Parliament that emerged from the general election of 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2019. In this

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<sup>10</sup>Available from:

[https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2014/141210\\_Law\\_4301\\_2014\\_Organization\\_legal\\_form\\_religious\\_communities\\_organizations\\_Greece.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2014/141210_Law_4301_2014_Organization_legal_form_religious_communities_organizations_Greece.pdf)

<sup>11</sup>Constitution of Greece, Article 3. Available from: <http://www.hri.org/docs/syntagma/artcl25.html#A13>

<sup>12</sup>Constitution of Greece, Article 13.

<sup>13</sup>Constitution of Greece, Article 14.

<sup>14</sup>Constitution of Greece, Article 13.

context, Parliament approved by a one-vote majority the leftist government's proposal to amend Article 3 so as to explicitly establish the religious neutrality of the state. The change was vehemently opposed by both the Orthodox Church of Greece and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, with the latter having dozens of dioceses in Greece under its jurisdiction (To Vima, 14/02/2019).

The introduction of L.4301/2014 "*Organization of the Legal Form of Religious Communities and their organizations in Greece*" provided the legal opportunity for religious groups to become recognized as "religious legal entities" under civil law<sup>15</sup>. The same law established the registry of clergy and other staff of "known religions" and religious legal entities, while exempting from the requirement the Greek Orthodox priests, imams in Thrace, and Jew rabbis. Nonetheless, a new law that passed on August 2018 (L.4559/2018) extended the application of the former law (2014) to all religious officials including the Greek Orthodox Church, the Muftiates of Thrace, and Jewish communities, requesting to register within a year in the electronic database of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

The granting of a worship temple permits is regulated under a specific Circular (128231/2016) issued on 2nd of August, 2016<sup>16</sup>. The planning authorities are authorized to issue a permit to construct a temple or a worship place of any religious community (except for those within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ), provided that it has been firstly approved by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs<sup>17</sup>. Another Circular<sup>18</sup> (118939/2016) provide for the Ministerial decision that shall issued following verification that, first, the three conditions laid down in article 13 (2) of the Constitution are fulfilled, namely, that it is a "known religion" without secret dogmas; that proselytism is not carried out, and that the practice of rites of worship is in conformity with public order or good usages. Despite the positive steps taken by the Greek state to give permits for worship sites and so to modernise the legal context regulating the religious affairs, many of undocumented mosques continue to operate. According to a key informant the procedures of obtaining a permit is extremely expensive (about 5,000 euro) and time consuming (Interview 7).

Another controversy over the mandatory nature of military service for religious conscientious has been addressed by the L.4609/2019<sup>19</sup>. The law provides for

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<sup>15</sup>For the process of recognition, it is required filing an application in the civil court; providing documents proving that the religious group has "open rituals and no secret doctrines"; depositing a list of 300 signatory members; demonstrating there is a leader who is qualified and is a legal resident in the country, and finally ensuring their practices do not pose a threat to public order.

<sup>16</sup>For more information see: [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/EGYKLIOS\\_ANEGERSHS.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/EGYKLIOS_ANEGERSHS.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Building a new Orthodox Church is subject to a simple permission granted by the Organization of Administration of Church Property. Before 2006, any other religion must obtain a permit prior to construction and operation of a house of worship. The permission was granted by the Orthodox Church, and the Ministry of Education. L.3467/2006 abolishes the above requirement stating that for establishing, building, or operating a church or house of prayer of any creed or religion the permission or opinion of the local ecclesiastical authority is no longer needed.

<sup>18</sup> On "*Authorization to establish and operate places of worship for religious communities of religions and denominations other than the Church of Greece*". Available from: [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/270716\\_Circular\\_Update.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/270716_Circular_Update.pdf)

<sup>19</sup>[http://www.et.gr/idocs-nph/search/pdfViewerForm.html?args=5C7QrtC22wFqnM3eAbJzrXdtvSoClrL8SFJZYW49XfPtI9LGdkF53UIxsx942CdyqxSQYNUqAGCF0ifB9HI6qSYtMQEkEHLwnFqmgJSA5WIsluV-nRwO1oKqSe4BIOTSpEWYhszF8P8UqWb\\_zFijPyLHOLXg9BPJ3dwc3tm3wZcMb4i-MbxNFtNt1m\\_1Nr8](http://www.et.gr/idocs-nph/search/pdfViewerForm.html?args=5C7QrtC22wFqnM3eAbJzrXdtvSoClrL8SFJZYW49XfPtI9LGdkF53UIxsx942CdyqxSQYNUqAGCF0ifB9HI6qSYtMQEkEHLwnFqmgJSA5WIsluV-nRwO1oKqSe4BIOTSpEWYhszF8P8UqWb_zFijPyLHOLXg9BPJ3dwc3tm3wZcMb4i-MbxNFtNt1m_1Nr8)

alternative forms of mandatory service for religious conscientious objectors which are required to serve 15 months of alternate service in state hospitals or municipal and public services (Article 22).

Pursue to the provisions of articles 15-18 of L.4356/2015<sup>20</sup>, the National Council against Racism and Xenophobia, an advisory body under the Ministry of Justice, Transparency, and Human Rights, is responsible for preventing, combating, monitoring, and recording racism and intolerance and for protecting individuals and groups targeted on several grounds, including religion (State Department, 2019a: p.7). The same law prohibits discrimination and criminalizes hate speech on the grounds of religion<sup>21</sup>, while criminalizing approval, trivialization, or malicious denial of the Holocaust and “crimes of Nazism” if that behavior leads to incitement of violence or hatred, or has a threatening or abusive nature towards groups of individuals.

The National Commission for Human Rights<sup>22</sup> (L.2667/1998), an independent advisory body to the Greek state on matters pertaining to human rights protection. Its members are nominated by a broad range of institutions which are active in the field of human rights.

Lastly, the law requires all civil servants (including MPs), to take an oath before entering office. However, individuals are free to take a religious or secular oath in accordance with their beliefs. The same is applied in court where witnesses in trials must also take oaths before testifying and choose between a religious and a secular oath in both civil and criminal cases (State Department, 2019a: p.7).

### ***The Controversy over the ‘Mosque’***

One of the most controversial issues has been the much debated issue of the construction of the Mosque in Athens. It is indeed oxymoron that while there are about 300 mosques in Western Thrace and islands of Rhodes and Kos, there was until recently no mosque in Athens to serve the religious needs of the Muslims. Contentious political issues with regard to constructing a public place of praying for Muslims have been addressed by L. 3512/2006<sup>23</sup> “*Construction of mosque in Athens and other provisions*” and the article 29 of L.4014/2011<sup>24</sup>. The Law explicitly states that a piece of land of 850 square meters in the Botanikos area is granted by the State for the building of a mosque along with other facilities. Ownership of the mosque will belong to the Greek State. An imam will be appointed, for a two-year renewable term and will be paid by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion Affairs (The Law Library of Congress, 2012: p. 84). After a plea for annulment by which the constitutionality of respective provisions is contested relating to the location of the Mosque, the Council of

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ministryofjustice.gr/site/Portals/0/4356-2015.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Individuals or legal entities convicted of incitement to violence, discrimination, or hatred based on religion, among other factors, may be sentenced to prison terms of between three months and three years and fined 5,000 to 20,000 euros (\$5,700 to \$22,900). Violators convicted of other crimes motivated by religion may be sentenced to an additional six months to three years, with fines doubled (State Department, 2019a: p.7)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.nchr.gr/index.php/2013-04-03-10-13-40/2013-04-03-10-14-20>

<sup>23</sup> Available from: [https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document\\_navigation/154207/nomos-3512-2006](https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document_navigation/154207/nomos-3512-2006)

<sup>24</sup> Available from: [https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document\\_navigation/62759/nomos-4014-2011](https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document_navigation/62759/nomos-4014-2011)

State decision 2399/201425 held that the law is in full compliance with the Constitution<sup>26</sup>.

In 2015, the then newly elected left government passed an amendment of the existing legislation on certain technical issues related to the construction of the official mosque. This caused furious debates in the public opinion and in parliament, especially by the far right, with the anti-Muslim MPs supporting that “Greece will become Islamised” or that “Muslims are against the Western way of life”<sup>27</sup>.

During two rallies organised by those who opposed the construction of the mosque, there were slogans about a conspiracy against Greece that has as a main goal the Islamisation of the country. In the meantime, in August 2017, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion Affairs appointed 14 people (four of them Muslims) to the board of directors of the mosque, which was initially planned to open in 2018 (Huseyinoglu and Sakellariou, 2018: p. 289). In September 2018, Golden Dawn supporters held a protest in front of the mosque objecting to its construction, shouting “*whoever does not want Greece and its religion should go to Asia.*”

### ***The Dispute over ‘Sharia Law’***

Muslim Greek citizens who are resident in Western Thrace are allowed to use Sharia law as a parallel legal system for private law (ECHR, 2018: p.21). Inherited from the Ottoman Empire, the Sharia law is applied to Muslim populations under Greek jurisdiction. The treaties of Sèvres (1920) and Lausanne (1923) regulating after the War the fate of “minorities” in Turkey and Greece provided that they could continue to live according to their own customs. Thereafter, the Greek courts have held that Sharia law must apply to all members of the Muslim community of Thrace, in matters of marriage, divorce, and succession. The law gives muftis judicial power to rule on disputes between Muslims concerning inheritance and family matters (L.2345/1920)<sup>28</sup>.

Meanwhile, an interesting case examined by European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (Molla Sali v. Greece) raised serious concerns about the application by the Greek courts of Islamic religious (Sharia) law to a dispute concerning inheritance rights over the estate of the late husband of Ms Molla Sali, a Greek national belonging to the country’s Muslim minority<sup>29</sup>. On December 19, 2018, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Greece violated the ECHR by applying Sharia to an inheritance case in 2014 in which a widow lost three-fourths of her inheritance after family members requested a sharia ruling on the matter without her consent (State Department, 2019a: p. 5). The Court ruled that the compulsory application of Sharia law on Muslims was discriminatory compared to a non-Muslim Greek testator (Puppinck, 2018).

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<sup>25</sup> Available from: [http://archive.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2015/Council\\_of\\_State\\_decision\\_on\\_Mosque.pdf](http://archive.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2015/Council_of_State_decision_on_Mosque.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Available from: [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2015/Council\\_of\\_State\\_decision\\_on\\_Mosque.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2015/Council_of_State_decision_on_Mosque.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Parliament Proceedings, 24 June 2015, Session EB [62], p. 71

<sup>28</sup> For more information see: <https://www.viadiplomacy.gr/tag/nomou-2345-1920/>

<sup>29</sup> A 67-year-old widow, Hatijah Molla Salli, from the city of Komotini in Western Thrace filed a complaint against Greece over an inheritance dispute with her late husband’s sisters. Salli won an appeal in the Greek secular justice system, but the supreme court in 2013 ruled that only a mufti had the power to resolve Muslim inheritance issues.

Greece, however, anticipated this decision by voting to limit the powers of Islamic courts and making the use of Sharia law and the mufti jurisdiction optional through a law of 15 January 2018. In this way, the Greek parliament has changed a century-old law that gave Islamic courts priority over family law matters among the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. From now Civil Greek law will apply in cases where all parties do not agree to a religious court<sup>30</sup> settling a dispute. Specifically, the regulatory framework on Sharia Law<sup>31</sup> refers to the provisions of the Civil Code, except if the interested individuals sign up before a notary a declaration of property upon death, containing exclusively the expressive will of the testator to subject his succession under Sharia law.

### ***'Judicial Authority' of Muftis***

As a rule, the muftis in Greece have never been elected by the people; they are nominated by the Greek authorities, a practice contested by the Turkish state, and also by a part of the minority population. Since 1990 there have been five *muftis* in Thrace, three of whom were appointed by the Greek State and two elected by the minority but not recognised by the Greek authorities, which has given rise to disputes and led the European Court of Human Rights to find violations of Article 9 of the Convention (ECHR, 2018: p.21).

Again, the recently introduced presidential decree (PD52/2019) over the appointment of muftis and his "judicial authority" in Komotini, Didymoteicho and Xanthi drew the ire of the Turkish Muslim community in the country, claiming the decree takes away the community's rights to elect their own clerics. Among its clauses are the use of the Greek language in mufti offices and the assignment of muftis and their staff by the Ministry of Education, which are viewed as restricting the rights of muftis. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement (21/06/2019) that the above Presidential Decree is an "aggravation" of Greek "violations" of Muslim minority rights and "disregards the rights of the Turkish minority in Greece guaranteed by the Lausanne Peace Treaty also on the basis of reciprocity<sup>32</sup>." In response, the Greek Foreign Ministry rejected the Turkish accusations that Muslim religious leaders will be under the control of a newly established government body. It said that the presidential decree improves the work of Muftis who maintain judicial powers and provides guarantees for the parties resorting to the Muftis, adding that "Greece does not take lessons on the implementation of the Lausanne Treaty, international law or ECHR judgments from Turkey" (Kathimerini, 22/06/2019).

Similarly, the administration of wakfs (*wakif* in Turkish) has been another thorny issue. Since the military coup d'état of 1967, members of all wakfs boards in Greece have been appointed by Greek authorities. The L. 3647/2018 on waqf foundations and applied to Western Thrace, allows the election of board members. However, there are

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<sup>30</sup> State-appointed clerics, known as muftis, have resolved family law matters among Muslims in Western Thrace under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and Greece following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>31</sup> Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, January 15, 2018 Issue A' Amendment of Article 5 of Legislative Act of December 24, 1990 "On Muslim Clerics" (A' 11) ratified by the Sole Article of Law 1920/1991 (A' 11).

<sup>32</sup> For more see at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc-43-muftulukler-hk-yunanistan-cbsk-kararnamesi-hk-sc.en.mfa>

member of the Muslim minority that continued to criticize government appointment of members entrusted to oversee endowments, real estate, and charitable funds of the wakfs, supporting that the Muslim minority in Thrace should elect these members (State Department, 2019b: p.10).

### **Education and Religious Affairs**

According to article 16, paragraph 2, of Constitution, education is a key mission of the State and aims, among other things, at the development of national and religious consciousness. It is in this spirit that the Greek education system includes ecclesiastical education as well. The primary task of ecclesiastical schools (Ecclesiastical Junior High Schools and Ecclesiastical Lyceums) is to educate and adequately prepare students with the values of the Orthodox faith and Christianity. Since the academic year 2007/08, Higher Ecclesiastical Schools operate as Higher Ecclesiastical Academies, equivalent to higher education institutions (L. 3432/2006).

The Ministry of Education, Research and Religion Affairs is responsible for the supervising the religion education and the administrative issues related to governance of religions in Greece. The organisational structure includes the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs who is divided in two directorates: Directorate of Religion Administration and Directorate of Religion Education and Inter-religion Relations whose competencies cover the issues of religion education and inter-religion relations, while the activities of the Department of Muslim Affairs evolved around the issues of the Muslim minority of Thrace. The purpose of the purpose of the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs (PD 18/2018) is the supervision of the religious education system and the connection of religion and culture with the simultaneous promotion of action against intolerance and in favour of inter-religious relationships (Eurydice, 5/06/2019).

Greek Orthodox religious education in primary and secondary school levels is included in the curriculum. School textbooks focus mainly on Greek Orthodox teachings; however, they also include some basic information on some other "known" religions. Students may be exempted from religious class upon request, but parents of students registered as Greek Orthodox in school records must state the students are not Greek Orthodox believers in order to receive the exemption.<sup>33</sup> This issue has caused serious debates, the outcome of which is illustrated in another example that has appealed to the ECtHR, namely the case "Papageorgiou and Others v. Greece" (no. 4762/18 and 6140/18). Applicants, who are students that live on two small islands of the Aegean Sea, complain that the compulsory religious education violates Articles 8 and 14 and 9 and 14 in combination because the exemption of religion class stigmatizes the student and the student's parents as it becomes visible that they are not followers of the "dominant religion." The applicants also complain that the students are deprived of

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<sup>33</sup>Through cases against other European countries, the ECtHR has established very clearly that a state has the right to provide confessional religious education in public schools, as long as students may be exempted from the course. If the education system offers no exemption, then that course must be non-confessional, teaching about religion rather than teaching religion, per se. The Court has also firmly established that a state has no business asking a citizen to reveal his or her religious beliefs, or lack thereof.

hours of classes because of their religious and philosophical convictions. The very same religious education being questioned by Papageorgiou and others as a violation to their freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) has been considered, by Council of State (StE) - in a case raised by Archbishop Serafim of Piraeus - as in violation of the Greek Constitution for being insufficiently confessional in nature.

The relationship of the Orthodox Church with the religious education in public schools is regulated by the relevant law that provides for the church the right to control whether what is taught at school is doctrinally correct (Interview 1). Recently, the curriculum of religion courses has been subject to revisions at all levels. It started in 2011 and in 2014 was ready for a pilot implementation in high schools, while in 2016 it formally replaced the previous religion curriculum. The Orthodox Church strongly opposed its implementation to the formal religion classes. This crisis was escalated when a church bishop along with a group of theologians and two parents submitted an application for suspension of this new programme to the Council of State with the argument that it proselytizes the children and threaten their religion identity. The first decision of the Council of State ruled against the implementation of the new religion school programme, considering them unconstitutional and contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights (State Department, 2019b: p. 1). In the meantime, the association of Greek atheists with the support of ELIAMEP<sup>34</sup> appealed again to the Council of State asking for a different process of exemption from the religious lesson because the latter is exclusively based on Orthodox dogma (Interview 1). According to one of the key informants:

*“Those children who are not Christian orthodox have two and a half possibilities. One possibility is to get rid of the religious lesson. What they are doing at this time is a problem for the school. The second is to enroll to other schools that belong to the community. There are for instance Jewish school, Polish school and Filipino school”* (Interview 1)

Meanwhile, on October 23, 2016 hundreds of demonstrators rallied outside the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs to protest against the reforms to the curricula of the religious course, whose main objection was the inclusion of new chapters about Judaism and Islam.

There are no private religious schools, although certain foreign-owned private schools and individual churches may teach optional religious classes on their premises, which students may attend on a voluntary basis. The law provides for optional Islamic religious instruction in public schools in Thrace for the recognized Muslim minority and optional Catholic religious instruction in public schools on the islands of Tinos and Syros. The government operates secular Greek-Turkish bilingual schools and two Islamic religious schools in Thrace. According to the regulatory framework for

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<sup>34</sup> Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy

religious education<sup>35</sup> (Article 36) instead of teaching the Quran in the local Mosques, for the first time it is provided for Islamic religion teachers, to teach the Quran in public schools of primary and secondary education in Thrace, to students members of the Muslim minority exempted from the course of Religious Education (State Department, 2019a: p. 7). This provision is already implemented in other areas of Greece, such as the islands of Tinos and Syros, where during the course of religious education, catholic students may attend a course taught by catholic priests or theologians hired by the Greek State. In addition, absences for Muslim students in primary and secondary school for Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha celebrations are excused (State Department, 2018).

All Islamic religion teachers must be Greek citizens members of the Muslim minority, holders of a degree on Islamic studies of a Higher School of Theology (graduated in Greece or abroad). The positions of Islamic religion teachers are allocated to each Muftiate by decision of the Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs after obtaining the opinion of the Committee of article 38<sup>36</sup> and of the local Mufti<sup>37</sup>.

Since 1997, there is a quota system (5 percent) for the entrance to Greek universities of students from Muslim minority of Western Thrace and the Dodecanese (Tsitselikis, 2010: 240). Likewise, 2 percent of students entering the national fire brigade school and academy are required to be from the Muslim minority in Thrace (State Department, 2019a: p. 7). During the same period, increased attention has been given to Greek language education through different state programs as the most effective means to achieve social integration and upward mobility.

Another important development in the area of higher education was the introduction in 2016 of a new Undergraduate Programme of Islamic Studies that has been established at the Theological School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki<sup>38</sup>. In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs issued a decree officially incorporating Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina into the program of students attending Islamic religious schools in Thrace Again, in 2018, the Parliament Speaker announced that parliament would fund the creation of a museum space inside the Auschwitz concentration camp commemorating Greek Jews who perished there (State Department, 2019b: p. 11).

In 2015, the Guidelines for Educators on “Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education”<sup>39</sup> was translated into Greek under the auspices of the National Commission for Human Rights and the Centre of Intercultural Research and Educational Intervention of the University of Athens (Sakellariou, 2016: p. 216).

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<sup>35</sup>Law 4115/2013, Article 53. Available from: [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/13-01-13\\_L4115\\_2013\\_art.53\\_Islamic\\_religion\\_teachers.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2016/13-01-13_L4115_2013_art.53_Islamic_religion_teachers.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> The selection of Islamic religion teachers is made by a Committee of five members consisting of: a) the local Mufti, as Chairperson, b) an official of the Ministry of Education, c) a University Faculty member specialised in Islamic studies, d) a distinguished Muslim theologian, e) a distinguished Muslim theologian, proposed by the local Mufti.

<sup>37</sup>According to the Article 37, paragraph 2 2, the cost of the remuneration of Islamic religion teachers shall be borne by the budget of the Ministry of Education.

<sup>38</sup> See: <https://www.theo.auth.gr/en/islamic-studies>

<sup>39</sup> These guidelines were published by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) in collaboration with the Council of Europe and UNESCO.



## Trends in Radicalisation and Islamophobia

The data produced by the Hellenic Police and Racist Violence Recording Network have shown a gradual increase of racist violence in the country since 2010, which peaked in 2015 in the aftermath of refugee crisis. The largest increase was observed between 2011 and 2012, a period during which the far-right extremist party Golden Dawn gradually established itself in the Greek political arena. This increase is attributed to the rise of incidents of racist violence motivated by biases against the national or ethnic origin of the victims (Anagnostou and Skleparis, 2017: p.49). Since 2014, the characteristics of racist violence in Greece gradually started to change and becoming 'milder' (i.e. verbal abuse), a development which might be related to the prosecution of the Golden Dawn's MPs and leadership, its defeat in 2019 national elections and the closure of its offices in Athens and Piraeus by the authorities.

Nevertheless, there are incidents of attacks on mosques and synagogues, vandalism of monuments and desecration of cemeteries, which carry symbolic meanings of intolerance, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiments (Galariotis et al, 2017: p.8).

According to a Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs a total of two hundred fifteen (215) incidents against religious sites were recorded in 2016. Among them, two hundred and nine (209) incidents regards Christian religious sites (i.e. vandalism, burglaries, sacrilege). As for Judaism five (5) incidents were recorded in 2016, mainly acts of racism/anti-Semitism, while only one (1) incident of religious fanaticism and hate speech referred to Islam (MERRA, 2017: p. 8).

In fact, Jewish community has become targets of violence at different times during the last years. After 2009, when the financial crisis started to be more acute, attacks on Jews started to take place more frequently. Blaming Jews for the financial crisis is a common pattern in anti-Semitic and conspiratorial perceptions, with Jews being perceived as responsible for any kind of economic crisis (Galariotis et al, 2017). The perpetrators were never arrested but they were usually associated with extreme right-wing organizations.

Another group targeted by xenophobic attacks are Pakistanis, who are today considered one of the largest Asian communities in Greece. Attacks on Pakistanis and vandalism against their properties have intensified since 2004, when the numbers of arrivals of migrants from Pakistan to Greece increased rapidly. Islamophobia and anti-Muslim stances can be seen as motives for attacks against believers, and assaults on them often take place during their visits to unofficial places of worship to fulfil their religious duties (Galariotis et al, 2017:p.10). In 2018, 100 attacks against Pakistani immigrants from Golden Dawn militants had been recorded, with 4 death attacks and many serious damages to properties and shops (Interview 5).

In public discourse, the most radical rhetoric has been traditionally articulated by the certain high-ranking Orthodox Church ecclesiastical leaders. The Archbishop Anthimos of Thessaloniki, for instance stated, regarding the (previous) government's immigration plan, that *"if it is enforced, the country will turn black, we will be filled with Al-Qaeda Annexes"*, adding that *"you cannot bring 700,000 Muslims in the country and*

*make them Greek without asking the Church*". In his recent article, the Archbishop of Piraeus Serafim, considered the oath of the Muslim Turkish Minority deputies in the Greek Parliament over the Koran as a disgrace to a betrayal against Greece and the Greek Orthodox faith supporting that the Ottomans had enslaved, raped and massacred the Greek Orthodox people for 400 years (MilletNews 26/07/2019<sup>40</sup>).

In a statement on 7 January 2011, the Archbishop Serafim of Piraeus, having previously described Muhammad as a "*false prophet*", developed an analysis of the character of Islam according to which: "*The character of Islam has been aggressive, and by the criminal acts of Islamists it is proven that it remains like this today. The sword and the knife are considered more convincing than the sermon and persuasion. Besides, the dissemination of Islam through Holy War was the reason of its domination*"<sup>41</sup>.

The Archbishop Amvrosios of Kalavryta, has expressed similar views supporting that the arrival and presence of Muslim migrants is a great danger for Greece, because "*the city will be full of minarets and mosques*"<sup>42</sup>. The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, however, has never taken a hostile stance against Islam and Muslims on the whole. It has also never, however, punished or strongly disapproved of Islamophobic statements and announcements (Sakellariou, 2016: p.214). Even Archbishop Ieronymos of Greece, the leader of the Greek Orthodox Church, who is considered as a moderate cleric leader, in an interview on SKAI TV (November 2016) referred to some "*centers that want to deprive the country from Greek values*" and commented, in addition, that "*the existence of Muslims is not the best*" for Greece"<sup>43</sup>.

Back to the political sphere, apart from hate speech rhetoric articulated by the Golden Dawn, conservative right-wing political forces but also the moderate leaders of the social democratic center (i.e. Antonis Samaras and Andreas Loverdos) are equally responsible for the rise of islamophobia in public discourse. In the wake of economic and refugee crisis, they have publicly expressed their 'agony' about the Islamization of Europe and Greece, in particular.

Impressively, there are no recorded cases and neither signs of religion radicalisation in Greece. Moreover, Islamist radicalisation does not seem to constitute a serious threat for the country (Skleparis, 2017). Although, there are less well-documented factors that can potentially shed light on the matter, the absence of religion radicalisation in Greece could be explained by a series of reasons such as the level of (bottom-up) integration into the Greek society, on the one hand, and the fact that Greece was not a central player in the 'War on Terror', on the other. According to interviewees it is primarily attributed to the level of self-organisation and control that the Muslim leaders exercise over their co-believers. A key informant shared the following experience:

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<sup>40</sup> Available from: <http://www.milletnews.com/view.php?id=547>

<sup>41</sup> For more details see: <https://islamforgreeks.org/2011/01/10/refuting-serafim/>

<sup>42</sup> Available from: [http://mkka.blogspot.gr/2015/04/blog-post\\_22.html](http://mkka.blogspot.gr/2015/04/blog-post_22.html)

<sup>43</sup> For more details see: <https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2016/11/02/archbishop-ieronimos-shocks-those-who-thought-he-was-a-progressive-spiritual-leader/>

*“In 2014 was an imam in Athens that delivered fanatic speeches, not only against Christians but also against other Muslim doctrines. We decided to report him and along with the evidence we signed a letter with all the signatures and gave it to the authorities. And so we managed to deport him” (Interview 5)*

However, they sound the alarm in relation to the condition at the detention centers and the possibility of radicalisation there. Interestingly, a key informant gives his view with regards to what is believed to radical Islam:

*“Usually those who do such acts are not religious men. Only men who do not pray even once during the day, become radical. Most of those who committed crimes in the name of Islam are not even religious. If a child has grown up with the correct principles of Islam, there is no way of putting a bomb and kill human beings. According to Islam, if you kill a man, the way to paradise is hermetically closed. According to Islam there is no bigger crime than killing a man” (Interview 7).*

Noteworthy is the fact that on March 8, 2018, police arrested 11 suspects during operations to dismantle the self-identified extreme-right militant group Combat 18 (State Department, 2019b: p. 8). Combat 18 was accused of organizing 30 attacks, including arson and homemade bombs deployed in venues frequented by Muslim migrants and refugees (State Department, 2019b: p. 8). In general, however, the large majority of perpetrators of attacks remain unidentified; even those reproducing Islamophobic discourses, such as the aforementioned archbishops and/or politicians are not penalised for their hate-motivated speech (Huseyinoglu and Sakellariou, 2018: p. 287).

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Greek Orthodox Church has long had an influential role in Greek public life, and a large number of Greeks see national identity and religion as inextricably linked which in turn has diachronically defined their national project of ‘ethnos’. In fact, until 30 years ago, Greece was considered largely a mono-ethnic, mono-cultural and mono-religious country, thus a paradigm of a hard core ‘nation-state’. During the last three decades, Greece has had to familiarize with and make space for the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity which has been extended in three demographic units/levels: native population, “Old Islam”, and “New Islam”.

Apart from the historic context related to the governance of “Old Islam”, the management of the religious diversity related to “New Islam” remain the most important challenges for Greek society and its polity. The evidence discussed extensively in this study affirm the religious diversity in relation to “New Islam”, one the one hand, and the long persisting thorny issues between Greece and Turkey on the “Old Islam”, appears indeed to has been met with strong opposition by the public opinion. Apparently, this is partly related to geopolitics and national identity, hence linking the religious aspects of Islam with the question of national security and the

relationship between Turkey and Greece. It should be acknowledged, however, that the overall Greek policy and legal framework towards the religious minorities have been substantially reformed on the basis of liberal principals and human rights standards, recognising as such the equality of individuals before the law regardless of their religious and ethnic affiliation. However, the meaning of the tolerance towards the religion and cultural diversity is still perceived as minimal liberal tolerance, meaning that there is no pro-active accommodation of the de facto cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity of Greek society (Triandafyllidou and Kouki, 2012: p.3). Moreover, in what concerns intolerance in political life, it comes out as key aspects of far right ideology that are embedded in national political culture and do not appear as a radical shift in thinking and acting within the national context.

However, Orthodox Church - State relations are still problematic. In relation to other religions, the Orthodox Church still operates under the status of State Church. As a key informant addresses it:

*"It is not a coincidence that an Archbishop of the Orthodox Church take for granted to address a speech about political and ethnic issues such as "Macedonian" one. It is not his job to make politics. It means that it feels comfortable to talk about the nation"* (Interview 1)

Judging from above, the Orthodox Church has become more conservative and its attitude appears to be more xenophobic against the idea of the multicultural "other".

Generally speaking, there are three main domains that have played a crucial role in the seemingly trends of radicalisation and reproduction of Islamophobia in the public domain: the political domain (i.e. political parties of the right and the far right); the religious domain (i.e. Orthodox Church high-ranking clerics); and the media (i.e. Internet and social media). Saying this, radicalisation and islamophobia manifest themselves primarily on the discursive level (hate speech) and to a lesser extent it takes forms of physical violence (Sakellariou, 2017: p. 240). As far as the governance of religious diversity is concerned, despite the recent reforms putting forward mostly by the previous leftist government, the central state policy appears fragmented and so far we have just had bits and pieces of policies. Concluding, the recent developments have marked a highly conservative shift which is not reflected in laws, but rather in non-application of laws. While the legal context has been modernized, the mentality and public attitude has not been modernized in the same way.

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### Annex 1: List of Key Informants

No.	Capacity
1	Theologist; Former School Advisor for the Theologians;Seconded to the School of Theology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens;
2	Theologist;Adviser to the office of the Secretary General of Religions, Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs
3	Research Fellow, University of Glasgow
4	Lawyer; former adviser to the office of the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs
5	President of Pakistani-Hellenic Cultural and Welfare Society
6	Al Jazeera'scorrespondent based in Athens; Founder of <a href="http://www.islam.gr">www.islam.gr</a> ;
7	President of Muslim Association of Greece

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