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**Formal Weakness
and Informal Strength:
Civil Society in Contemporary Greece**

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Acknowledgements

Introduction: the research question and the hypothesis of the paper

During and after transitions to democracy, there is often an outburst of social and political mobilization. There is also a high interest of people in politics. These patterns are usually reflected in increased participation in voluntary associations, non-governmental organizations, social movements and political parties. In short, the process of democratisation is associated with the development of civil society and with rising political participation (Schmitter 1986, Diamond 1997).

In Greece after the 1974 transition to democracy, there was a very high interest in party politics (Lyrintzis 1983, Featherstone and Katsoudas 1987, Pappas 1999, Voulgaris 2001). Between 1974 and approximately 1987, Greek political parties claimed to have large membership; political rallies were very well attended; political films and books on politics used to sell well; and political newspapers enjoyed rather high circulation.

Research shows that since the late 1980s Greeks have gradually lost interest in politics and that they have become increasingly cynical towards political parties and politicians (Kafetzis 1994 and 1997). At the same time, it is widely accepted that civil society in contemporary Greece has always been weak (Mouzelis 1987 and 2002: 238-245, Diamandouros 1991, Mavrogordatos 1993, Markydemetris 2002, Lyrintzis 2002: 92). There have been comparatively few voluntary associations and non-governmental organizations, while participation in such civil society associations has remained relatively low. As comparative data shows (Table 1, in the following page), in the 1990s the participation of Greeks in (officially registered) voluntary associations and/or organized voluntary .

If, since the late-1980s, there has been a rise in political cynicism and alienation, the following question rises: how has the large political mobilization in the wake of Greece's 1974 transition to democracy been transformed? More concretely, given that in post-authoritarian Greece political parties, particularly of the centre-left and the left, used to be relatively massive organizations, what happened to the dynamic of political participation sparked by the transition?

One possible answer is that this dynamic has expired; that Greece has become a typical Western democracy with most citizens participating in politics only every four years, when elections are held; and that, in the time between elections, political participation has been reduced to passivity or even to complete indifference towards politics. Another possible answer to the above question is that, after the decline of the appeal of political parties, Greeks have increasingly formed or joined civil society associations and, alternatively, have channelled their activities into informal collective activities which have not taken the form of formal organizations.

This second, alternative answer is the hypothesis of this paper. In other words, the hypothesis is twofold. First, some formal voluntary associations have been quite strong, and civil society in contemporary Greece is *not* as uniformly weak as it is generally thought to be. And second, in addition to formal civil society associations, of which there are comparatively fewer in Greece than in other EU countries, there is an informal civil society. This emanates from a flourishing, albeit informal and thus not officially registered, social mobilization which substitutes for the usual, formal civil society found in modern Western societies.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION PARTICIPATING IN AN ASSOCIATION OR IN AN ORGANIZED VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY IN 12 EU MEMBER-STATES

	1994	1998
COUNTRY		
Belgium	35	46
Denmark	57	84
Germany	51	53
GREECE	**10**	**24**
Spain	26	28
France	27	40
Ireland	40	51
Italy	14	34
Luxembourg	39	57
Netherlands	45	79
Portugal	15	26
U.K.	46	53
EU-12 average	**34**	**48**

Source: Eurostat 1998: 188 and Eurostat 2000: 114.

A. Theoretical Considerations

1. Formal and informal civil society: a binary concept

An assumption lies behind this hypothesis. This assumption, i.e., our point of departure for this paper is the following: in contemporary Greece there are plenty of informal groupings or collectivities which are the functional equivalent of formal associations in other Western societies. This is not as paradoxical, if one recalls that in Greece there has always been a pronounced distance between the official, formal level of social interaction and the unofficial, informal one. Of course, in Greece social interaction has been regulated by official, formal rules and regulations (all the way from taxation law to traffic regulations). In practice, however, as every resident of or visitor to Greece quickly realizes, there are evolving patterns of social interaction which often go unreported and have never been included in the letter of the law. This

is the informal level of social and economic life, with its own rules. Let us see two aspects of the contrast between formal and informal levels.

First, as it is well known, in Greece there is a formal and an informal, "grey" economy. Clearly, many capitalist economies, even the most advanced ones, have their share of informal economic activity. The point is that in Greece the informal economy has been estimated to amount to approximately thirty per cent of the formal. At times when, on the basis of macroeconomic indicators, the formal economy shows a faltering performance, the informal economy may be thriving (Tatsos 2001).

Secondly, in Greece the legal system has been functioning in parallel with a system of unofficial norms and customs which have not been officially codified or explicitly included in court decisions. Obviously, in most societies there is a co-existence of law and custom. Also in most societies changing interpretations of the law do not necessarily take the form of an official pronouncement. However, what is particular in the case of Greece is the large number of laws and decrees which are passed by parliament but are never implemented. Informal rules cover sectors of social and economic life, which should have been regulated according to the existing official legislation. There are many informally accepted, but not officially sanctioned, ways of behaviour. In the end, circumscribing the law is not only possible, but rather is a common everyday experience of the country's residents.

Of course, in many societies there is a distance between what law stipulates and what custom dictates. However, the Greek 'exceptionalism', and perhaps the 'exceptionalism' of other societies with similar historical trajectories and prevailing cultures (e.g., in Southern Europe or in the Balkans), is that appearances may be almost always deceptive. It would then come as no surprise to make the hypothesis that in parallel to formal, civil society associations, which are comparatively weak, there must be an informally functioning civil society which is not necessarily as weak.

It is easier to document the formal weakness of Greek civil society, i.e., to present the evolution and particularly the post-transition decline of formal organizations and their membership, than to substantiate our argument about civil society's informal strength. Organizations such as political parties, labour unions and non-governmental organizations are recognizable formal entities. Informal collectivities, groupings, networks or "circles" of neighbours and friends, are not as recognizable.

However, in other historical settings, informal civil society was the only civil society available. This was, for example, the case of civil society in the last phase of the evolution of state socialism. In Eastern Europe before 1989 there were varying degrees of civil society mobilization and resistance to one-party states. Owing to oppression by the state, most of the relevant activity was necessarily informal but not less real for that matter (Keane 1988, Miller 1992).

It may argued, however, that in post-transitional, consolidated democracies, informal groupings, loose networks and social "circles" should not be considered a part of civil society. The relevant argument would be that their members do not participate in the public sphere in the way card-carrying members of political parties and labour unions or members and registered militants of organized social movements do.

However, this would imply a restricted notion of civil society. We would like to accept a wide definition of the concept, understanding civil society to be a wide-ranging set of social interaction and collective action taking place in the public space available between the individual household, on the one hand, and the state apparatus, on the other. This is not one more, new definition of civil society (see definitions in

Cohen 1982, Cohen and Arato 1992 and Tester 1992). It abides by a conception of civil society widely used in current research on globalisation and democratisation.

According to Mary Kaldor, there is an activist version of the definition of civil society. As Kaldor writes,

"civil society refers to active citizenship, to growing self-organization *outside formal political circles*, and expanded space in which individuals can influence the conditions in which they live both directly and [indirectly] through political pressure" (Kaldor 2003: 8, emphasis added).

This is not an idiosyncratic conceptualisation of civil society. Also according to another contemporary analyst of civil society, Larry Diamond, civil society is

"a network of formal *and informal* groups, voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, representing different social, political, professional and economic groups. It is distinct from 'society' in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold state officials accountable" (Diamond 1994: 6, emphasis added).

We would like to underline two points in the above definitions. First, not all groups are parts of civil society. For instance, a chorus in a village church or a bird watching society usually do not play a role in civil society.[1] However, such associations are not necessarily condemned to stay outside the boundaries of civil society for ever. They may play such a role at some point in time, if they intervene in the public sphere in order to fulfil any of the civil society's functions of aggregation, intermediation or representation of material and "ideal" interests (in the Weberian sense of the term). Otherwise, normally only those groups which are politically relevant, i.e., which somehow contribute to the public sphere, should be considered as elements constituting civil society.

Our second point is that civil society is better defined by a set of functions, in addition to a range of organizations (labour unions, NGOs, organized social movements, etc.) Notably, in both definitions of civil society cited above, care is taken to include informal aspects of civic engagement in the concept. Informal collectivities, loosely held together and identified by a common cause rather than by an officially registered name and address, may also be elements constituting civil society. Both formal associations and informal, rather amorphous, collective actors are included in our binary conceptualisation of civil society, as long as they are active in the public space located between the household and the state apparatus and fulfil some civil society function.

The above conceptualisation of civil society runs into the following difficulty: there is little empirical research on the informal aspects of civil society. Relevant anthropological research and research in the sociology of networks, focused on informal social aspects of civil society, is difficult to obtain. This dearth of data holds particularly true for the case of contemporary Greece. Empirical research on the Greek civil society started only in the 1990s. General statements about the Greek civil society have been rare (Mouzelis 1987 and 2002, Mavrogordatos 1993, Sotiropoulos 1995 and 2004, Makrydemetris 2002). Studies of particular sectors of civil society,

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[1] I owe this point to Christos Lyrintzis.

such as organized interests, have been more numerous (Mavrogordatos 1988, Ioannou 1989 and 1999, Alexandropoulos 1990, Kazakos 1991, Kioukias 1994, Katsanevas 1994, Zambarloukou 1997, Anthopoulos 2000, Sklias and Chouliaras 2002).

For these reasons, we are unable to provide but only limited pieces of empirical data in order to make an assessment of civil society in Greece of the 1990s. Our assessment will be made on the basis of available data on formal organizations, i.e. organizations which have a publicly recorded activity and a formal hierarchy and distribution of labour. Relevant indicators are the number of such organizations, the size of their membership and attitudes reported in surveys on participation in organizations. We will present the existing few pieces of data, drawn on unpublished sources, as well as other data based on surveys of attitudes.

As the definition which we have just adopted in this section of the paper, claims, civil society groups perform certain functions. Such groups involve citizens who act collectively in the public sphere, in order to express their interests, to exchange information, to achieve mutual goals and to encounter and hold state officials accountable. If a group fulfils some of these functions, then it should be considered as part of the civil society, regardless of whether the group has assumed the form of a modern formal organization or whether it has appeared as an informal, amorphous grouping. In other words, our argument is that informal groupings or collectivities may fulfil the same functions as formal ones. If they do so, then research on civil society should count them in too.

The dominant thesis about the weakness of civil society in contemporary Greece has not taken into account either the informal outbursts of collective political participation or informal networks of individuals, co-workers, neighbours and experts or the under-reported local and regional instances of civil society. All these instances may be unaccounted by analysts. Such informal aspects of civil society do not appear in the form of formal organizations nor do they enjoy the visibility of peak associations or prestigious professional associations (e.g., the associations of private-practicing medical doctors, lawyers and engineers). However, being informal and less visible does not make them unsuitable to be classified as instances of civil society. The important thing is not the form which such instances have taken but, rather, the function which they have fulfilled.

To sum up this section, our claim is the following: if the above collective actors (groups, networks, "circles") participate in the public sphere, expressing their commonly held views and making demands on the state, then they should probably be counted in as instances of civil society, despite their informal, unofficial or unregistered status. As Antigone Lyberaki and Christos Paraskevopoulos put it in a recent paper on social capital in Greece (2002: 3):

"…research on formal networks alone (e.g., by focusing on the official records of membership in voluntary organizations), beyond the problems of reliability and consistency of the historical records, may be inadequate for capturing other forms of primarily informal and loose-knit organizations, such as anti-globalization movements. Therefore, research should cover *all* forms of civil engagement" (emphasis in the original).

Civil society has been studied in Western societies, on the basis of registered associations, publicly available data on their membership, and attitudinal surveys of the general population on matters of social capital and trust (e.g., Putnam 1993 and 1995). It is methodologically difficult to locate informal groupings, networks and

circles through the usual social surveys. In this paper, we will only start to try hinting at different informal expressions of contemporary Greek civil society.

In the remaining sections of this paper we will sketch some examples of informal civil society in contemporary Greece. We will discuss both constructive initiatives of civil society, which have made a positive contribution to the public sphere; and not-so-constructive initiatives, in fact, initiatives which have obstructed tolerance and social inclusion. Then, we will describe to the evolution of formal civil society organizations in Greece over the last thirty years. We will differentiate among sectors of civil society, underlining those in which, since the early 1970s, civic engagement has been strong and other ones in which it has been weak

2. Informal aspects of civil society

Informal instances of civil society may include a wide range of traditional and very modern collectivities, arising in various public spaces, including the traditional Greek coffee shop, on the one hand, and discussion groups communicating through the Internet, on the other. Relevant examples of such informal groups are circles of neighbours in the cities and villagers in rural areas, self-help groups in the various migrant communities, networks of people exchanging messages over the computer and the mobile phone, small social movements focusing on local issues, likely-minded professionals or experts creating 'free-floating', scientific or policy-oriented communities.

The distinction between formal and informal civil society should not be considered as being too sharp. As it is well known, many social movements have started up as loose, informal circles of likely-minded citizens and have grown into formal, complex organizations. A similar transition from informality to formality of organization is evident in the case of Greece at the level of local government elections. Loose, non-partisan or inter-party coalitions have emerged over a number of years, since the early 1990s. This phenomenon occurred just before municipal elections in 1994, 1998 and 2002. It did not occur in the prefectural elections, i.e., the elections for "nomarches" (the rough equivalent of the French "prefets" - Greek "nomarches" are not appointed to their posts; since 1994, they have been elected).

While candidates for the posts of prefects have almost always been selected by the major political parties, which have come to consider prefectural elections as a rehearsal for general parliamentary elections, many candidates running for mayors have become less dependent on the major political parties. As Elias Nikolakopoulos has shown (2000: 91), local political divisions, which in the past used to mirror the dividing lines of the national-level party system, have gradually given way to inter-party coalitions.

These inter-party coalitions were different from the ad hoc coalitions forged during various electoral periods in the post-war period. The difference lied in their expansion in size and their transformation from inter-party alliances within either the block of the Right or the block of the Left (intra-block coalitions) to inter-block coalitions. In detail, in the 1990 municipal elections, fewer than fifteen such coalitions appeared in various, mostly small towns. As had been the case in the past, these coalitions were forged in an intra-block fashion. For instance, there were coalitions among left and centre-left parties in order to promote a common candidate of the block of the left, already from the first round of municipal elections. Independent candidates, who were not supported by any of the main political parties, also appeared

in various municipalities. Later in the 1990s, inter-block coalitions were formed, including coalitions between (earlier polarized) political forces of the right and the left. By 1998, there were more than 100 cases of such coalitions, built on purpose for the municipal elections. Their common trait was that they "neglected ideological conflict at the national level" (Nikolakopoulos, *op. cit.*). The phenomenon was repeated in the municipal elections of autumn 2002. The above cases reflected the inter-block formation of local interests. The candidates, which inter-block, local alliances of cadres and voters put forward, were often strong enough to overcome the hostility of national-level parties and to win municipal elections.

One can imagine how once improbable political alliances were gradually formalized in electoral tickets containing "strange bedfellows". In Greece at the local level there have traditionally been many pockets or "niches" of public space where politics was fervently discussed, public opinion was formed, citizens' consciousness of collective interests (local, professional or otherwise) was forged and claims towards central state and local authorities were voiced.

Today, such pockets or niches of informal civil society include public squares in small towns where men (mostly) meet regularly; theatres and sports fields; corridors and patios of university buildings and headquarters of public service; and festivals and feasts which take place regularly, mostly during the Easter and Summer holidays. In all these localities, there are some kinds of social interaction which remain informal, i.e., they are not of the same nature as an official assembly of the members of a voluntary association.

Yet, such kinds of social interaction, albeit informal, sometimes fulfil some of the functions which in other Western societies are performed by formal organizations. Such functions include the setting up of self-help groups and the forging of collaboration on matters of mutual interest. A social anthropologist has suggested that meetings in the traditional coffee shop of the typical Greek village constitute a sort of "popular assemblies" (Papataxiarches 1992: 209). In other words, we may see that such periodic, albeit not standardized, meetings are procedures, through which local civil societies are continuously constituted and re-constituted.

In terms of social attitudes, there is contradictory evidence in regard to whether Greeks show a sort of aversion to participating in voluntary associations or not. For instance, in a sample survey of young people's attitudes in 1997 and in 1999, 53 per cent of the respondents stated that, if they were to participate in associations, these would be in the sectors of environmental protection or humanitarian aid. However, it seems that many respondents did not see such participation as a stable commitment on their part (Alexopoulos 2001: 59-60). On the other hand, in a survey of the general population in regard to their willingness to do volunteer work in the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004, the majority of respondents (around two-thirds of the sample) replied negatively (Panayotopoulou 2003: 133). The majority of the comparatively few who wanted to volunteer, claimed that their basic motivation was to contribute to the success of the Games. Far fewer among those who wanted to volunteer to work for the Games, valued participation as such (Panayotopoulou 2003: 135). In this case, the willingness to participate in collective action, to the extent that existed, was combined with a reluctance to do so through formal channels of participation, organized by the competent authorities, "from above".

Are there any specific examples of informal civil society mobilization? Some events of the late 1990s can be listed as cases of constructive civil society participation. Other events may be seen in a more negative light, in the sense that they

signified obstruction on the part of local communities which fought to preserve their own interests against those of the wider region or the country as a whole.

Let us first mention a positive example: An instance where constructive civil society mobilization surfaced was the case of non-governmental mobilization to help with the victims and the material damages of the earthquakes in North-Eastern Turkey and in Western Athens in the late summer and the early fall of 1999. There is some unpublished data available on the collective actors who devoted part of their resources to alleviate the situation of the victims of the earthquake in Athens. There is also some information of the kind of help offered (Kallas 2004). Around 700 associations, foundations, NGOs and private businesses mobilized. They offered goods, such as money, food, clothes, and also services, such as health care and psychological support to the victims.

In this case, there were three interesting points for the purposes of our argument: first, these informal initiatives "from below" were taken without infra-structural support by or consultation with or even any kind of coordination by the state authorities. The authorities had not devised any plan about how to tap civil society resources. Only some of the affected municipalities were able to draw on voluntary help and did so in an ad hoc fashion.

Secondly, the mobilization of civil society was very quick and effective; and thirdly, a large share, almost 40 per cent of the collective actors who mobilized to help, were private businesses (Kallas 2004). The theoretical point which is raised in this instance is whether profit-making organizations are part of the civil society or not. We usually associate civil society with voluntary, non-profit making organizations. However, in the case of support to the victims of the 1999 earthquake in Athens, the magnitude of support by private businesses was quite large. If civil society is seen not only as a set of organizations but also as a multitude of functions, to be fulfilled by all sorts of collective actors, be they formal or informal, private or non-governmental, then we may consider the following: even if private businesses are not normally part of the definition of civil society, in that above particular instance, they seemed to have functioned as such.

However, examples of not-so-constructive, but rather obstructive, civil society mobilization also surfaced in the late 1990s (and were probably evident even before). Let us briefly mention two relevant stories. A first story: Several years ago, the Holy Synod of the Greek Christian Orthodox Church appointed a new metropolitan bishop for Larissa, the capital city of the region of Thessaly. Many local supporters of the incumbent metropolitan bishop did not agree with this decision. They formed groups which actively resisted the decision by obstructing access to the cathedral of Larissa and/or angrily interrupting mass whenever the newly appointed bishop was present. Other local supporters of the newly appointed bishop formed counter-groups. Violent clashes ensued in the streets of Larissa around the city's cathedral, in the unavoidable presence of news-hungry private TV channels.

A second story: In Greek school parades, taking place to celebrate national anniversaries, all pupils marsh through the streets of the school's town. The parade follows the lead of the pupil who carries the Greek flag. There is a ministerial ordinance that this pupil should be chosen from among the graduating class. He or she should be the top pupil in his or her class, on the basis of grades obtained in all subjects. In 2000 and again in 2002, in two small Greek towns the association of parents of the local high school convened to reject the decision of the school's head master to deliver the Greek flag to the student who was the best in his class. In both cases, the reason was that the student happened to be of Albanian origin.

In the first case (of 2000), the pupil came from an Albanian family who had recently migrated to the small Greek town. The parents' association announced that it would use force to obstruct the parade if it were headed by the Albanian student carrying the Greek flag. Just one day before the parade was scheduled to take place, the Albanian backed down and passed the flag to the second best student who happened to be "Greek".

What do these stories tell us? It seems that under particular circumstances, informal collectivities, rising against the authorities, can act effectively in the public sphere to protected their interests. There are more strong enclaves of civil society in Greece than the activity of certain formal associations would indicate. These enclaves may be informal groups who are mobilized for certain causes. The problem arises however when, as the aforementioned stories show, such causes may be very narrow and mobilization runs against the interests of wider society. In fact, a lot of the relevant literature which links the development of civil society with the deepening of democracy does not address the problem of civil associations which pursue clearly und-democratic goals or show flagrant intolerance towards minorities or reject legitimate causes beneficial to the wider community.

In the case of contemporary Greece, there are a few examples of dubious civil society manifestations, this time involving both formal associations and informal groupings. Firstly, there is a youth organization which is titled "Golden Dawn" (in Greek, "Chryssi Avgi") and which is explicitly racist and xenophobic. This is a small organization, but its members appear in military-like, black uniforms and have repeatedly clashed with left-wing students. Secondly, there are the para-ecclesiastical organizations of "Zoe" and "Soter", which have been active in church matters for a long time. These are old, rather secretive and very conservative formal organizations of Christian Orthodox Greeks. They have taken sides in disputes among warring factions of bishops and among candidates for the top posts in the hierarchy of the church.

Thirdly, there is the more loose network of intellectuals, including academics, which is called "Network 21". This is a network which for a time promoted confrontation (rather than reconciliation) with Greece's neighbouring countries. It has adopted particularly ethnocentric positions in regard to Balkan issues, the Greek-Turkish relations and the Cyprus question.

The above cases are not of similar nature. One may not equate explicitly fascist organizations with secretive ecclesiastical organizations and with single issue groups publicly voicing a different, however problematic, course of action in foreign policy. However, the point is that we may consider that the link between civil society and democracy offers an idealized picture of social reality. Thus, a normative question is whether the definition of civil society may be so broad as to include collective actors who do not seek "noble" causes, such as more solid guarantees of human rights or further democratisation of the political system. This is an open normative question which we cannot address in this paper (see on a similar question, Keane 1998: 114-154).

To sum up this section, we have noted a few cases of strong informal mobilization of the civil society. Most of them appeared in the late 1990s and stemmed from local initiatives. This does not imply that informal civil society may develop in a rather delimited geographical area. Modern technologies of information and communication certainly allow the weaving of larger networks which may span different towns, regions or even countries. A typical example is the rather rapid development of the anti-globalization movement. Several "waves" of this movement

have occurred owing to good networking possibilities through the Internet. Another example was the organization of anti-war protests, against the military intervention of the US and the UK in Iraq, which were staged almost simultaneously in various countries of the world in February 2003.

B. Civil Society in Contemporary Greece

1. The dominant thesis about civil society in contemporary Greece

A number of authors have suggested that civil society in Southern Europe is comparatively weak (e.g., Giner 1985, Schmitter 1986: 6-8). As noted in the beginning of this paper, the same has been claimed more strongly for the case of Greece. The relevant argument is roughly the following: political participation in Southern Europe and especially so in post-authoritarian Greece has been shaped by a large, overbearing state and a few strong political parties. To the extent that parties remain strong, with large membership and extended influence, civil society remains weak. This inverse relationship is accounted for by historical structural reasons.

Historically, the way Greek masses were incorporated into the political system did not allow for horizontal ties among people of the same status and among interest groups located in equivalent positions of the social structure. Other institutions facilitating the development of civil society were not available. For instance, the church, which in other European countries has been an autonomous collective actor, has traditionally forged very close ties with the Greek state; and in the past, the local government was too dependent on the central state apparatus, to play any autonomous role. The incorporation of the masses into politics was done in a 'vertical fashion', as in patron-client relationships (Mouzelis 1987). This long-term historical pattern was not conducive to the development of a strong civil society in Greece in the twentieth century.

In the more recent period, the fact that the colonels' regime, which lasted between 1967 and 1974, was not overthrown "from below" (through social mobilization), has kept shut any "windows of opportunity" for civil society development. In the summer of 1974, almost overnight the authoritarian regime gave its place to a democratic parliamentary regime. As a consequence, there was no time or political space available for political or social organizations, except for political parties, to develop.

A few political parties "sapped", as it were, the political energies of the populace. Some political parties drew on their traditional pre-1967 electorate and repertoires of discourse and organization (such was the case of the parties of the communist left). Other parties drew on charismatic leadership (for example, PASOK and ND). After 1974 the parties of the Left (above all, PASOK) built party-led labour organizations and exerted heavy influence on professional associations and even social movement organizations, such as students' and women's associations. As a consequence, in each domain (labour relations, education, etc.), party-led organizations encountered one another in a manner that reflected cleavages of the party system. Such party-dominated organizations occupied and divided amongst themselves the available seats in the governing bodies of peak associations (e.g., GSEE in the case employees and workers of the private sector and the wider public sector, ADEDY in the case of civil servants; GSEVE, in the case of small

businessmen and artisans; the associations of industrialists – SEV, and ship owners - EEE, were exceptions to the rule).

In the 1970s and the 1980s, at each government turnover, the incoming Cabinet used to make sure that peak labour associations would be staffed by pro-government leaders. This monitoring "from above" was accomplished with the help of an often docile judiciary which produced court decisions changing the composition of the governing boards of peak labour associations. Monitoring "from above" was also effected by the Ministry of Labour which controlled the finances of peak associations.

In its most extreme and unsustainable version, the above argument states that the socialist party (PASOK), in particular, orchestrated the synchronization of government and almost all labour and professional associations, so as to acquire full-control over civil society, in the manner the Nazi party had done in inter-war Germany (Mavrogordatos 1988 and 1993). However, even the much more toned-down version of a similar argument, which we have offered in an earlier publication (Sotiropoulos 1995, following Mouzelis 1987), seems to generalize across the Greek public sphere. Such a generalization neglects sectors of strong interest representation and social movement mobilization which have flourished independently of and even against the state.

2. Two enclaves of strong civil society

There are at least two enclaves of strong civil associations. The first consists of the trade unions of the wider public sector. Typical examples are the unions of state-run banking employees (e.g., National Bank's SYETE), of employees of the Public Power Corporation (GENOP-DEI), and of the state-run high-school teachers (OLME). At the organizational level, their strength is based on high organizational density and on the close links of union leaders with the leadership circles of political parties, including the governing party. At the wider social level, public sector unions have been for a long time at the centre of a state corporatist system of interest representation. This system, which is usually found in authoritarian settings, in the case of Greece was reproduced even within the post-war and, later, the post-1974 parliamentary regimes. The strength of public sector unions has been fuelled by PASOK's electoral appeal to public sector employees. They constitute one of this party's electoral strongholds. In fact, at times, the mobilization of the Greek labour movement (owing mostly to public sector unions), was quite formidable even by West European standards, as Table 2 shows.

TABLE 2
LOST WORKING DAYS PER 1,000 EMPLOYEES IN 11 EU MEMBER-STATES

YEAR COUNTRY	1985	1994
Belgium	45	145
Denmark	1065	34
Germany	1	9
GREECE	**618**	**329**
Spain	444	760
France	50	26
Ireland	521	28
Italy	266	246
Netherlands	20	8
Portugal	100	30
UK	299	13
EU-11 average	**311**	**148**

Source: The Economist 1997: 11 (No data for Luxembourg).

By contrast, in the Greek private sector, where business enterprises are comparatively smaller in size, unions have never been as strong. In 1988, even the strongest among the private sector unions had an organizational density which was proportionately half the corresponding density of public sector unions. This weakness of labour unions in the private sector has obviously benefited the few large private interests (e.g., a few private banks, insurance companies, metal and chemical industries, information and communications enterprises, mass media businesses, etc.). Even though labour unions of the public sector have been much stronger than the corresponding unions of the private sector, the organizational density of public sector unions, which, importantly, dominate the largest peak labour association (GSEE), declined in the 1990s (Ioannou 1999: 20).

The second enclave of strong civil society consists of the associations of liberal professionals, including lawyers, medical doctors and engineers. Their strength is derived from their high organizational density and their high representation among

Members of Parliament and Cabinet ministers, regardless of which political party is in power (Sotiropoulos and Bourikos 2002). Liberal professionals enjoy their own social insurance and health schemes, which are funded, not only by themselves, but partly also by their clients and the state through various forms of state transfers and indirect taxation. Their contribution to tax revenue is much smaller than expected, owing to tax evasion and the reluctance or the inability of successive Greek governments and tax authorities to tax these self-employed strata. Finally, any government reforms affecting lawyers, doctors or engineers, have met with vigorous resistance both in parliament and on the part of their professional associations.

3. State corporatism and the labour movement

After the 1974 transition to democracy, the state's control of peak associations (confederations of workers and employees) in both the private and the public sector was continued. As we have noted, this was a Greek paradox since, normally, state corporatist structures accompany authoritarian, not democratic political regimes.

In the immediate post-authoritarian period, despite the corporatist control imposed by the state on peak associations, there was some mobilization of factory-level unions in the private sector. This labour movement, which was not controlled by the GSEE, gradually died out, along with the rise of PASOK in power. Overall, as noted above, since 1974, there has been intense factionalism in the representation of labour interests, even though there has been a state corporatist system of such interests.

In Greece there is only one peak association in the private sector. This is GSEE which is a confederation of large federations of workers of the same occupation. GSEE, however, also includes the large and dominant unions of public corporations (e.g., the unions of state-run banks' employees, of the Public Power Corporation, etc.). There is also one peak association of civil servants, meaning employees of the central and the local government (not of the employees of public corporations). This is ADEDY. It is within GSEE and ADEDY that party-led "front organizations" have fought for power. Until a few years ago, when communist-led unions put together a rather weak new confederation (PAME), there was no competitor to either GSEE or ADEDY at the national level.

After the rise of PASOK to power in 1981 and with the exception of the first few years of the 1980s, the leadership of the two peak associations (the confederations of GSEE and ADEDY) remained in the hands of PASOK cadres, supported by cadres who belonged to the KKE (Mavrogordatos 1988). The situation has changed since 1989-90, when peak labour associations gradually acquired some independence from central government and major political parties. Using Philippe C. Schmitter's terminology, one could come to the following conclusion: since the early 1990s, there has been a transition from state corporatism, which however in the Greek case existed in a post-authoritarian setting, to social corporatism (Zambarloukou 1997).

The post-war legal framework, according to which industrial action was accommodated through compulsory negotiations between business and labour under the supervision of the state, was retained throughout democratic transition and consolidation until 1990. In general, labour unions remained dependent on the state apparatus. However, compared to the pre-authoritarian period (the 1960s), in the years of democratic transition and consolidation (1974-1981), strikes became more frequent and were more successful in terms of numbers of participants. The average number

of strikes in 1976-1981, in the first period after the democratic transition, was double that of 1963-1966 (just before the breakdown of democracy). Comparing the two periods, the same holds for the number of lost working days per thousand workers (Ioannou 1989: 96). This pattern, however, soon started to change: between 1976 and 1998 the number of strikes per year gradually declined.

There were three exceptional periods of very intensive industrial action: first, in 1979-1981, just before PASOK's ascent to power; second, in 1985-1987, just after PASOK won the 1985 elections and imposed an about face in its formerly lax macroeconomic policies; and, third, in 1990-1993, when the conservative party of ND was in power. In the 1990s, the decline of labour mobilization was substantial and the difference between the brief term of ND in power (1990-93) and the second term of PASOK (after 1993) was dramatic: the average annual number of people who participated in strikes in 1994-1998 was approximately only one of fifth of the corresponding number in 1990-93. This was not a Greek paradox: the pattern of gradual decline of striking activity in Greece conforms to the general pattern of the weakening of labour unions in Western Europe and the USA.

However, except for the changing international trends of labour mobilization, there was a country-specific explanation for the above decline in industrial action: the composition of confederations' leadership, made up of socialist (PASOK) and communist cadres, may account for the increased strike activity in 1990-1993, while the conservative party, ND, was in power. Strike activity declined after PASOK returned to power in 1993. This does not mean that in the 1990s the socialist cadres of the labour unions continued to abide by the party line. Since 1990, labour leaders have somewhat distanced themselves from various government policies, including the income and social policies of PASOK after 1993.

The most dramatic exposition of this new stance was the successful action taken by the above, basically pro-government, confederations against the reform of the pension system, introduced by PASOK in early 2001. The reform was aborted (Featherstone, Kazamias and Papadimitriou 2001). Simultaneously, the new legal framework which has freed industrial action from being subjected to compulsory negotiation supervised by the state, has not produced a change of behaviour on the part of labour unions. For most of the 1990s, union leaders resorted to the new, optional intermediation institution (OMED, founded in 1990; see Ioannou 1999). Thus, unions resorted again to state dependence.

The declining mobilization of labour unions, including those of the public sector, may be accounted for by the gradual disaffection Greeks have felt in regard to political parties. This change has primarily affected political parties, which, for some time now, can not count on the voluntary mobilization of their voters and members in the pre-electoral periods. The same change may have affected labour unions, which in the post-authoritarian period were too closely linked with and dependent on political parties and the central state apparatus.

C. Voluntary Associations in Contemporary Greece

1. Greek voluntary Associations in the last quarter of the twentieth century

Has the disaffection with parties and unions led to an increase of participation in voluntary associations and social movements not linked to particular political parties? There is scant empirical evidence to answer this question in contemporary Greece. First, in regard to the foundation of new voluntary associations, there is some unpublished evidence on the type of objectives and the number of new associations per year, in 1971-1991, in the district of Athens (Hadjiyanni forthcoming). Second, in regard to social care organizations in particular, there is some research, based on surveys of such organizations (Panayotidou 1999, Tsakraklides 2001). Finally, there are unsystematic press reports on informal groups and networks, the activities of which may resemble those of voluntary associations.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, the most common types of newly founded voluntary associations were the following: sports clubs; cultural associations (focusing on drama, folk art, etc.); associations of internal migrants who had moved from their village to Athens or Thessaloniki and who founded these associations, in order to keep contact with their rural place of origin and amongst themselves in the new urban environment; and organizations interested in environmental protection. Less frequently founded organizations included quality of life associations (focusing on healthy life-styles), and parents' associations, springing up in various elementary schools and high schools.

There was a peak in the number of newly founded organizations in the immediate post-authoritarian period (1974-1975) and again just after PASOK came to power (1982-1984). We may explain these two peaks in terms of the new opportunities for political participation during and after the transition to democracy and in terms of a spirit of collective action and social change which accompanied the socialist party's sweeping electoral victory in 1981. By contrast, since the mid-1980s, the number of newly founded voluntary associations declined year after year.

How, if at all, was the foundation of new voluntary associations related with the evolution of political parties? First, the number of new associations founded every year in Athens in the early 1970s, i.e., just before the fall of the colonels' regime, was much higher than the corresponding number for every year between 1974 and 1989, i.e. during the first rule of ND (1974-81) and the first rule of PASOK (1981-89). The lack of other vehicles of political participation under authoritarian rule must be an explanation for the above pattern.

Secondly, after the transition to democracy, we observe an inverse relationship between the foundation of new associations and the holding of general elections. In all years in which elections took place (e.g., in 1977, 1981, 1985), the number of new associations was comparatively small.

To sum up, in post-authoritarian Greece political parties provided the primary channel for political participation and voluntary associations were no substitute for parties under the democratic regime. In the 1980s, the decline of interest in politics was not accompanied by either an increase in participation in labour unions or by a steady rise of interest in voluntary associations.

2. Types and frequency of new voluntary associations in the 1970s and the 1980s

Voluntary associations experienced variable patterns of evolution, depending on their type (Hadjiyanni forthcoming). We distinguish between associations of local migrants, cultural associations, environmental protection associations, social care associations, feminist associations, and the peace movement. Associations of internal

migrants, which were based in Athens, declined with the rise of PASOK to power. They had flourished in 1979-1981, just before PAOK came to power. The numbers of new such associations declined afterwards. This may have to do with the exhaustion of possibilities to found a new association of people sharing the same geographical origin, after numerous such associations had been newly founded. The declining figure of new associations may also be explained in the following manner: after 1974, some of those associations played a political role, namely they served as rallying points for potential voters and party members. Political parties (e.g., PASOK) used some of these associations as "front organizations" to galvanize electoral support.

Cultural associations had flourished in the immediate post-authoritarian period, for obvious reasons which had to do with the lack of freedom of expression under the previous, authoritarian rule. Later, the founding of new cultural associations showed a relative decline. Cultural associations flourished again in 1986-87 (Hadjiyanni forthcoming). This sharp increase may be accounted for by the opportunities to obtain funding from the European Communities (EC), opportunities which were seized by activists and entrepreneurs when Greece became more closely integrated with the EC.

In contrast to cultural associations, there were relatively few environmental protection associations in the immediate post-authoritarian period. Their numbers started rising in the 1980s and reached a peak after 1988. They have started declining since 1995. While environmental protection associations have remained relatively few, their political impact has been larger than their small number would indicate.[2] In the late 1980s a new political party, a confederation of environmentalist organizations, managed to be represented in parliament (this political breakthrough was not continued after 1993). At the same time, Greek political parties felt obliged to include environmental concerns in their electoral platforms. Also, in the late 1990s, one of the leaders of the old environmentalist movement, became a deputy minister for the environment in one of Costas Simitis' Cabinets.

The little we know of social care associations (Panayotidou 1999, Tsakraklides 2001) indicates that there is a large number of such organizations. Apparently, most of social care associations do not have a nation-wide scope, but rather cater to local needs and take care of the disabled and the elderly. Most of these organizations do not function as pressure groups. Rather they are non-governmental training centres and schools.

Feminist associations flourished for a while in post-authoritarian Greece. They were initially dominated by political parties. Each party of the left (PASOK, KKE, KKE Interior) had put together its own "front organization" on women's issues. After PASOK came to power, it brought about a change in the very traditional family law (in 1982), which reflected more modern ideas about the division of labour in the family and the role of women in society. After that accomplishment, the women's movement lost steam.

The same picture holds for the peace movement of the 1970s and the 1980s in Greece. Party-led "front organizations" dominated this movement until it died out in the late 1980s. But in the first years of the twenty first century, in Greece as in many other countries, a large and somewhat heterogeneous anti-globalization movement grew. The Greek equivalent of that movement consists of environmentalists, sympathisers of youth organizations of the left and factions of a left-wing party

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[2] I owe this point to Marilena Simitis.

(SYNASPISMOS). The Greek movement has been strongly represented in various international rallies against globalization (e.g., in Genova and in Thessaloniki).

3. Voluntary associations in the 1990s

There is research indicating that in Greece participation in civil associations and voluntarism has gradually increased over the last twenty five years (Panaytopoulou 2003, Lyberaki and Paraskevopoulos 2002). According to one estimate, among the currently existing associations, 60 percent were founded in the 1980s. One fourth of all currently existing Greek voluntary associations were founded in the first-half of the 1990s (Panayotopolou 2003). It seems that formal organizations of the civil society have mushroomed. To evaluate this impression, we may look first at aggregate numbers of associations, then at the size of their membership and finally at a few variables which modify our initial impression of the rise of independent formal organizations in Greece.

On the basis of various surveys of associations, which have taken place since the mid-1990s, the following picture emerges: currently, there are thousands of voluntary associations in Greece. Estimates of their numbers range between 1,200 and 2,400 associations, excluding sports clubs which may be as many as 11,620 (Panayotopoulou 2003, Panayotidou 1999). The majority of associations not related to sports, are cultural and social care organizations. The sectors of social care (care for the disabled, for the elderly, etc.) as well as of social philanthropy seem to be the largest in size and the most differentiated among all sectors of civic engagement (Tsakraklides 2001, Panayotopoulou 2003). In regard to size of membership, things look different: if we count all types of associations, then trade unions, sports clubs, and cultural associations have the widest membership (Lyberaki and Paraskevopoulos 2002). The share of members who are active, ranges between 14 and 30 per cent of total members (Panayotidou 1999).

A crucial point for our discussion is that according to one estimate, 75 per cent of all associations have received state subsidies which amounted up to one fourth of their budget (Panayotopoulou 2003). Many associations have been founded by local government (for instance, as an outgrowth of a municipality). Other associations would have probably not been founded, if it were not for ample EU funding and for the organizational requirements to absorb such funding (e.g., in the policy areas of regional development, vocational training, etc.). Generally, voluntary associations are small in size. Two thirds of them have up to 50 members.

On the grounds of attitudinal surveys of the general population, we may draw similar conclusions, pointing to weak participation in associations. In 2000, a sampling survey of residents of Athens revealed that only 4 percent of the respondents were members of a voluntary association (excluding political parties and trade unions). In the same survey, 80 per cent of all respondents could not name a single voluntary association. According to Eurobarometer data, Greece ranks the last among all EU countries in regard to the percentage of young people who offer voluntary work. The Greek figure (4.1 per cent) is almost half the EU average (7.4 per cent, as reported in Panayotopoulou 2003: 127). Finally, employing the - by now common - indicator of social trust in institutions, shows that among EU countries, Greece is predictably one of the cases of very low such trust (Eurobarometer no. 55, published in 2001 and reported in Lyberaki and Paraskevopoulos 2002).

D. Conclusions

The above discussion indicates that civil society in Greece has remained weak, despite the conducive environment for civil society mobilization in the post-authoritarian period. Theoretically, the level of civil society strength is reflected both in the representation of material and "ideal" interests and in post-materialist concerns.

If we judge the Greek civil society in terms of the number and type of formal organizations which partake in it, then this is a weak civil society. Several social movements, including the labour movement, have for a long time been dominated by the main political parties. The Greek state has been over-bearing, often monitoring interest representation. However, the general conclusion that civil society in contemporary Greece is uniformly weak should be differentiated. First, we may want to count in informal aspects of the civil society, which may not be as weak. Secondly, in regard to the formal aspects of our topic, we need to point to a few enclaves of strong civil society.

To take the first of these two points, in this paper we have argued the following: while definitions of civil society often include informal aspects of civic engagement of individuals and of collective actors through channels of participation other than formal organizations, empirical research tends to concentrate on formal organizations, such as NGOs and voluntary associations. However, it is possible to argue that, in parallel to the civil society measured by the usual formal indicators, there is such a thing as an informal civil society.

Instances of informal civil society in contemporary Greece include both local and nation-wide mobilization of loose groups and networks which are not NGOs or voluntary associations and have no legal personality. There are informal collective actors who have mobilized in order to pursue one or more of the following aims: first, to protect vested interests in their region, which may have been affected by large new public works and/or private industrial investments; second, to take sides in public disputes; third, to object to governmental policies; and fourth, to volunteer to help people in need.

Such collective actors, albeit not organized in the fashion of parties, unions or associations, should be considered part of the civil society. This is so, since also they perform typical civil society functions, such as aggregation, intermediation and representation of interests on behalf of society and towards the state. In a society such as the Greek one, where in parallel to the formal national economy there is a large underground economy and where the law is always competing with a plethora of informal norms and customs for the allegiance of citizens, it is not unsound to find that parallel to the formal expressions of civil society (unions, associations, etc.), there are also informal instances of civil society. Our argument has been that there is an informal civil society in Greece which may be not be as weak as the formal one and which may show some sporadic strength, in terms of mobilization capacities.

However, mobilizational strength is not always a welcome aspect of social relations. A problematic aspect of both formal and informal instances of civic engagement is the existence of un-democratic, intolerant and/or exclusionary reactions by various segments of civil society. In Greece of the 1990s, these were exemplified in collective behaviour towards minorities, such as Albanian migrants.

It is very debatable whether such kinds of collective behaviour form part of civil society. However, the potential for mobilization by relevant xenophobic

associations should be assessed, in view of the fact that, according to the dominant thesis, Greek civil society has been very weak. The fact that emancipating and progressive social movements have been weak, does not preclude the possibility that, one day, un-democratic ones may become strong.

Its weakness is owed to a tradition of state authoritarianism and strong political parties. As a result, there have been internal divisions inside the labour movement, mirroring the divisions of the party system. Each political party had put together its own "front organization", fighting to obtain as many seats as possible in the periodic conferences of the peak labour associations and in the governing bodies of these associations. Until the early 1990s, the peak associations were closely monitored by the incumbent government (including by the ND Cabinets in 1974-1981 and PASOK ones thereafter).

The unions representing the employees of state-run companies have generally been fairly strong. This was a first strong enclave within a largely weak civil society. A second such enclave was the liberal professions. The associations of doctors, lawyers, and engineers, have been consistently able to obtain certain privileges in terms of taxation, social security benefits, etc. In the post-authoritarian period, successive Greek governments have had to adapt to the demands and/or interests of the above strata.

In the private sector, in medium-sized and large private business enterprises, the labour movement has generally been weak. The same holds for other, non-labour voluntary associations. In terms of formal indicators, such as number of associations and size of membership in associations, there were high and low points in 1971-1998. In this period, there were "time windows" during which there was a somewhat flourishing (formal) civil society, evident in the number of new associations founded. Examples included associations of internal migrants in the late 1970s; cultural associations in the early 1970s and again in the mid-1980s; and environmental protection associations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The latter had also had a significant political impact, in terms of enriching the agenda of public debates. Also in various regions, there has been a rise of associations collaborating with the local government, in order to benefit from opportunities arising from Greece's membership in the EU (Paraskevopoulos 2001).

However, overall voluntary associations in Greece have been relatively few in numbers (excluding sports clubs) and small in size. On the one hand, the dominant thesis about the weakness of Greek civil society is still correct, particularly if Greece is compared with other EU societies. The thesis is largely true, even today, as far as formal civil society is concerned. Despite the prospect of hosting the 2004 Olympics in Athens, voluntarism has not particularly been on the rise. That is to say, voluntarism has not reached the high levels one would expect on the grounds of Greece's staging such an event. On the other hand, it is an open question whether, after the end of the Olympic Games of 2004, informal civil society may show some of its sporadic strength.

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary Greece, several social movements, including the labour movement, have for a long time been dominated by the main political parties. The Greek state has been over-bearing, often monitoring interest representation. This legacy has led many analysts to consider the Greek civil society comparatively weak. However, there are informal aspects of the civil society, which may not be as weak. Also there are a few enclaves of strong civil society.

Instances of informal civil society in contemporary Greece include both local and nation-wide mobilization of loose groups and networks which are not NGOs or voluntary associations and have no legal personality. These are informal collective actors who have mobilized in order to pursue one or more of the following aims: first, to protect vested interests in their region, which may have been affected by large new public works and/or private industrial investments; second, to take sides in public disputes; third, to object to governmental policies; and fourth, to volunteer to help people in need. There is probably a rather strong, but not so visible, informal civil society in contemporary Greece.

In addition, the unions representing the employees of state-run companies have generally been fairly strong. This has been a first strong enclave within a largely weak civil society. A second such enclave has been the liberal professions. The associations of doctors, lawyers, and engineers, have consistently been able to obtain certain privileges in terms of taxation and social security benefits. In the post-authoritarian period, successive Greek governments have had to adapt to the demands and/or interests of the above strata. In sum, the general conclusion that civil society in contemporary Greece is uniformly weak should be differentiated.

Curriculum Vitae of the Author

Dr. Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos was senior research fellow at the Hellenic Observatory, The European Institute, The London School of Economics and Political Science, between February and August 2003. He has studied law and sociology at the Law School of the University of Athens, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and Yale University where he obtained his Ph.D. in 1991. He has published books and articles on politics and bureaucracy, civil society, the welfare state, and democratization. He does comparative research on Greece, Southern Europe and Southeastern Europe. He has been coordinating editor of the Greek Review of Political Science. Curently, he is an assistant professor of political science at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of the University of Athens.