

GOLDEN DAWN IS ATTEMPTING TO REGAIN A PRESENCE IN GREECE WITH A FOCUS ON NORTHERN GREECE AND WESTERN THRACE

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On December 18, 2022, the far-right neo-Nazi group Golden Dawn (GD) publicly reappeared and held a march and rally in Florina, Northern Greece.[1] This is significant because many group members, including those serving in the Greek Parliament, were convicted in 2020 for heading a criminal organization.

Florina is known for being a far-right stronghold due to its proximity to the state of North Macedonia and its Slavic-speaking population. GD organized the demonstration in response to the approval of the "Macedonian Language Center" in Greece as an official NGO.[2] This center teaches the official language of North Macedonia, which is referred to as the Macedonian language.[3] GD and other Greek far-right have recently been rallying around the Macedonia issue, using it as a political asset. In addition to GD, far-right groups like The Hellenic Socialist Resistance (ESA) and APELLA have utilized the Macedonia issue.[4]

The District Attorney of Florina has objected to the approval of the Macedonian Language Center, and an appeal hearing date is scheduled.[5] In response to the GD's march, groups opposing far-right organizations, student organizations, and leftist political parties staged a counter-protest.[6]

Annulment Of The Establishment Decision Of The "Macedonian Language Center"

On December 29, 2022, the prosecutor in Florina sought to have the court decision establishing the "Macedonian Language Center in Greece" annulled. However, the civil court in Florina approved the association's establishment in July 2022, aiming to preserve and promote the Macedonian language in Greece and support its teaching in universities

and public schools.[7]

The prosecutor argued that the decision violated the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia and that there are no Macedonian-speaking citizens in Greece, only Greek-speaking ones. The prosecutor also claimed that the systematic development of a foreign language, Macedonian, in Greece's Macedonian and Thrace regions would harm the country's security and public order.[8]

The hearing to consider the annulment request started on February 2, and the Supreme Court prosecutor has also weighed in by filing an objection against the decision. The former President of the Court of Cassation, and Former Acting Prime Minister of Greece, Mrs. Vassiliki Thanou-Christophilou, who served as caretaker Prime Minister from 27 August to 21 September 2015, commented that the protests were legally and nationally justified.[9] She requested the cancellation of the "Macedonian Language Center" registration decision, and the Florina Prosecutor's Office filed a lawsuit for the annulment of the recognition decision shortly after this request.

According to the Florina prosecutor, the association's charter assumes the existence of a foreign language called "Macedonian," spoken in Greece. Still, the language of citizens in North Macedonia is the only recognized Macedonian language.

A lawsuit is also filed against Western Thrace Fenerbahçe[10] Association

A closure lawsuit has also been filed against the Western Thrace Fenerbahce Association (WTFA), headquartered in Komotini (Gümülcine in Turkish) and has been officially operational for some time. WTFA was an association whose statute was approved by the Greek court. However, shortly after the association was founded, it began to be targeted by anti-Turkish far-right politicians, retired members of the judiciary, and the media in Greece. In addition, the association was portrayed as a "national threat" by extreme far-right fanatics in the Western Thrace region who were allegedly offended by the expression "Western Thrace" in the association's name. In this context, Mrs. Thanou claimed that the WTFA harmed national interests and threatened public safety and the rights of others.

In an article she wrote, Thanou requested the cancellation of the registration decision of the WTFA by the Komotini court. In her article published on the website "dikastiko.gr", which covers legal issues, Thanu stated that the aims of the WTFA are contrary to national interests and have the potential to harm the social relations between the two Greek communities of Christians and Muslims living in a sensitive region. She stated that the area was not referred to as Western Thrace in any international agreement and that there was only one Thrace in Greece, arguing that the Treaty of Lausanne was not referring to such a term. Thanou claimed that the Civil Court of First Instance of Komotini, which registered the founding petition of the WTFA, made a mistake and that it was wrong to accept the association's aims as legal. Thanou defended the view that the Komotini court, which registered the association's foundation, did not consider the similar decisions of the Supreme Court on the subject. Thanou requested that the Greek judicial and

administrative authorities, especially the Komotini prosecutor, take immediate action and take the initiative to cancel the registration decision of the WTFA.[11]

Short History Of Golden Dawn

Nikos Michaloliakos, who spent time in prison with leaders of the far-right military dictatorship that controlled Greece from 1967-1974, created the Golden Dawn newspaper, which later became a political party in 1993. The party gained popularity during economic hardship in Greece and held many parliamentary seats. Despite their violent and racist actions, they were largely ignored by society until 2013, when members planned an attack on a group of left-leaning organizations, resulting in the death of a Greek rapper. This led to investigations and mass indictments, with the party ultimately being labeled a criminal organization in 2020 and its leaders imprisoned. GD fell into obscurity in the following years as other far-right groups attempted to take its place. However, they recently reemerged and organized a rally in Florina, with members coming from various regions in northern Greece and specifically Thessaloniki, where they aim to recruit a new base of young members. The rally was marked by fascist symbols and slogans and was supported by other far-right organizations.

The Presence Of The Golden Dawn In Thessaloniki

When Golden Dawn (GD) was at its peak in Greek society, most of the group's activities and members were primarily based in the neighborhoods of Athens. This is where they held their events and gatherings and carried out racist pogroms and violent attacks. In Athens, they also murdered the rapper Pavlos Fyssas in 2013. However, Thessaloniki, the second-largest city in Greece, was never a stronghold for GD. Despite their national successes, GD's electoral power in Thessaloniki was relatively weak. This was also reflected in their limited presence in the streets of Thessaloniki, unlike in Athens, where specific areas such as Agios Panteleimonas and Perama became known for GD's violent attacks. In addition, the city's multicultural history and inhabitants' anti-far-right attitudes also kept GD's public appearances in Thessaloniki limited.

Demonstrations In The Macedonian Region

In August 2021, the Far Right Sarissa Gathering Center was reopened in Thessaloniki, where the offices of the Golden Dawn (GD) organization had previously been located.[12] The group has been actively trying to establish a presence in the city, mainly through its youth organization, the "Youth Front."[13]

Due to their links with GD, people possibly associated with the "Sarissa" have been linked to racist attacks and vandalism in the city. They are believed to be the main organizers of the GD group that created clashes between far-right and leftist, and communist students in September 2021 in the 2nd Vocational High School district (called EPAL in Greece) of

Stavroupoli, a suburb in Western Thessaloniki.[14]

Despite no official claim of responsibility, reports suggest that young far-right organizations and party members were involved in attacks against refugees, immigrants, and people with different political beliefs in Evosmos and Stavroupoli. [15]

The GD's Youth Front has publicly supported these actions. On October 4, 2021, a group of fascists, possibly including GD members, attacked members of the Communist Youth of Greece and other left-wingers, distributing leaflets in the suburb of Ilioupoli. The GD attempted to hold a rally on October 8 to mark the first anniversary of its conviction as a criminal organization, but the police banned the event.[16]

On December 29, 2022, the Jewish cemetery inside Aristotle University in Thessaloniki was recently vandalized with fascist symbols. In addition, a far-right Telegram channel published a propaganda video of the GD members in Thessaloniki, who were seen painting Nazi symbols and slogans.[17]

Links Between Greek Far-Right And White Supremacists In The West

White supremacists in the United States have had close ties to key leaders of Golden Dawn. For example, in leaked conversations from 2018, a direct link was found between Matthew Heimbach, the former head of the now-defunct neo-Nazi group Traditional Worker's Party, and Golden Dawn leaders.[18]

Former Marine Lance Cpl. Vasillios G. Pistolis, who bragged about attacking people at a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, was dismissed from the Marines for his involvement in white supremacist groups in the United States. Pistolis, who admitted to being a member of TWP and an affiliate of Atomwaffen Division, said he gave up his Greek citizenship to work in the U.S. Pistolis was convicted of disobeying orders and making false statements and given a 28-day sentence before being kicked out of the Marines. Pistolis was also deposed in the Sines v. Kessler civil lawsuit for participating in the deadly 2017 Unite The Right events in Charlottesville, Virginia. Some of its members considered TWP as a "Golden Dawn sleeper cell."[19]

Conclusion

The far-right has had a cultural and political base in Greece since the 1973 military coup and regime. Groups that adopt this ideology try to find a place for themselves in the spectrum of political parties by taking action by prioritizing the issues that the majority of the people will be sensitive to during the periods when the mainstream political parties begin to falter. They struggle for a stake in former Golden Dawn voters hoping to break into the mainstream political arena. They try to take advantage of every opportunity to sneak through every door. For example, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, they took advantage of some people's discontent and joined the anti-vaccine movement.

Two last examples of this tactic are spreading hatred against the Muslim Turks in Western Thrace and getting involved in the Macedonian issue. These are the two most sensitive issues of Greek politics. Their activities in Northern Greece and the Western Thrace are likely to bring more political benefits and visibility than racist and xenophobic actions against migrants and refugees. It is a fact that the Golden Dawn has officially and on paper disappeared from the political life of Greece, but its political, cultural, and ideological legacy is alive and kicking.

*Photograph: Political Insight

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[8] The Trial for the Macedonian Language Center in Greece Begins; Annulment of the Establishment Decision of the Macedonian Language Center in Florina Requested!

[9] Annulment of the Establishment Decision of the Macedonian Language Center in Florina Requested!; The Trial for the Macedonian Language Center in Greece Begins.

[10] Fenerbahçe, founded in 1907, is one of the most popular sports clubs in Turkey. It has millions of fans. Football and Basketball clubs are famous around the world. The basketball team won the European championship. Lefter Küçükandonyadis was a professional footballer of Greek descent, who played as a forward in Fenerbahçe. He is often recognized as one of the greatest strikers to play for Fenerbahçe and Turkey. His name was included in Fenerbahçe anthem. Lefter Küçükandonyadis was capped forty-sixtimes for the Turkish national football team, nine of them as the captain. His name was included in Fenerbahçe anthem.

[11] Batı Trakya Fenerbahçeliler Derneğine kapatma davası açıldı, *Millet News*, sec. Batı Trakya, accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.milletgazetesi.gr/bati-trakya/bati-trakya-fenerbahceliler-dernegine-kapatma-davasi-acildi.

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[19] Schiano, Leaked; Message from @VasilistheGreek, *DiscordLeaks*, accessed January 29, 2023, https://discordleaks.unicornriot.ninja/discord/view/358909#msg.

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