



GREEK POLITICS 2024: A YEAR IN REVIEW



GPSG Pamphlet No 9

Edited by Vasiliki Poula

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Editorial

By Vasiliki Poula

The tension between challenge and resilience frames our analysis of Greek politics in 2024, reminding us that the path forward is seldom linear and that politics remain a realm where progress and resistance to it interweave. In this edition of the GPSG Pamphlet, the collection of essays captures three fundamental issues: the fluid dynamics of political mobilisation, the complex relationship between innovative solutions and their implementation, and the country's international positioning in an increasingly complex global order.

Mainstream parties find themselves grappling with changes in their traditional support bases. The concurrent fragmentation of both Left and Right into smaller political entities reflects more than mere organisational discord – it signals an undercurrent of discontent driving interest in anti-establishment alternatives, even as the majority continues to support traditional, mainstream parties. The fragmentation of the political system has been punctuated by moments of intense civic mobilisation, most notably as a response to the Tempi train collision, where public outrage over daedal investigations crystallised broader demands for institutional accountability. In response to this shifting terrain, where voters increasingly prioritise concrete outcomes over ideological allegiance, government initiatives have sought to adapt. The establishment of a dedicated Ministry for Social Cohesion and Family Affairs represents such a strategic attempt to address citizens' everyday concerns and household challenges. The historic passage of same-sex marriage legislation, which garnered support across unexpected constituencies, further underscored how issue-specific concerns now transcend conventional ideological boundaries. These developments point to a further recalibration of Greek political engagement, where issue-based mobilisation and tangible impact gradually, albeit increasingly, outweigh partisan loyalty.

A second crucial tension emerges from the intricate relationship between policy innovation and implementation effectiveness. Greece's ambitious digital transformation agenda illustrates this complex dynamic. Initiatives such as citizen reporting platforms for coastal access violations and digital participation tools for urban planning epitomise innovative approaches to transparency and civic engagement, yet their practical impact often falls short of their democratic promise. The country's comprehensive AI National Strategy and engagement with the EU Carbon Framework further demonstrate this pattern – both represent sophisticated policy frameworks with potentially transformative implications for labour markets, society, and environmental protection. However, policy sophistication alone cannot guarantee successful outcomes. The elegance of policy design must be complemented by robust implementation mechanisms and rigorous enforcement frameworks, a balance that often proves elusive in practice.

Concerning Greece's international positioning, the country must navigate multiple, sometimes competing, spheres of influence. This is evident in its careful balancing act

between EU commitments and ties with China, as well as its diplomatic engagement in the Middle East. Beyond traditional diplomacy, Greece is cultivating soft power through education, positioning itself as a regional academic hub through internationalisation initiatives. The ongoing dialogue over the Parthenon Sculptures exemplifies another dimension of soft power, through cultural diplomacy and collaborative cultural partnerships, suggesting a broader shift towards new paradigms for resolving long-standing international disputes.

This Pamphlet brings together diverse perspectives, from academics and practitioners, on key developments in Greek politics during 2024. While it touches upon a variety of fields, it does not claim to be a definitive account of last year's political landscape. Its value aims to extend beyond national borders: Greece emerges as a compelling laboratory for studying phenomena with broader comparative significance, as many of the trends documented therein resonate with developments across Europe and beyond. We look forward to your engagement with this edition and invite you to share your insights and reflections, enriching our collective understanding of recent political developments. The dialogue initiated in these pages continues through GPSG's various platforms, from our Working Papers series to our online publications and upcoming events, where we welcome further contributions to deepen our understanding of these evolving dynamics.

Vasiliki Poula is a DPhil candidate in International Development at the University of Oxford.

Section I
On political mobilisation

1 | Greece's Marriage Equality: A Political Maturity Test Passed

By Niko Efstathiou

On February 15th 2024, the Greek parliament approved a landmark bill that legalised same-sex marriage and granted adoption rights to same-sex couples.

I would be insincere if I did not admit that it was a political development with immense personal resonance. Many Greeks like myself grew up with the expectation that living in our home country would inherently come with exclusion and second-class citizenry. Throughout the 2010s, I encountered numerous disillusioned LGBT+ Greeks living abroad, studying in American campuses or working in European companies. They never considered a possible return to the motherland, due to what they perceived as a perpetual denial of parental and family rights for themselves and their loved ones. Some of them had families and children, registered in their countries of residence but remained invisible in the eyes of the Greek state.

It is hard to describe the visceral feeling of being excluded and not recognised by your own country.

This is the reason that February 15th was a day of massive celebration for the Greek LGBTQ+ community. But I would argue that the marriage equality bill, proposed by the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis and approved with a majority of 176 Greek MPs from both sides of the aisle, was an immense victory for the Greek political system, in ways that go beyond our community.

Starting from a values-based assessment, the Greek state was founded under the ideals of equality, respect, freedom, and dignity. The 4th article of the Constitution states that all Greeks are equal before the law, that Greek men and women have equal rights and obligations. The marriage equality bill was seen as a progressive step, but it was an embodiment of those very foundational values. A victory for equal rights is a strengthening of democracy, and therefore victory for all Greeks. If people were to step back from their predispositions, they would see that it is a purely additive law – extending liberties without taking away anything from anyone.

Of particular significance was the fact that the law was proposed by the centre-right party. This is not unprecedented: in the UK it was David Cameron's government that introduced marriage equality, in Germany it was Angela Merkel's party that paved the way for its recognition (though she voted against same-sex marriage herself). But it was still an unexpected move with ripple effects in the traditionally conservative Greek society, whose majority, following the adoption of the bill, now supports same-sex marriage. Against a backdrop where the regressive anti-woke narrative has blamed everything from plane collisions to wildfires on DEI policies, the Greek right-wing party showed that human rights are not exclusive to the left-wing political

agenda (especially when it comes to championing the rights of families, technically a conservative talking point).

The methodical, data-backed process for the design of this policy change was also rare for Greek standards, setting a shining example. The law was developed after the formation of a competent committee, which set a strategy for the equality of LGBTQI+ people in Greece, grounding its policy recommendations in research and tangible evidence, while articulating them with rigor and conviction. Unlike many similar schemes, it was composed of exceptional academics, experienced representatives of civil society and members of the government. For example, it is impossible to find a single negative thing to say against its chairperson, Linos-Alexandre Sicilianos, a former President of the European Court for Human Rights.

Some people objected to the fact that, when the bill reached parliament, many parties instructed their members to vote their conscience. I found it to be a refreshing example of policy moving beyond strict party lines and herd mentality. The vote also led to some interesting examples of lawmakers defying expectations, such as Ilhan Ahmet, a PASOK MP who represents Rhodope, and who went against the beliefs of many of his Muslim constituents or the warnings of the unauthorised Muftis. 'I could not deny a human right to fellow citizens', he argued. What a rare occasion, also, that a law about social policy passed with the support of five different political parties, enjoying the backing of traditionalists and progressives, socialists and liberals.

The marriage equality bill was not just a big step forward for Greece's LGBT+ community – it was a sign of maturity for the Greek political system. It made Greece a pioneer of sorts in the path towards social progress, as the first Orthodox Christian country to allow same-sex marriage and the easternmost state in the EU to do so. Its introduction may have led to inflammatory rhetoric by the bill's opponents and it may have emboldened some far-right voices, at least in the short-term. But I remain convinced that a decade from now, an overwhelming majority of Greeks will look back to February 2024 and remember it as a rare instance where politicians joined forces to restore a historical injustice and to bring Greece closer to its democratic ideals – making it more inclusive, more European, and ultimately, more just.

Niko Efstathiou is a journalist and author, and a current Journalism Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford University.

2 | On the Fragmentation of the Greek Left

By Spyros Kasapis

2024 consolidated a major paradigm shift in the electoral power of SYRIZA, a party that has gone from uniting the entire Left and becoming a governing party to polling fifth in recent metrics. Interesting insights into the reasons justifying this trajectory can be found in [the analysis by the ENA Institute](#) on the 10 years since SYRIZA came to power. The majority of the study's sample population cited overpromising and the belief that a third bailout package agreement was unnecessary, as reasons for turning their backs to SYRIZA. Certainly, the consecutive electoral losses took a heavy toll on the party during 2024.

It took three consecutive election losses for Alexis Tsipras to step down from the SYRIZA presidency. Populist parties (with the disclaimer that I consider populist leadership itself neither inherently positive nor negative but rather, a political approach of appealing directly to ordinary citizens that can either serve to amplify legitimate grievances, or be exploited to oversimplify complex issues and mislead) tend to be leader-centred, which prevented SYRIZA from making the necessary changes – especially in leadership – that would make it appealing to the electoral majority. During the last trimester of 2023, and during a time when the party was in shock after having not only lost two consecutive elections but also the leader who had brought it to power, elections for the new presidency were held. Stefanos Kasselakis, a former Goldman Sachs banker and US-based entrepreneur with little to no experience in politics (especially left-wing politics), won the SYRIZA presidency. Developments unfolded rapidly and overwhelmed many SYRIZA voters and members, particularly the older and more left-leaning ones, who felt utterly unrepresented from the new President and what he was standing for.

That's when SYRIZA experienced its first fragmentation in its post-government era. What appeared to be the left wing of the party, unable to accept the new President's background, inexperience, and leadership style, broke away in December 2023 to form another party, the New Left. Along with a considerable number of active party members, SYRIZA lost 11 out of its 47 seats in Parliament. Although Kasselakis estranged the party's traditional core, he was elected on the promise of attracting new supporters, operating as a point of entry to new electoral groups, such as apolitical voters and progressive centrists. Failing to balance out his negative attributes (inexperience, capitalist image, etc.) with his communication skills and fresh-looking persona, Kasselakis lost the presidency within a year of his election (November 2024) and after a vote of no confidence. Following the trend of fragmentation, Kasselakis created his own party, now called the Movement for Democracy.

Having addressed the Left's two instances of fragmentation following its government period, it should be noted that, back in 2015, when Alexis Tsipras agreed to the third

memorandum on Greece's debt with the IMF and the EU, 25 SYRIZA MPs opposing the bailout terms broke away to form a new party, Popular Unity. Having lost the majority in Parliament, within days Tsipras resigned as Prime Minister and called for fresh elections, in which Popular Unity performed below 3%, thus, failing to secure parliamentary representation and subsequently collapsing.

All the parties that have split from SYRIZA seem to share the fate of Popular Unity: New Left failed to surpass the 3% threshold required to secure a seat in the European Parliament in the 2024 EU elections, while the Movement for Democracy is now polling just above the same threshold. The same goes for parties formed by former SYRIZA members: Yannis Varoufakis' DiEM25 party failed to elect any MPs in the last election, while Zoe Konstantopoulou's party, Course of Freedom, although it managed to slightly surpass the threshold in the last national elections and enter Parliament, it is also polling low with no signs of gaining momentum.

The result of such fragmentation is clear when looking at the most recent polls. The Greek Left is now represented by five main parties: SYRIZA, Course of Freedom, New Left, DiEM25, and the Movement for Democracy (noting that many would position the latter at the centre of the political spectrum). Despite the array of leftist parties, mainstream voters – who have no formal affiliation with any of these parties – cannot tell what the programmatic differences among them are. The fact that all five parties' leaders used to be high-profile members of the same coalition (SYRIZA), adds on to the confusion. The fragmentation of the Left has severely hampered its media effectiveness and political operational capacity, further blurring narrative differences. With this lack of unity being perceived as either political tribalism or amateurism, all parties are now polling below 10%, and all, except SYRIZA, risk failing to surpass the 3% threshold required for parliamentary representation in the next elections. In the absence of unity within the Left, many progressive voters have now migrated to PASOK, the centre-left party that has governed Greece in the past.

The current political landscape, marked by growing anti-establishment sentiments and deepening distrust in institutions, offers the Left a crucial window to redefine its message and convince voters before the next scheduled election in two years. Public opinion has shifted notably in early 2025, with the government facing mounting criticism over its handling of the 2022 Tempi train collision investigation – particularly accusations of withholding evidence and maintaining opacity in investigations. [Recent polls](#) have shown that, instead of continuing with New Democracy's administration, the Greek electorate strongly favours the possibility of the Left taking over by co-governing with PASOK. While many countries witness a surge in far-right movements, Greece's political dynamics present a different trajectory: the potential emergence of an anti-right front comprising progressive forces. This unique positioning creates a strategic opportunity for the Left to reshape the political landscape.

Spyros Kasapis is a Research Scientist at the NASA Ames Research Center.

3 | Greece's Far-Right in 2024: Between Fragmentation and Consolidation

By George Kordas

In the 2023 national elections, the Greek far-right expanded its influence among the Greek electorate, securing 13% of the vote and 34 seats in the newly formed Parliament. Moreover, 2024 presented several events, which historically could have served as political opportunities for the Greek far-right: the legalisation of same-sex marriage, the wiretapping scandal involving many politicians and journalists, the voter data leak ahead of European Parliament elections, summer wildfires across the country, and economic inflation.

However, instead of following established patterns similar to LAOS' course in the early 2000s or the extremist approach of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, the four main Greek far-right parties followed distinct trajectories.

Spartiates, which had secured the position of the fourth largest party in the newly formed Parliament in 2023, chose to openly collaborate with Elias Kasidiaris, a former Golden Dawn member who maintained significant popularity among certain voter demographics. This decision proved disastrous for Spartiates, leading to both diminished voter credibility and legal complications over alleged voter manipulation. The ongoing judicial investigation prevented the party from participating in the European elections, causing its disappearance from voters' preferences in polling data, whilst its trial has not been completed yet.

Greek Solution currently maintains its position as the most influential far-right party in the Greek Parliament. The party has steadily increased its electoral gains in the recent European elections, by taking advantage of and capitalising on the emerging political opportunities.

Niki, in contrast, has maintained consistent but stagnant electoral percentages in both national and European elections. The party's stability reflects the existence of a loyal voter base. However, due to its religious orientation, the party fails to further resonate with the conservative, albeit non-religious, members of the electorate.

A fourth party, Foni Logikis, represents a new entry in the Greek far-right scene. Foni Logikis secured 3% of the vote and gained representation in the European Parliament. The party's electoral appeal appears to largely stem from the public profile of its leader, a young woman named Afroditi Latinopoulou, as well as her indirect endorsement from prominent conservative politicians.

The current landscape of the Greek far-right defies simple characterisations, particularly when it comes to the extent of its fragmentation or potential for consolidation.

The fragmentation is evident in the simultaneous existence of four far-right parties, each maintaining moderate electoral support. This suggests a critical absence of charismatic leadership. Such a leadership vacuum has left the movement without a unifying figure capable of controlling and uniting the far-right's activity, as well as effectively communicating a cohesive agenda through social media platforms.

The question of potential consolidation remains more complex, as it depends on both internal and external factors. Internal factors include the parties' organisational dynamics, their willingness to pursue inter-party cooperation, and their ability to capitalize on emerging political opportunities. However, it is largely external factors that will determine the political space available for such interactions. The policies of New Democracy (ND), Greece's governing centre-right party, towards the conservative electorate and the political forces on its right are of high importance in this respect. Since returning to power in 2019, ND invested in a more centre-friendly profile, thus, necessitating a rebalancing with its right-wing constituency.

As these dynamics continue to evolve, the future of Greece's far-right movement hangs in a delicate balance between the centrifugal forces of fragmentation and the gravitational pull toward consolidation.

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4 | Building Social Cohesion: Greece's New Ministry Marks First Full Year of Operation

By Prodromos Pyrros

Ten years ago, Greece reached the brink of collapse. A combination of long-term recession and political instability paved the way for the rise of populism that eventually questioned fundamental political and economic choices such as the country's participation in the Eurozone. Fast forward to 2025 and Greece has achieved 'a remarkable economic recovery' to quote a [Foreign Policy headline](#), one of the many to tell the same story in different words. Indeed, if one delves into economic indicators, there is no doubt that notable improvement has been achieved on most fronts. GDP per capita in real terms has significantly exceeded EU average every single year since the exit of the pandemic. Public debt has fallen by almost 20% from 2019 to 2023, more than any other EU country. And investment has increased by over 40% during the same period, again more than any other EU country.

Most importantly, the recovery was not achieved at the expense of social cohesion. From 2019 to 2024 unemployment declined by 7.6 pp, while the population outside the labour market also decreased by 5.8 pp. Poverty and social exclusion has decreased from 29% in 2019 to 26.1% in 2023 while the EU average has slightly increased over the same period. Despite the progress that has been made, significant challenges remain to be addressed with regard to social policy. Developing active social programs that go beyond allowances, facilitating labour market participation, avoiding poverty traps and setting up targeted policies for vulnerable groups of the population are only some of the objectives that need to be met in the not so distant future.

To that end, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis had pledged to create a Ministry dedicated to social cohesion, if re-elected. As a result, the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs was founded in June 2023 with a wide spectrum of responsibilities that range from social housing to childcare and from policies for persons with disabilities to gender equality. The creation of the Ministry sought to address fragmentation in social policies and by extension increase effectiveness. The year 2024 was particularly significant as the Ministry's first full year of operation, during which most of its flagship initiatives moved from planning to implementation. Given the results produced in approximately one and a half years, the risk entailed in creating a new administrative entity – let alone an entire ministry – has paid off.

Despite the hurdles that needed to be overcome, numerous policies have either been accelerated or set in motion during this period. The initiative 'Personal Assistant for Persons with Disabilities (PwD)' has been piloted across the country. More than 1,300 PwD are already recipients of the service and from 2026, a national rollout is expected. Numerous other programs for PwD are underway with the aim to enhance independent living and prevent institutionalisation. Equally important is a set of

policies that aims to reform welfare benefits in Greece. Our efforts include legislative changes to the current system, the introduction of a prepaid card for delivering most of the benefits and the digital transformation of the Organisation of Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity (OPEKA). Concurrently and alongside the Ministry of Health, a National Strategy for Long Term Care (LTC) has been set with the aim to address all aspects associated with those in need of care. All the above are closely interlinked with other relevant initiatives of the Ministry, such as the National Demographic Action Plan.

There is no doubt that – as it happens in other fields – Greece still has a long way to go if it wants to converge with its European partners on social cohesion. However, thanks to achieving high growth rates and fiscal consolidation, Greece now has the resources to pursue that goal. But concerted efforts on social policy are equally important, not only to alleviate poverty, but also to fuel long-term growth. Only by doing that it can be ensured that Greece has permanently left behind the vicious cycle of the past and replaced it with a virtuous one. After all, in a world of rising uncertainties, increasing resilience on all fronts is not a choice but a necessity.

Prodromos Pyrros is General Secretary of Social Solidarity and Fight against Poverty at the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs.

Section II

On the relationship between innovation and implementation

5 | The EU Carbon Framework's Promise for Greece's Wildfires

By Michael Gravanis

The Greek summer is for many synonymous with sunlit beaches and deep blue seas, yet for many in the country, it has also become a season of dread – one of uncontrollable wildfires tearing through forests and threatening homes. 2024 was no exception. Wildfires burned 450 km² of land, with rising temperatures causing the fire season to begin in April, earlier than ever before. Despite increased preparedness and resources devoted to firefighting, the intensity and frequency of fires in 2024 made clearer than ever that Greece faces a challenge that conventional responses alone cannot solve. That same month, April 2024, far away, in the halls of the European Parliament, the Carbon Removal Certification Framework (CRCF) was adopted with a two-thirds majority. A seemingly unrelated development to the wildfires in Greece that could possibly offer a ray of sunshine under the smoke and ash.

The CRCF aims to create a formal centralised system for certifying carbon removals, ensuring that companies needing to offset their emissions can purchase verified removal credits from projects that genuinely capture CO₂. Technology-based solutions such as Direct Air Capture and biochar as well as more natural alternatives like reforestation and soil restoration are some of options available for companies purchasing carbon removal credits. These credits have become more and more common nowadays with many companies from tech giants like Amazon and Meta, to airlines and industries with hard-to-abate emissions such as the cement and steel industries, purchasing removal credits to reach their net-zero targets. The CRCF is expected to continue being gradually developed, as more solutions are introduced with the expectation being that it goes fully operational in 2027.

While policy frameworks are being shaped in Brussels, on the ground in Greece, the reality is far more pressing. The Greek government has to, year after year, bear the financial burden of those wildfires with billions of euros being redirected towards recovery efforts with natural regeneration being hindered by repeated fires. The CRCF offers a powerful opportunity: rather than relying solely on the state budget to fund costly post-wildfire reforestation, the private sector, through carbon markets, could step in and bear the cost with mutual benefits for all parties involved.

Obviously, this doesn't come without its challenges. The CRCF sets strict requirements to ensure that only high-quality credits are available. It requires proof of additionality – that the reforestation efforts would not have happened without the credits –, permanence, and robust monitoring. Furthermore, the cost of these credits for Greece could range between €30-90 per ton of CO₂ captured which while affordable when compared to methods like Direct Air Capture (DAC), which costs upwards of €1,000 per ton, might be more expensive than similar reforestation credits in countries like Brazil which range in the region of €20-30 per ton. That said as demand for high-quality

credits grows with more and more companies looking for high-quality credits, prices are expected to reach €50-100 per ton, making Greek reforestation projects competitive in the market.

For the Mitsotakis administration, which has positioned environmental protection as a key priority in its second term while pursuing an ambitious agenda of attracting foreign investment and promoting Greek business expansion abroad, carbon removal credits could offer a compelling opportunity that aligns with both goals. The Government's appointment of Theodoros Skylakakis as Minister of Environment and Energy in 2023 signalled a shift toward more market-based environmental solutions, aligning with the opportunities presented by the CRCF. This approach could help address both the immediate challenge of wildfire recovery and the broader political imperative of demonstrating concrete action on climate change while creating new opportunities for international business partnerships and investment in Greece's green transition.

In an era where global warming fuels crises faster than humanity can solve them, relying on nature alone to heal may no longer be viable – every tool at our disposal needs to be leveraged. If harnessed correctly, 2024's launching of CRCF could transform one of Greece's greatest environmental disaster into an example of ecological and financial resilience.

Michael Gravanis is an Energy Markets Analyst at AFRY Management Consulting.

6 | MyCoast: Digital Tools for Bottom-Up Transparency

By Alexandros Konstantes

The unregulated commercialisation of Greek beaches allows private businesses to monopolise public coastlines with sunbeds, tables, chairs, and other amenities, effectively restricting free access to what should be public space. Frustration over this reality fuelled the Beach Towel Revolt of May 2023, a grassroots movement demanding the reclamation of Greek beaches – not from tourists, but from businesses treating the coastline as their private fiefdom. The movement sparked broader discussions on overtourism, public space management, and government accountability, quickly gaining ground as a national call to action. In response, the Greek government launched the MyCoast app in April 2024 under the Coastal Development Law, empowering citizens to report unauthorised activities on Greek beaches directly from their mobile phones.

Prior to the app's launch, complaints about illegal beach occupation had to be submitted to the Greek Ombudsman (Citizen's Attorney) or to local municipal authorities. However, these complaints often faced significant obstacles: bureaucratic hold-ups and delayed responses, leading to frustration among citizens. Local networks meant that complaints against well-connected businesses were often ignored or deprioritised. Finally, the limited enforcement capacity at the municipal level resulted in poor implementation, as authorities lacked both the personnel and resources to act swiftly against violations. In turn, the illegal occupation of public beaches endured, despite repeated citizen complaints.

The MyCoast app was introduced as an innovative solution to these systemic failures, offering a simplified, transparent, and citizen-driven mechanism for reporting and enforcement. Partially funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the Ministries of Economy and Finance and Digital Governance, MyCoast aims to be both efficient and cost-effective. The app streamlines the reporting process through a user-friendly interface where citizens can document complaints for unauthorised activities with photos and structured questionnaires. These reports automatically trigger mandatory responses from local authorities, backed by a robust penalty framework that aims to deter violators. Unauthorised operators face fines quadruple the minimum auction price of the area they occupy and five-year concession bans, while legal concessionaires exceeding their allocated space by more than 30% risk fines between €2,000 and €60,000, alongside temporary suspensions and future exclusion from concessions.

The app's implementation has yielded promising initial results, with over 1,900 complaints registered since launch, demonstrating its potential for enhancing transparency through real-time citizen participation. However, transparency alone does not guarantee effectiveness. While MyCoast has democratised the reporting process and begun restoring public trust in state institutions, the fundamental issue

of enforcement capacity remains unresolved. Creating an app and establishing a penalty framework are meaningful first steps, but if well-documented violations are left unpunished due to inadequate municipal resources and lacking political will for follow-through, these tools risk becoming merely symbolic gestures rather than effective instruments of change.

Nevertheless, MyCoast serves as a compelling case study in how technology can amplify citizen voice – in this case, to protect the commons from unchecked commercial interests – and represents a paradigm shift in public governance, exemplifying Greece's emerging model of citizen-led governance and digital policy entrepreneurship. MyCoast's success ultimately depends not merely on its technical infrastructure, but on building the institutional capacity and political will to translate digital reporting and real-time accountability into consistent enforcement action – a challenge that speaks to the broader reimagining of the social contract in an era where technology increasingly mediates the relationship between society and the state.

Alexandros Marios Konstantes is a European Public Policy Analysis student in the Master's Program of EU Political and Governance Studies at the College of Europe in Bruges.

7 | Digital Citizen Participation on Greek Urban Plans: From a Democratic Promise to a Procedural Hurdle

By Vasiliki Poula

One of the most ambitious urban planning programs in Greece's history, determining the destiny of 80% of the nation's land use, remains largely invisible to the public debate, despite being set to conclude by the end of 2025. Launched in December 2020, this €401 million initiative, funded by the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, aims to establish comprehensive urban planning frameworks for 824 municipal units – units that either entirely lack plans or operate under outdated ones. The Technical Chamber of Greece, under the Ministry of Environment and Energy's supervision, is racing against time to complete 245 urban plans by the end of 2025, in order to abide by the EU deadline, which is tied to the disbursement of EU funds. These plans will reshape the Greek landscape, determining what can be built, how, and where.

This undertaking is currently seeking public participation through a digital platform launched in summer 2024. While Greece has made significant strides in digitalising public services – both in government to citizen, as well as government to government transactions –, the strategy and design choices behind the public consultation process reveal troubling patterns in how Greece conceptualises (digital) citizen participation in crucial policy decisions. After all, the mere existence and operation of a digital platform is not inherently sufficient. Depending on how the public consultation processes are designed and implemented, these interfaces can either substantively enhance public participation or create an illusion of engagement, with the latter being particularly problematic as it obscures the lack of meaningful consultation behind a veneer of openness enabled by digital modernisation.

The problematic policy choices manifest in the consultation timeframe. The consultation windows emerge abruptly, with minimal notice and constricted deadlines, suggesting an administrative checkbox rather than a genuine invitation for dialogue. This approach transforms citizen participation from a democratic promise into a procedural hurdle to be cleared as swiftly as possible.

The accessibility barrier compounds these temporal constraints. While urban planning documents must necessarily contain specialised technical content for precision and legal clarity, the format of the documents renders the content nearly impossible to understand and therefore, provide feedback upon. Documents appear as scanned PDFs – hundreds of pages resistant to searching, copying, or sometimes even basic readability as the pixels increase dramatically upon zooming. Interested citizens thus face a double obstacle: they are simultaneously overwhelmed by the volume of information and unable to navigate it effectively, as basic digital functions like keyword searching remain unavailable. This turns the consultation process into a needle-in-a-haystack exercise, where relevant content remains technically present but practically inaccessible.

Perhaps most concerning is the black box of feedback processing. Without clear feedback loops demonstrating how citizen contributions influence policy modifications, the consultation process fails to build the trust necessary for sustained civic engagement. Consequently, even the few citizens who invest time navigating the platform's labyrinth find their engagement met with silence, a response pattern that discourages future participation.

Urban planning decisions shape communities for generations. They determine not just physical spaces and land use, but social cohesion dynamics, economic growth trajectories, and sustainability practices. When procedural obstacles are erected against meaningful citizen participation, we lose valuable input and ultimately, the quality of our decision-making does not reach its full potential, creating spaces that fail to reflect local needs, knowledge, and aspirations. These missed opportunities for meaningful engagement often result in urban plans that require costly revisions or face implementation challenges due to community resistance.

The shortcomings in the public consultation process are symptomatic of Greece's broader challenges with civic engagement. However, the urban planning consultation case stands out as particularly problematic for two reasons. First, the Ministry's extensive promotion of the process created heightened expectations. Thus, the gap between the self-proclaimed ambition for innovative citizen engagement and the ill-designed reality makes the failure to capture local knowledge and collective needs especially disappointing. Second, unlike typical legislative consultation which primarily involves text, urban planning consultation requires citizens to engage with complex visual and technical materials – from maps to diagrams – making user-friendly digital interfaces even more crucial for meaningful participation.

The solution is not to abandon citizen participation nor digital tools enabling it, but to put genuine engagement at its core. This does not require reinventing the wheel – it means reasonable timelines, accessible information, and transparent feedback loops. A recent initiative points to this potential – in September 2024, the Minister of Interior launched diavoulefsiypes.org, a pilot platform that provided plain language article-by-article explanations for two bills of the Ministry of Interior, in addition to the bills' standard consultation on opengov.gr. Such approaches need to become the norm rather than remaining isolated experiments. Until then, Greece's consultation on the new urban planning platform remains a cautionary tale about how ill-designed public consultation frameworks, without proper policy strategy and despite the use of novel digital tools, can create an illusion of participation while actually distancing citizens from the decisions that will shape their communities' future.

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8 | Greece's AI National Strategy as a High-Priority Political Project

By Charalampos Tsekeris and George Efthymiou

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the biggest contemporary global challenges requiring international cooperation and coordination, as well as multi-stakeholder dialogue and partnerships. However, the Greek government also identifies AI as a national challenge – as well as opportunity –, and as a major existential factor impacting future economic and societal prospects.

Within this context, Greece's national AI strategy, entitled 'Blueprint for Greece's AI Transformation' (developed by a high-level advisory committee and published on 25 November 2024), represents a comprehensive, high-priority political project. The strategy stresses the importance of preparing the Greek economy and society and bolstering their resilience to harness AI's potential and benefit from its transformative effects.

This strategy signifies a long-term vision to leverage AI for economic growth, societal benefit, and enhanced regional and global standing, positioning Greece as a key player in the global AI landscape. The latter requires 'a focused AI innovation brand' (per the strategy) for Greece, which needs to be properly developed and communicated, as well as a hands-on approach to implement the deliverables of the strategy to turn this brand into reality. It is remarkable that, until now, Greece's mainstream political parties have shown consensus on this ambitious plan.

Furthermore, the strategy articulates Greece's mission to horizontally integrate AI across various sectors, including the judicial system, healthcare, culture, climate action, civil protection, and public administration. At its core, the plan aims to accelerate responsible innovation, improve public services (through the transition from e-government to algorithmic governance), and enhance public trust, social cohesion, and democratic processes, while mitigating potential risks associated with AI, such as cybersecurity threats, data privacy concerns, information inaccuracy, and bias in decision-making.

Central to the strategy are its so-called 'flagship programs' which include (1) regulatory arrangements and new infrastructure for data governance and AI policy coordination; (2) a world-class centre of excellence in AI; (3) an AI education platform for teaching and virtual collaboration; (4) an AI ecosystem encouraging innovation, partnerships and investments (Greece has already qualified to operate a European AI Factory powered by the DAEDALUS supercomputer); (5) a Greek language and culture data space; and (6) a global AI ethics forum aimed at promoting international collaboration, democracy, and sustainability.

A critical political issue at stake is the strategic orientation of AI towards the effective reorganisation, modernisation, and metamorphosis of public administration, whose weaknesses significantly contributed to the Greek economic crisis. The broad adoption of mAigov in 2024, i.e. of an AI-powered digital assistant launched at gov.gr to simplify citizens' interaction with the public sector, represents a positive step towards Greece's expanding AI capacity-building and use across all segments of the state. This technological transformation is actively reshaping Greek politics and the national political agenda. This transformation is primarily a dynamic sociopolitical process which needs to be adaptive, accountable, inclusive, and actively engage with all stakeholders in the country.

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Section III

International positioning

9 | Redefining the debate on the Parthenon Sculptures: from the question of ownership to collaborative cultural partnerships

By Theoni Androulidaki

The long-standing debate over the Parthenon Sculptures entered a new phase in 2024, marked by pivotal meetings involving Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and key British figures including Prime Minister Keir Starmer, British Museum trustee George Osborne and the Museum's newly appointed director Nicola Cullinan. These discussions evidence a renewed momentum over this highly symbolically charged issue, for both politicians and museums' management.

As traditional arguments about ownership give way to more nuanced discussions, the Parthenon Project shifts the question from ownership towards flexible cultural partnership models that blend public authority with privately-run solutions. Originally conceived as a patronage initiative, the Project presents a compelling vision for cultural cooperation, aligned with the aspirations of cultural institutions, like the British Museum, to adapt to modern realities, and contextualise cultural heritage.

The Parthenon Project presents a dynamic vision for cultural partnerships. The Project's proposal would allow the British Museum to retain its world-leading collection of ancient Greek artifacts while hosting masterpieces – such as the 3,600-year-old Mask of Agamemnon, the Kritios Boy, and pre-Parthenon treasures – for world-class visiting exhibitions. Meanwhile, the Parthenon Sculptures would be reunified in Athens' Acropolis Museum as a complete artistic work, restoring the integrity of this monumental work. The proposal also envisions the establishment of a joint Greek-British Foundation to fund scholarships, exchanges, and cultural programs, all operating under the British Museum Act 1963, creating long-term, win-win synergies that benefit both nations (Greece and the UK) and museums (Acropolis Museum and British Museum).

For the British Museum, collaboration with the Parthenon Project aligns naturally with the museum's 'Reimagining the British Museum' project, which aims to foster international collaborations, redefine curatorial practices, and explore innovative funding models. This convergence of interests creates opportunities for both institutions to enhance their cultural offerings and strengthen their global networks.

This proposal is underpinned by a broader rethinking of cultural stewardship. At stake is not merely the fate of the ancient marbles but a fundamental shift in how we conceptualise 'reinstitution' and 'ownership'. Politicians on either side might have preferred a definitive solution, such as having the marbles permanently based in Athens. Yet, there is a sentiment that governments should not overstep their boundaries; decisions regarding high-profile artefacts should remain within the

purview of the cultural institutions that care for them rather than being determined by political considerations and partisan agendas. In this context, the Parthenon Project positions itself as a mediating force that empowers cultural institutions to drive the decision-making process while offering them the practical framework and resources to implement their vision through private initiatives.

However, the reframing of this historically charged dispute into a model driven by private-public partnerships via the Parthenon Project requires careful consideration due to various challenges. Success depends on ensuring that both Greece's cultural identity and the British Museum's global stewardship are respected, which requires a delicate balancing act. The partnership necessitates compromises in competing national narratives, but it must also be acknowledged that questions of property and ownership, though temporarily sidestepped, will likely resurface requiring explicit engagement rather than quiet omission from the discussion. In this context, maintaining transparency, equal partnership, and cultural integrity is essential to ensure that the process is perceived as driven by genuine mutual benefit rather than external financial interests inadvertently reducing historically significant artifacts to tradeable assets in a global cultural marketplace.

Beyond reaching an agreement on the immediate question of the Sculptures, the reframed debate opens up new possibilities for funding, collection sharing, and cultural diplomacy. Looking ahead to 2025, stakeholders aim to craft an agreement that not only resolves the marbles' dispute but also sets a new blueprint for managing cultural assets with a focus on global understanding and shared responsibility. This model, although crafted for a complex negotiation on a particular topic, challenges museums and policymakers to transcend traditional boundaries and embrace collaborative frameworks for cultural heritage management.

Theoni Androulidaki is currently working in the art and design sector in London, UK, with a background in consulting on arts partnerships and museum fundraising.

10 | The Greek Janus Face: Balancing Between the EU and China

By Anna Irene Baka

Greek-Chinese relations, established in 1972 and elevated to a strategic partnership in 2006, have strengthened considerably in recent years. This growth is evident in the introduction of more frequent direct flights between Athens, Beijing, and Shanghai, along with the recent removal of visa requirements for Greek citizens travelling to China. These advancements are just the visible tip of a much deeper partnership, supported by key bilateral agreements such as the 2015 double taxation agreement and the 2016 privatisation deal in which the Chinese shipping giant COSCO acquired a 51% stake in the Port of Piraeus, later increased to 67%. This investment, a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has transformed the Port of Piraeus into Europe's fifth-largest container port. While it has given China a crucial gateway to Europe, it has also brought substantial benefits to Greece, including modernised port infrastructure, increased job opportunities, and significant economic growth.

In 2024, the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China showcased new opportunities for Greek-Chinese collaboration. The Chinese Ambassador to Greece at the time, Xiao Junzheng, emphasised key areas such as maritime technology, green shipping, and improving connectivity between Piraeus, the Balkans, and Central Europe—particularly through the Hungary-Serbia railway. This railway, financed and constructed under China's 'loans-for-infrastructure' model, highlights the significant economic and political impact of the BRI. Applying this model to Greece could help modernise its struggling railway system, unlocking valuable economic and logistical benefits. However, such investments also come with geopolitical risks, as they would deepen China's influence in Greece's critical infrastructure.

Greece must tread carefully in this partnership, balancing its growing ties with China against its responsibilities as a member of the European Union. Since joining the EU in 1981, Greece has reaped significant benefits from the bloc's policies and support. However, relations between EU and China have become increasingly strained, often described as a clash of values, with human rights at the forefront of the conflict. China's handling of the pandemic, along with mounting concerns over the rule of law and human rights under Xi Jinping, brought bilateral relations to a new low when the European Parliament (EP) refused to ratify the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment after its signing in 2021. In retaliation, China imposed sanctions on five Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Since then, the EP has issued multiple resolutions condemning China's actions. Most recently, in October 2024, the EP strongly criticised China's military provocations against Taiwan, accusing Beijing of distorting history and international law by reinterpreting the 1971 UN resolution that recognised the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate representative of China at the United Nations.

Greece has thus far managed to strike a careful balance in its relations with both China and the EU, although it briefly deviated from this approach in 2017 by vetoing an EU statement at the United Nations that criticised China's human rights record. However, the global geopolitical and economic landscape is shifting dramatically, especially with the return of the Trump administration. New US policies, such as the proposed tariffs targeting both the EU and China, are set to disrupt the status quo, creating new pressures and testing Greece's ability to maintain its delicate balancing act.

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11 | Greece as a Regional Academic Hub

By Stefanos Gandolfo

A landmark legislation enacted in 2024, allowing for the operation of private non-profit universities in Greece as branches of foreign universities, has introduced unprecedented opportunities for international academic collaboration while operating within the limits of the Greek Constitution. This latest reform caps a series of significant reforms undertaken in recent years to enhance the internationalisation of Greek higher education. These reforms aim not only to attract foreign students but also to encourage the return of Greek academics and scientists. Through a combination of policy adjustments, increased funding, and a concerted strategic push, Greece is positioning itself as an emerging regional hub for international higher education.

The cornerstone of this paradigm shift has been a comprehensive legislation overhaul addressing both the governance of Greek public universities and the broader liberalisation of the higher education space. On the governance front, for instance, Greek public universities have been granted a much higher degree of institutional autonomy in the design and implementation of internationalisation activities from establishing foreign-language degree programs at all levels to expanding dual and double degree agreements as well as hosting foreign university research centres within Greek universities' premises.

Increased funding has been another key driver behind Greece's internationalization push. Significant EU funds, such as the Recovery and Resilience Fund, along with national funding have been allocated to finance internationalisation activities across all universities. The Ministry of Education recently published a €64 million call specifically designed to foster the creation of dual and joint degree programs. Furthermore, investments in university infrastructure from labs to dorms is playing a pivotal role in making Greek universities more attractive on a global scale.

Third, since 2019, the government has taken a very proactive stance in placing Greece on the global academic map. A key milestone was the creation of 'Study in Greece' as an inter-university partnership with funding from the central government in order to showcase Greek academia abroad. In addition, the Ministry of Education has undertaken key initiatives such as the Pharos Summit which brought over 30 leading US universities (Yale, Columbia, Harvard, Princeton among others) to Greece.

So far, the results have been robust and promising, with new English-language BA programs for foreign students in leading Greek universities receiving applications multiple times over the available slots. The 2024 legislation further accelerated this momentum, with several prestigious international institutions already expressing interest in developing an academic presence in the country.

However, challenges remain. First, the country needs to complete its legislative overhaul by making the necessary constitutional changes – a complex process, indeed. In addition, it is essential to ensure the integration of foreign students into the wider academic community, as well as into Greek society and economy. Greece continues to face difficulties in retaining skilled professionals, particularly in the fields of medicine and engineering, where the private sector abroad often offers more competitive salaries. Similarly, the wage differential between Greek and foreign universities deters Greek academics abroad from returning. Last, equity issues persist in terms of access to higher education, particularly for students from low-income or rural backgrounds. While reforms have made higher education more internationally appealing, there is still work to be done to ensure that Greek citizens, especially those from disadvantaged regions, are not left behind.

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12 | The Future of Greece's Diplomatic Engagement in the Middle East

By Loukas Papavasileiou

2024 constitutes a watershed moment in the geopolitics of the wider Middle East region. Major regional developments, particularly the continuation of the war in Gaza and the fall of Assad's regime in Syria, have added to the complexities of an already highly volatile area. As part of its foreign policy strategy aimed at strengthening both regional and international standing, Greece has intensified its efforts to reinforce bilateral cooperation with key Middle Eastern actors such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt.

Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis' visit – within less than one month – to Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia supports the argument that acquiring a strengthened role in the Middle East and wider Mediterranean region is considered a high priority by the current Greek government. It should be noted that the Greek PM was the first EU leader to visit Beirut following the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement on 27 November 2024.

In his speech at the 1st meeting of the Hellenic-Saudi High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC), the Greek PM emphasised that 'this is the first time Greece is establishing a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council with a country from the Middle East', while reiterating that 'the security of Europe and the Middle East are interdependent'. This inaugural meeting was also attended by the Ministers participating in the 7 Committees that were established to foster cooperation in a wide range of sectors, ranging from security and defence to trade and investment. In addition, the reinforced commitment by Greece to promote stability and maritime security in the wider region is highlighted by its leading role, as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2025-2026 term, in drafting Resolution 2768 (2025) on the continued Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. The Resolution, among others, reiterates the demand that the Houthis immediately cease all attacks against merchant and commercial vessels, and emphasises the need to address the root causes of these attacks.

These developments demonstrate that the Middle Eastern dimension of Greek foreign policy has been reinvigorated to a great extent. However, there is still considerable unrealised potential. Greece should take full advantage of its crucial geostrategic position and pursue a comprehensive foreign policy strategy that could deliver concrete results and promote its national interests. In this respect, Greece should work to deepen strategic cooperation with its regional partners in areas of common interest, and particularly in energy security and counterterrorism.

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