

‘Modern day blackshirts’ in Greece and the UK: hate strategies and actions against the ‘other’

Povzetek

‘Sodobni črnosrajčniki’ v Grčiji in Veliki Britaniji: strategije sovraštva in akcije proti ‘drugemu’

Članek se osredinja na dejavnosti skrajnih političnih skupin in njihovo povezanost s primeri viktimizacije t. i. drugih. Glede na porast rasizma, nasilja in sovražnega govora do manjšinskih skupin, ki temeljijo na nacionalni, etnični, verski, spolni in politični identiteti, članek raziskuje vpletenost dveh političnih skupin v nasilje ali sovražno hujskanje: grške Zlate zarje in Angleške obrambne lige (*English Defence League*) iz Velike Britanije. Proučuje od ‘nacionalnih demonstracij’ EDL, uličnega gibanja, do ‘Odbora nacionalnega spomina’ Zlate zarje, torej političnih strank, ki so se kot t. i. tretja sila pojavili v parlamentu, in kako razumeti aktivizem takih skupin v institucionaliziranih demokracijah. Članek temelji na analizi teh dveh primerov in zagovarja tezo, da ideja nacije, ki je v središču njihovega konstrukta, fenomen takih skupin osvetljuje kot sodobno in popularizirano različico kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva po Evropi.

Ključne besede: skrajna desnica, nasilje, EDL, Zlata zarja, rasizem, populizem

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Abstract

The activities of extreme right political groups and their relationship with cases of victimisation of so-called ‘others’ are the main focus of this article. Following the rise of racism, violence, and hate speech towards minority groups based on people’s national, ethnic, religious, sexual and political identities, the article examines the engagement in violence or incitement of violence in the case of two political groups: Golden Dawn from Greece and the English Defence League from the UK. From the ‘national demonstrations’ of EDL, a street movement, to the ‘Committee of National Memory’ of GD, a political party that emerged as a third force in the national parliament, the challenge of how to perceive the activism of such groups in institutionalised democracies is highlighted. Based on the analysis of the two cases it is argued that with the idea of the nation at the centre of their construction, the phenomenon of such groups sheds light on a contemporary and popularised version of hate crimes spreading across Europe.

Keywords: extreme right, violence, EDL, Golden Dawn, racism, populism

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Introduction

In October 2010, Shami Chakrabarti, the director of the National Council for Civil Liberties, characterised EDL, a street protest group, as ‘modern day blackshirts’ (BBC1, 2010). This was a direct reference to the Italian *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (Voluntary Militia for National Security), an unauthorised paramilitary and street army group, loyal to Mussolini, called ‘Blackshirts’ (Milza, 2002), who undertook various violent actions against Mussolini’s opponents. Similarly, in Greece, members of Golden Dawn (GD), an extremist political group often referred to as neo-fascist or neo-Nazi, have also been described as ‘Blackshirts’. The primary underlying connection between these two groups is their violent action.

This article compares the cases of EDL and GD and aims at raising awareness on how such groups have managed to establish themselves through acts of fear. In doing so, the first section of this article explores the relevant literature on extremism, followed by a brief historical overview of the political groups under examination. It traces their activism and violent actions through the years.

In the current European political reality, with political actors trying to deal with the ongoing financial crisis, the potential of populist groups of the extreme right to attract large numbers of followers is of great significance. The European elections of 2014 functioned as a reminder of this potential since all across the EU such parties gained significant support of the popular vote; from the anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant National Front and the triumph of Marine Le Pen, to the Eurosceptic UKIP and the True Finns as representatives of the Scandinavian scene, among others at the political party level, Europe appears without a doubt to be faced with a dangerous and escalating phenomenon: the threat of the extreme right. As mentioned above, this article examines two different cases of groups originating from two countries, the UK and Greece, both affected by the economic crisis though in dissimilar ways.

Golden Dawn launched a campaign in the 2012 national elections in Greece, focusing on concern about unemployment, austerity and the economy, as well as adopting an anti-immigration rhetoric (see GD, 2014). Following 9/11 and facing emerging issues due to the economic crisis, a securitisation of migration in Greece began to be developed. In Greece under crisis, GD took advantage of the framing of migration as a security issue and adopted a distinct xenophobic speech that encouraged hate crime against immigrants.¹ According to them, migrants represent a major problem for Greek society, and are to be blamed for, e.g., rising unemployment and crime; above all immigrants came to be identified as the ultimate threat to Greek cultural and national identity. Moreover, the party has not just engaged in hate speech. In May 2012, action squads organised by Golden Dawn terrorised for days immigrants detained in special facilities in the outskirts of the city of Patras by trying to enter immigrants’ residences, eventually being stopped by police forces. The level of public tolerance towards, or even support for, such action is difficult to measure with accuracy. However, recent opinion polls show that support for Golden Dawn is still strong since the last parliamentary elections: a percentage of 5.6 per cent ranks Golden Dawn in fourth place in terms of electoral support, behind New Democracy (30 per cent), SYRIZA (34.1 per cent) and Potami (8.5 per cent) (see Metron Analysis, 2015).

In the meantime, since March 2009, a new protest group has made its appearance in Britain, as an outcome of a growing sense of cultural alienation in relation to the ethnic minority groups in the country (Sheffield, 2011). The main focus of the new group has been strong anti-Islamic sentiments and attitudes against the various cultural divisions that exist in British

¹ In France, since the early 1970s, the Front National adopted an anti-immigration rhetoric and called for ‘assisted repatriation’ (see Hainsworth, 2008); comparable examples are found in the Belgian party Vlaams Blok, in Italy in the Lega Nord, in Switzerland in the Schweizerische Volkspartei and in Austria in the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, among others.

society. The group adopted street demonstrations as part of its main activity in order to come closer to their potential audience and managed to establish itself in British society, ignoring allegations of racism and extremism. The new group was named the English Defence League and since its first appearance in 2009, it has experienced growth in its support,² placing it as a successful populist movement at the edge of the extremes.

The most systematic attempts to explain the success of extreme right groups include explanatory factors such as institutional and political opportunities but also the type of electoral system, role of the media, cultural acceptance of populist parties and quality of leadership (see Mudde, 2007). In the case of GD and the EDL there are three factors that seem to be equally prominent for both cases: unemployment and economic discontent, immigration and asylum, and finally citizenship and national tradition. With both countries suffering high unemployment, as Mudde (2007) underscores, socioeconomic issues have greater salience in the political debate. Furthermore, with rising concern over immigration, the increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees are perceived not only as an economic threat, but also as an ethnic and cultural threat, fuelling the rhetoric of the importance of the 'national configuration of citizenship' (see Koopmans et al., 2005: 186).

While both GD and the EDL have been trying to present themselves as non-violent and non-racist, both groups seem to build their political agenda on 'signature issue mobilising support' and the threat of 'the other', driven by patterns of immigration, asylum seekers and multiculturalism' (Norris, 2005: 132). Both make xenophobic appeals, calling for the expulsion of illegal immigrants, and demand stricter measures to reduce immigration. For them, immigration is a threat to several major aspects of national life, such as national security and employment, and contributes rising crime rates. Both are self-characterised as nationalist and patriotic, with elements of populism being a prevailing element in their rhetoric. In addition, both use street marches in order to draw attention to their cause.

Despite the similarities between the two groups, there are also certain major structural and cultural differences, such as the political opportunity structure and socio-political environment they operate in. While Greece is characterised by corruption, clientelism, and a rudimentary welfare state, the UK has a more stable political system with a developed, well-structured welfare system. Nevertheless, the severe economic crisis that has extended across Europe has affected both countries and created ideal circumstances for both groups to draw the attention of the public and, in the case of Greece, to thrive.

Moreover, another major difference is that while GD, especially since 2005, has evolved as a political party, the EDL is a street protest movement. In comparative research the cases may be similar in some regards, but may differ in others. Kriesi's (1995: 1) point that political parties "enter the fray as part of the political environment of social movements" offers argumentation that validates the chosen comparative approach. Following the literature on social movements and the extreme right (see Goodwin, 2012; della Porta, Caiani and Wagemann, 2012), the observation that political parties are linked to social movements can be supported by the fact that Steven Yaxley-Lennon and Kevin Carroll, leading members of the EDL, have links with the British National Party (BNP). Nevertheless, the approach of this article is not to delve into the differences between a social movement versus a political party, but rather to examine the two cases as groups, based on their engagement in violence towards the 'other'. The goal is to discover the aspects, properties and attributes that characterise the groups. In order to do so, the article traces the extremist and racist forms of violence and activities of the groups, underlines the similarities and differences in their core ideology, and places emphasis on the discourses and 'othering' narratives that are used to mobilise support.

² Estimated active members 25,000–35,000 (see Bartlett and Littler, 2011).

Theoretical Context: Populism vs. Extremism

Problems of definition

There are many terms used to provide a conceptual umbrella for the groups, parties, organisations and movements of the extreme right. One of the main problems is the groups' diversity. Mudde (1996) has calculated that in the existing literature on the extreme right, there are 26 different approaches regarding a definition that contain at least 58 separate criteria. Among others, the following terms have been used to characterise the extreme right: radical right (Minkenberg, 1998; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Merkl and Weinberg, 1997), extreme right (Hainsworth, 2000; Ignazi, 1996), neo-fascist, mimetic or nostalgic fascism (Griffin, 1993), populist, common man protest, poujadist, ultra right, far right (Marcus, 2000), new populism (Taggart, 2000; Lloyd, 2006), ethno-nationalism (Rydgren, 2005), and anti-immigrant (Fennema, 1997). This leads to difficulty in terms of classification based on "organisational complexity and ideological heterogeneity" (Anastasakis, 2000: 5) and the fact that it evolves from the mobilising nature of the groups (Mudde, 2000) since the parties change along with the demands of the electorate.

The nationalist card appears to be a common argument among the groups, while adopting the belief of superiority, authoritarianism, racism, and xenophobia (Hillard and Keith, 1999) alongside prominent concepts on ultra-nationalism, militarism and homophobia (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994). What needs to be highlighted at this point is the prominence in such parties of the view that there is a threat to national and cultural unity, thus they tend to blame social and economic problems on those constructed as the 'others'. In some cases, the 'others' are being targeted in violent activities, e.g. organised group attacks that can often lead to fatalities in the name of protecting the purity of the nation.

Following the collapse of communism, 'the eternal enemy' has been replaced in the extreme right rhetoric with a new 'national risk', the one of globalised and multicultural society. These changes have influenced the way these groups build up their arguments by creating new approaches based on, for example, xenophobia, by adjusting appropriation of slogans and concepts that were previously identified within a left ideology, e.g. the welfare state, and transforming them into new ones, e.g. welfare chauvinism. The new groups emphasise the importance of 'external threats' (e.g. the U.S., the world market) and 'old' and 'new' enemies of the state/nation (e.g. Muslims, immigrants, refugees) that threaten national sovereignty and disturb the national-cultural homogeneity of the nation state (Georgiadou, 2008: 89–90). For Hainsworth (2000), however, the success of the groups is determined according to their ability to re-form and reinvent themselves.

Extremism

The concept of extremism is difficult to define. The common use of the word alternates between two meanings: a) generalised extremism as a deviation from political or social norms and b) extremism as a definite trend towards the violation of democratic processes. The term itself is rarely used for self-determination or self-identification, but mainly for the association and stigmatisation of ideological opponents.

Along with despotism, tyranny and dictatorship, extremism belongs to negatively charged concepts. It carries a latent pejorative connotation and is a defensive attitude fuelled by historical experience, which in turn influences and to some extent shapes political thought. As a negatively charged term, it contrasts with political concepts expressing positive situations with which one defines itself, e.g. democracy. Any refusal presupposes choice based on specific criteria. According to Backes (2003), extremism, similar to the concept of dictatorship, may be seen as contrary to the rule of law. It is therefore a denial of minimum requirements, i.e. the

necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of the rule of law.

“Extremism is anti-pluralism or – to use a less inappropriate term – monism. And the functional core of extremism is the suppression of difference and disagreement ... precisely the functional essence of extremism is the tendency to treat divisive sections and doubt as unfair.” (Lipset and Raab, 1971: 6) The term gradually entered the political vocabulary in the mid-1960s to describe the emerging groups of the right and left, replacing the previously used term of radicalism.

When referring to specific topics, extremism simply means the tendency towards the ends of the ideological scale. In the most negative sense, when coupled with authoritarianism and totalitarianism as the absolute evil, the problem is not in subjects but in the processes. In this sense extremism means “pushing the limits of regulatory processes defining democratic political practice” (Lipset and Raab, 1971: 4). And while Lipset and Raab refer to extremism as a rejection of pluralism, which represents liberal democracy, for March and Mudde (2005) extremism as opposed to radicalism argues against the values and practices of democracy; as such extremists are seen as undemocratic in comparison to radicals who accept forms of liberal democracy. A further dimension concerns the populist approach. The central concept of populism is that we should place our trust in the common sense of the ordinary people to find solutions to complicated problems. Having said that, it becomes clear that the term populism has a wider range than being used just for the extremes of the political scale. And while populism is defined by its highlighting the people and the elite (see Mudde, 2004), the populism of the extreme right stresses the threat of the ‘other’, or following Zaslove’s (2008: 323) clarification, a second ‘enemy within’ who pressures the people as a ‘special interest group’.

Extremism is not about loyalty to the state or the political system, the belief in democracy. A single extremist ideology of course does not exist. Lipset (1960) proposes that some movements be classified as fascist, because these sought to maintain certain privileges or conditions with authoritarian means, divided into left, centrist and right fascist. They differ as to the objective pursued, but tend to use similar means, and their ideologies, although different, are usually simplistic. This in no way means that the rhetoric and their actions are matched.

Populism

Mudde (2004: 543) explains populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volente generale* (general will) of the people”; for Betz (1998) and Eatwell (2000) the main belief behind populism is the idea of measuring social value in relation to individual social contribution. Populism rejects the established system and supports the idea of the many (people). The term populism underlines more of a political attitude where the mobilisation of the electorate’s popular dissatisfaction is the aim of the parties.

On the other hand, Pfahl-Traughber (1993) takes a somewhat different approach, adopting populism to describe those “modernising right wing parties, which appeal to resentments, prejudices and traditional values and offer simplistic and unrealistic solutions to socio-political problems” (in Ignazi, 2003: 29). Finally, Kitschelt (1995: 21) defines populism as a subcategory of the ‘new radical right’ in those “populist anti-statist appeals which are primarily directed against big government and the political class that dominates a country’s politics through the conventional parties”.

For Mudde (2000) most of these definitions of populism barely contrast in content from definitions of the radical right. Nonetheless, many scholars have chosen to adopt numerous terms in order to describe these political parties (Hainsworth, 2008). However, as Eatwell (2000: 410) emphasises, in an environment where other political families can be identified by their name, e.g. Communists or Greens, the parties which have originated in the radical right

family appear to be “extensive and cannot be summed up in a single identity”. For Georgiadou (2008) the distinction between radical and extreme right contains an understanding that radicalism cannot be extreme. In addition Ignazi (2003) finds the term of new right equivalently vague, since it doesn't reflect the radical context of the parties, and furthermore populism is not an explicit characteristic of the right.

Following the argument above, right-wing extremism is often associated with among other things violent activities, hate crime racism and fascism. Hainsworth (2000), for instance, suggests that violence is a method of disseminating their message while Mudde (2000) suggests that due to the difficulty of defining the extreme right, there are three elements of extremism that can be related to the majority of these groups: authoritarianism (belief in the rule of law), ethnic nationalism (ethnic and cultural origins) and xenophobia (‘fear of the foreign’) (see Eatwell and Goodwin, 2010). In order to address the challenge of the popularity of groups of the extreme right in modern democratic states, Eatwell and Goodwin (2010) focus on the perceptions that cultural heritage is under threat due to the rise of immigration and multiculturalism, which appears to be a key factor in the success of such groups.

In addition, hate crime is often associated with several groups of the extremes. Although difficult to define, hate crime is perceived by Wolfe and Copeland (1994: 201) as a violent act targeting groups which are not valued by the majority of the society, may suffer discrimination in several areas and may also not have access to social, political and economic justice. Though this definition sheds light on the concept of hate crime, the term seems to be rather vague and is open to many criticisms. Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that hate crime is not always singularly violent but it can be threatening and overwhelming on several levels.

What can be considered as major differences between populism and extremism would be their approach to democracy and the tolerance of violence. Nevertheless, in both populism and extremism notions, the idea of conflict appears to be necessary and unavoidable. Due to the emphasis on the ‘other’, for the groups under examination, for the purpose of this article, populism is linked to extremism and is examined in similar terms.

The case studies

Golden Dawn

Often labelled as a neo-Nazi and neo-fascist party, the origins of Golden Dawn go back to the mid-1980s, when Nikolaos Michaloliakos founded The Popular Association Golden Dawn. GD is an extreme right party that claims in its manifesto to have “faith in the ideology of nationalism” (GD, 2012). The symbol of the party shows great resemblance to the Nazi swastika.

From 1980 until 1984, Michaloliakos, in addition to the newly launched group, published a magazine of the same name in which he, along with other like-minded people, found the opportunity to express ideas strongly resembling those of National Socialism. Michaloliakos found himself in the National Political Union in 1984 but in 1985 he decided to separate himself and create GD, which became a political party in the early 1990s. In the years that followed, GD tried to disregard any reference to National Socialism and focus on the nationalist agenda of the party (Psarras, 2012).

GD's flag closely resembles the Nazi swastika and many of its leaders proudly display the Nazi salute while they carry out pogrom type attacks on immigrants, homosexuals and political opponents. Moreover, the slogan used in public gatherings by GD's supporters is ‘Blood, Honour, Golden Dawn’, which rhymes in the Greek language (Αίμα Τιμή, Χρυσή Αυγή, in Greek).

The party did not have any significant electoral success for almost two decades, until the

local elections of 2010, when it managed to gain 5.3 per cent of the popular vote and elect a representative to the City Council of Athens. In the national elections of 2012, the party managed to increase its support and receive 7 per cent of the popular vote, enough to gain 21 seats in the parliament, but a month later, following the new elections, this was reduced to 6.92 per cent and its seats in the parliament dropped to 18. In 2013, Michaloliakos along with other GD MPs were arrested based on allegations of forming and participating in a criminal organisation. Although the strong leadership forces remain in jail, the party in the latest elections of 2015 managed to gain 6.3 per cent of the vote and maintain their presence in the national parliament.

The party of GD, as stated in its manifesto of 2012, opposes “the demographic alteration, through the influx of millions of illegal immigrants, and the dissolution of Greek society, which is systematically pursued by the parties of the establishment of the so-called left” (GD, 2012). According to the party, nationalism is the “third major ideology in history” (ibid.) and one needs to support the establishment of institutions originated from this ideology. The party “equates the state with the nation, citizenship with ethnicity and demos with ethnos” (Ellinas, 2013: 549). For GD, “nationalism is the only absolute and genuine revolution because it pursues the birth of new moral, spiritual, social values” (GD, 2012). Regarding its structure, the party follows similar patterns with other extreme right parties in Europe, where the authority is concentrated on the figure of the leader.

Several reasons help explain why Golden Dawn has emerged as a parliamentary political party: (1) popular disillusionment over the deep financial crisis; (2) rising poverty and unemployment; (3) the continuing popular disapproval of the traditional ruling parties New Democracy and PASOK, which are considered to be corrupt and culpable for the current financial situation in Greece; and (4) an anti-immigrant, racist campaign which has appealed to a rising nationalism in a Greece under crisis and has been further fuelled by the failure of the state to deal effectively with the huge problem of illegal immigration in Greece (Akrivopoulou, 2013).

English Defence League

The English Defence League (EDL) is an extreme right street protest movement focusing on anti-Islamic sentiments and stands against any idea or form of multiculturalism within the UK. The group’s current leader is Tim Ablitt, after co-founders Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll left in 2013, implying dangers of ‘far right extremism’ (BBC, 2013). Going back to the identification of the group, EDL (and its offshoots) has a plethora of distinctive symbols and imagery deployed by the activists and others associated with them. The EDL logo, appears online and on pin badges and clothing, and is a Christian cross with the Latin *in hoc signo vinces* (by this sign you will conquer). Alongside this, their online presence often features images of medieval knights, referencing the Crusades.

The origins of EDL can be found in United Peoples of Luton (UPL), a group against Islam. In March 2009, UPL organised a demonstration as a response to the earliest demonstration of the organisation of Al-Muhajiroun against the war in Afghanistan, with the main argument concentrated on ‘Islamic extremism’ as a national problem that needs to be addressed. What finally emerged from the event was a group of organised activists that were to become, under the leadership of Stephen Yaxley Lennon, one of the most ardent anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim groups in the UK, relegating and parodying Muslim communities within the country. In an attempt to build on the ‘success’ of Luton, several similar demonstrations were organised during the following months, e.g. the one in Birmingham on 8th August of the same year by a number of different groups that EDL appeared to be in collaboration with.

Although both leadership and members of the group firmly insist that EDL opposes the mobilisation of Islamic extremists and not Islam in general, the group was almost from the

beginning linked to anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic rhetoric. Since 2011, the party has collaborated with the British National Party (BNP) and launched the British Freedom Party (BFP). The attendance at national events has been between a few hundred and 2000; these have been publicly advertised events, with publicity also coming from the mainstream media and police warnings. While the support base of EDL has been difficult to measure due to the lack of formal membership structure, the think tank Demos estimated that there were between 25000 and 35000 active members in 2011 (Demos, 2011). The group has enriched its base of supporters through the use of new media and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which offer a space to broadcast its propaganda and information on forthcoming activities to large audiences. The lack of formal membership structures and the engagement and organisation of marches and demonstrations through social media has allowed EDL to deny responsibility for violent activities.

Reacting in a similar way to such extreme right groups that are active in Europe, EDL, similarly to GD, denies the characterisations of its members as racist and xenophobic, and presents an alternative perspective on their identity. As Sheffield (2011) notes, by defining itself as a “human rights organisation, EDL aims to protect the right to free speech, so citizens can speak out against the threat of Islamic extremism” and stresses that according to its official rhetoric the group stands in favour of the promotion and protection of democratic ideals, which can be challenged and threatened by Sharia law. In addition, EDL emphasises the obligation of the people immigrating to the country to respect British culture, laws and traditions and not “expect their own cultures to be promoted by agencies of the state. [...] The onus should always be on foreign cultures to adapt and integrate” (EDL, 2011). In Copesey’s report (2010) on EDL and the challenges for the country and the values of social inclusion, fairness and equality, the author proposes that the EDL represents an “ugly type of English nationalism, which deploys native English identity as its principal weapon’ against the ‘other’”. Without following a traditional manifestation, EDL chooses to campaign on purely anti-Islam issues and in its effort to strengthen its argument the group often adopts the language of liberal democracy and human rights, an approach that can be found in similar extreme right groups in Europe.

Activism and violence

Although both groups stress that their aim is to demonstrate peacefully, activism in the form of violence appears to be engaged in by GD in particular. More specifically, several of its members have been involved in numerous incidents of both hate speech and crime against the ‘other’, based on people’s national, ethnic, religious, and sexual identities.

Violence as a form of activism has been linked with GD since the late 1990s and the party has often been officially accused by pro-migrant organisations and left-wing groups of this. From vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and memorials in the early 2000s, to football hooliganism related to acts of sports violence, GD appears to choose a provocative tactic that has often led to serious injuries against mainly foreign sport fans. In 1998, in the famous case of Perianthos, a well-known member of GD, Antonis Androutsopoulos was accused of the attempted murder of three leftist students; this drew the attention of the media to the group that challenged at the time the efficiency of the Greek police force and strengthened the claim of connections between the Greek police force and GD. Androutsopoulos was finally arrested in 2005 and sent to prison in 2006. Attacks against anarchists and leftists are a common and repeated tactic of GD members.

In the meantime, while seeing its support increasing, GD has been developing from the outset a social programme, including the delivery of free or minimal cost food among the most unfavoured strata of ethnic Greeks, under the slogan ‘Return Greek people’s money to the people’. In one of the public food donations in Athens, GD MP, Ilias Panagiotaras, refused to give

food to an elderly immigrant woman and urged her to go and ask for food from the left coalition party SYRIZA which, according to his opinion, is the protector of immigrants (Koronaïou and Sakellariou, 2013: 336). In order to ensure that food goes only to Greek citizens, they ask people queuing for food to present their identity cards. On May 2, 2013 a GD Member of Parliament, Giorgos Germenis, attempted to punch in the face the mayor of Athens, George Kaminis (a little girl was hit instead by mistake). The incident occurred one day after the police stopped Golden Dawn distributing food 'only to Greeks' on the occasion of the Greek Orthodox Easter celebrations in the most central square of Athens. The mayor of Athens had thanked the police in a public statement for stopping such hate actions during these holy days. He claimed that the GD MP who attacked him had a gun.

Another area of activism in which GD engages is that it allegedly offers protection for victims of crime, a service that has been appreciated by citizens and utilised by the police, which refers Athenians to the GD for help, especially when immigrant crime is involved. The party, however, demands allegiance in return for their service. The myth of the little 'boy scouts' of the GD has been widely reproduced by the media. A picture of a male GD member standing behind two elderly women in front of a bank ATM in order to protect them from thieves was reproduced by many Greek media and across the internet. It was eventually revealed that the man behind the elderly women was a party candidate in the 2010 local elections in Athens and later in the 2012 national elections and the son of one of the women (Koronaïou and Sakellariou, 2013: 333). Nevertheless, the impression was given that GD helps and protects Greek citizens (Psarras, 2012: 379–382).

One of the actions GD took after the 2012 elections was to create a blood bank. Announcements and slogans such as 'Donate blood – Save a Greek soul' were widely circulated, and it was clearly stated in the text accompanying this announcement that the blood is 'only for Greeks'. There were reactions by medical doctors who claimed that blood is for everyone and no one can control who gets blood except by clinical criteria and decisions on individual cases (Koronaïou and Sakellariou, 2013: 333–334).

Another health initiative of GD has been the formation in December 2012 of Medicines Avec Frontiers, in opposition to the international organisation Medicines Sans Frontiers. In their inaugural announcement they state that the service is only for Greeks and call on Greek doctors to participate. They also state that "almost 3 million illegal immigrants are treated by Greek hospitals for free and this is the basic reason why the health system is in this mess" (Koronaïou and Sakellariou, 2013: 334).

As far as unemployment is concerned, GD's anti-immigrant rhetoric is summarised in their repeatedly used slogan 'every foreign worker is a Greek unemployed'. Incidents like the one in a strawberry production farm in southern Greece in 2013, where migrant workers were shot at, but luckily only slightly injured, by their supervisors for demanding to get paid for six months of work, have allegedly been triggered by GD's virulent anti-immigrant rhetoric. Nevertheless, in this particular case, Golden Dawn publicly denied its involvement and condemned the shootings, stating, however, in an official announcement that these issues arise because jobs were stolen from Greeks and given to illegal immigrants, and that the only solution to the problem is the immediate expulsion of all illegal immigrants living and working in Greece.

Moreover, GD has formed a non-profit organisation, which they named OAED (in Greek after the acronym of the official state organisation for the unemployed, which literally means 'Manpower Employment Organisation', but in the case of the GD organisation the acronym means 'Group for the Unemployed Hard-Hit Greeks'). The purpose of this organisation, which according to the Greek Ministry of Labour operates illegally, is, in collaboration with local Golden Dawn offices, to find jobs only for Greeks. A Greek farmer in collaboration with the local GD Offices in a region two hours distant from Athens advertised in local newspapers asking for thirty Greek workers for casual work to pick oranges and tangerines. Fifteen of them according to the advertisement might also be employed on his olive plantations in the near

future (Koronaïou and Sakellariou, 2013: 335). These practices are illegal according to both Greek and EU law. Its supporters — in some instances with the alleged cooperation of police — stand accused of unleashing a rash of violence since the party rose to national office, including the stabbings and beatings of immigrants, ransacking an immigrant community centre, smashing market stalls and breaking the windows of immigrant-owned shops.

Moreover, GD has already demonstrated having ties with other neo-fascist and neo-Nazi political groups in Europe. In May 2005, for instance, it joined the German neo-Nazi party NPD in Berlin in a ceremony paying respect to Hitler, on the anniversary of the defeat of Nazism. And in 2010, Nikos Michaloliakos, the party's leader, addressed the audience in a gathering of the Italian neofascist party Forza Nuova (Zenakos, 2012).

On September 18, 2013, the violent murder of the anti-fascist musician Pavlos Fyssas by members of GD opened once again a debate over banning the party. This time, Greek judges moved forward without new legislation. The Greek High Court of Annulment on September 28 indicted the leader, deputies and members of Golden Dawn based on Art. 187 of the Greek Penal Code, which penalises the formation of and participation in a 'criminal organisation'. Thus, the Greek High Court not only considered GD to be an abettor of Pavlos Fyssas's murder but also initiated a broader investigation into other criminal activities connected with GD, including several reported racist and hate crimes, illegal possession of firearms, and money laundering. On November 1, 2013, two GD members were killed and a third wounded in a drive-by shooting outside the party's offices in an Athens suburb. A previously unknown urban guerrilla group calling itself Militant Popular Revolutionary Forces has claimed responsibility for the murders of the two GD members and the serious injuring of the third one. In an 18-page proclamation the group said that the shooting of the GD members was a 'political execution' in revenge for the murder of leftist rapper Pavlos Fyssas.

The case of EDL appears to have several similarities with that of GD. The group, although stating that its intention is to demonstrate in peace across the country, often appears to be involved in street violence with other opposing organisations and groups, incidents ending in severe injuries (e.g. January 2010 in Stoke-on-Trent where four police officers were injured). Since 2010 the demonstrations of EDL have involved damage to private property, damage to public property and several arrests. All the organised demonstrations and marches of the group have been closely observed by police since they are seen as harbouring a threat to public safety.

Having also strong links with hooliganism and right-wing extremist groups, the group's marches have descended into violent acts and racist and Islamophobic speeches. Additionally, in the riots of 2011, EDL members gathered in several places around the country arguing that their attendance would deter the rioting crowd, and claimed that in this way they were 'protecting' the locals and mobilising the hooligans (see Garland and Treadwell, 2012).

At demonstrations, the primary offline activity of the EDL, the most visible symbol is the English flag, which is the flag of St. George (red cross on a white background), and has connotations of the Crusades. This is combined with slogans and symbols which reference Islam ('No Sharia', 'No more mosques'), and the British military ('Support our troops') and sometimes slogans which aim to distance the group from racism and extremism ('patriotism does not equal Nazism'). The references to the military relate both to the fact that the British military are engaged in operations against Islamic groups overseas, and more importantly are a response to al-Muhajiroun and its successor organisations' protests against the military back in 2009. Thus, the use of the poppy image was in direct response to the radical Islamists' burning of a poppy on Remembrance Sunday.

A further common phrase is 'No Surrender', or NFSE (standing for 'No Fucking Surrender Ever'). This harks back to the use of the phrase in Northern Irish politics (Unionist Ian Paisley, and going back hundreds of years) and its appearance in football songs in 1980s England as 'No surrender to the IRA'. This football song has been adapted to 'No surrender to the Taliban', and is sung at EDL demos alongside other football related songs, including 'England 'til I die'.

Given the EDL's origins in football culture (casuals, hooligans, fans) these songs are no surprise, nor is the prevalence of fashions associated with the scene.

A further slogan, seen on the back of many EDL shirts is 'Not racist, not violent, no longer silent'. The final part of this slogan demonstrates how the EDL's populist anti-elitism is constructed. For the EDL, the people of Britain have been silent for too long on the question of the threat of Islam and/or Islamism, and the time has come to tell the government to do something: "Much of the EDL leaders' vitriol is not directed at the Muslim community, but at the government, which they perceive as pandering to Jihadis' demands, drowned in political correctness and marred by indefensible double standards." (Bartlett and Littler, 2011: 12–13)

Given that the EDL was formed in response to the radical Islamist group, al-Muhajiroun, and states its target as 'extremist Muslims' and 'radical Islam', individuals' orientations to other Muslims is of great interest here. The official EDL website warns against "the unjust assumption that all Muslims are complicit in or somehow responsible for these crimes" and describes Muslims themselves as the "victims of some Islamic traditions and practices" (English Defence League). Indeed, in the speech that EDL leader Tommy Robinson gave at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne demonstration, the week after an Islamist killed an off-duty soldier in South London, he asked the crowd to salute Muslim British soldiers. There were at least two Muslim EDL supporters at this same demonstration. Thus, for at least some EDL activists, some Muslims can be accepted as allies.

That said, the drawing in of other issues besides extremism – "denigration and oppression of women, the molestation of young children, the committing of so-called honour killings, homophobia, anti-Semitism" (English Defence League) – does lead to a focus on Islam more generally as these issues are not limited to radical Islamists, and of course not to Islam either. This reflects mainstream, including governmental, discourse, that places these issues firmly in the context of 'Muslim culture'. Again, a distinction can be made between criticising Islam or particular ethno-religious cultures and hating Muslims as people. Nevertheless, EDL members have been reported for physical assaults and hate speech against Muslims and have been themselves, as in the case of GD, targets, since in 2013 Islamists launched an attack on an EDL march in Dewsbury.

Concluding remarks

From 'modern day blackshirts' to anti-immigration groups, far right activists, racists, neo-Nazis, football hooligans, white nationalists and numerous others, GD and EDL are referred to as two groups of right extremism. With the politics of fear overhanging the immigration debate and the securitisation discourse surrounding immigrants, groups of the extreme right have experienced significant success in Europe.

Although the 'other' in the case of EDL is clearly identified as extremist Islam, in the case of GD, the 'other' is spread more widely in a variety of groups and ethnicities. Hate crime in the case of EDL and GD can take different forms. Although when it comes to street-level violence, discrimination and hate speech towards the 'other' the similarities between the selected cases are clear, the analysis shows that there are differences characterising different practices of mobilisation. Being a street protest group, EDL focuses mainly on street demonstrations and protests, whereas in GD's case the forms of mobilisations vary. From social programmes, to non-profit organisations, to street protests, violent attacks and even murder attempts, GD has managed to become one of the most active and aggressive groups in the European extreme right scene.

Whether it is a street protest group yet to be political party, or a successful political party, violence and hate crime have managed to explicitly interpret the rhetoric of the 'othering' in ordinary language and reduce the margins of tolerance in society to a worrying extent. Both EDL and GD are building their ideology on the glorification and mythologisation of a national

past by glorifying it through reinterpretation of meanings of various symbols, while in the name of nationalism anti 'other' acts are legitimised.

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