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THE LEFT AND THE CHURCH IN GREECE:  
THE AMBIGUITY OF POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS DOMAIN  
RELATIONSHIPS

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2013, the Department of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki organized a conference on the topic “the Church and the Left.” The announcement of the Conference caused a sensation and provoked a lot of questions such as: “What could the Church discuss with the Left?”, “How could the Left lead a dialogue with the Church?”, “What do the two fields have in common?” On the one hand, the Left was expected to express its well known political positions on the separation of Church and State and on the restriction of the Church in the private sphere, questioning, or even not recognizing, the dynamics of the religious field in the Greek public sphere. On the other hand, the Church was expected to adhere to a traditional understanding of State and Church relationships and defend the current status quo that guarantees its position in the Greek public space in various ways. In brief, the conference was expected to juxtapose the new and the old, the progressive and the conservative, i.e. to line up the Left,

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a progressive political power, opposite the Church, a traditional/conservative institution.

The Conference was admittedly successful and brought together, through public debate, the positions of both the Left and the Church on a variety of issues that concern the Greek society in general, and the Greek religious field in particular, and triggered a lot of discussion in the public space seeking common ground and highlighting the differences.<sup>1</sup> The truth is that in the past some efforts for dialogue were made between the Left and the Church, such as the Christian-Marxist dialogue in the early 1980s<sup>2</sup> and the Conference of EAR (United Left) in Thessaloniki (22-24 April 1988) on the topic “the Church and the Left in Greece today.”<sup>3</sup> What is more, the recent attempt at dialogue between the two fields acquired even greater interest because of the rising electoral dynamics of the leftist party which in fact brought it to power two years later.

Among the political actors that participated in this conference, the developing and very promising party of SYRIZA was in the forefront of this effort and put forward its views on issues related to the position of the Church in the Greek public sphere. Two years later, after the election of 25 January 2015, for the first time in the post-dictatorship period in Greece, the leftist party SYRIZA (with the support of the populist right party ANEL) comes to power.

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in the newspapers at that time, for example, Maria Antoniadou, “Sacred Turn to the Left,” *Vima*, November 11, 2012, sec. A, p. 37; Ioannis Konidaris, “Church: Left or Right?,” *Vima*, February 17, 2013, sec. A, p. 49; Maria Topali, “The Church and the Left in New Ways,” *Kathimerini*, October 5, 2014, p. 15; Maria Topali, “Church – Left Relationships in Greece,” *Kathimerini*, October 12, 2014, p. 15. In order to make all information accessible to the reader, the original Greek titles have been translated into English.

<sup>2</sup> See Petros Makris, *Marxists and Orthodoxy: Dialogue or Conflict?* (Athens: Epikairotita, 1983); Athanasios Gieftits and others, *Orthodoxy and Marxism* (Athens: Akritis, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Kostas Mygdalis, “New Government and Religions,” *Avgi* (27 September 2015); available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10811/5887115/nea-kybernese-kai-threskeumata>> [accessed: 05.07.2017]. For a general overview, see Andreas Nanakis, “The relations between Church and Left in Greece in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century,” in *Aspects of relations between Church and Greek State in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*, ed. Andreas Nanakis (Thessaloniki: Barbounakis, 2017), 177-192.

This paper investigates the relationship between the Left and the Church in the frame of political discourse and practices of the ruling leftist party. More specifically, it attempts to answer the following questions: “How does the first-time Left government behave towards the Church?” “How does the Church react towards the leftist government?” “Are there any points of convergence or divergence between the two institutions and in what fields are those revealed?” “What are the relations of influence and power between the two fields and how are they expressed?”

The study period is limited to one year of SYRIZA’s governance, between January 2015 and January 2016, which includes, besides the co-existence of the Left and the Church for the first time, major domestic and international issues, such as the peak of the economic and political crisis in Greece during the summer of 2015 and the aggravation of the refugee problem throughout 2015, with the entrance of over 800,000 refugees and immigrants in the country. Those are important factors that should be taken into account, if one wishes to have a full and clear picture of the political field in Greece in the period under review, which probably affect its relationship with the religious field as well.

The main source for this investigation is the coverage of “religious” events and news by *Avgi*, the official party newspaper of SYRIZA. For this purpose, the relevant articles of the newspaper are used as documents which constitute raw material for investigating the relationship between the two fields. Document analysis is a key method in the social sciences.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The foundation of the Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA) dates back to 2004 and is due to the electoral alliance of left-wing parties and organizations, the major component being the Coalition of Left, of Movements and Ecology (Synaspismos or SYN). The Synaspismos, as

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<sup>4</sup> See Georg Payne and Judy Payne, *Key Concepts in Social Research*, (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

it was named after its first and largest component, participated in the 2004 national elections with a joint ballot that comprised other leftist organizations<sup>5</sup> under the name “Coalition of the Radical Left – Unitary Social Front” gathering 3.3% of the electoral power. In the elections of 2009, the Synaspismos participated under the leadership of the current Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras (who had been elected party president in 2008) and won 4.6% of the vote.

In 2012, in an effort to overcome its internal strife, SYRIZA was re-established as a single party and participated as such in the elections on 6 May 2012 raising its percentage to 16.78%, whereas about a month later, in the second 2012 elections of 17 June, it increased its share to 26.89% and became the main opposition party in the Greek Parliament. For the first time since the post-dictatorship period, a left-wing party stood a strong chance of claiming political power in Greece, which it eventually conquered with a percentage of 36.34% in the elections on 25 January, and “broke” the monopoly of the bi-party system of PASOK and New Democracy that had been dominant for over thirty-five years on the Greek political scene.<sup>6</sup>

The remarkable surge of SYRIZA in Greece is attributed to the worsening of the economic crisis, which broke out in 2010 and struck a blow at the post-dictatorship period of prosperity and growth. This crisis has in many ways launched a long period not only of financial but also political changes in the history of modern Greece. Together with the economic hardship, the prevailing political party system is being

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<sup>5</sup> Such as AKOA (Renewing Communist Ecological Left), KEDA (Movement for the United in Action Left), DEA (Internationalist Workers Left), KOE (Communist Organization of Greece) and other independent left-wing groups or activists.

<sup>6</sup> See Gerassimos Moschonas, “A New Left in Greece: PASOK’s Fall and SYRIZA’s Rise,” *Dissent* 60/4 (2013): 33-37; Michalis Spourdalakis, “The Miraculous Rise of the «Phenomenon SYRIZA»,” *International Critical Thought* 4/3 (2014): 354-366; Vassilis Paipais, “Greek elections 2015: a short overview,” available from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurocrisispress/2015/01/26/greek-elections-2015-a-short-overview/> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Panos Petrou, “The making of SYRIZA,” *Encyclopaedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line*; available from <<http://socialistworker.org/print/2012/06/11/the-making-of-syriza>> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Giorgos Katsabekis, “Radical Left Populism in Contemporary Greece: Syriza’s Trajectory from Minoritarian Opposition to Power,” *Constellations* 23/3 (2016): 391-403.

deplored, the democratic regime is shrinking<sup>7</sup> and an “unsafe democracy” is manifested.<sup>8</sup> All that has led to a political phase that some researchers call “post-political” or “post-democratic.”<sup>9</sup>

The causes of the crisis are attributed to internal (national) and external (international) factors, such as the economic globalization that has led to the dominance of financial capital and the incapacity of capital movement at national level, the Eurozone dysfunction due to quality differences between northern and southern European countries, as well as the clientelist system in Greece.<sup>10</sup> What actually triggered

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<sup>7</sup> See Ilias Nikolakopoulos, “Continuities and ruptures: The ambivalent term After-Dictatorship,” in *Post-Dictatorship. Greece between two ages*, eds. Manos Avgeridis, Efi Gazi, and Kostis Kornetis (Athens: Themelio, 2015), 429-431.

<sup>8</sup> See Panagis Panagiotopoulos, “From the protected to the unsafe democracy. Sociology of Post-dictatorship in the light of crisis,” in *Post-Dictatorship. Greece between two ages*, 335-366.

<sup>9</sup> See Constantinos Tsoukalas, “The mutation of democracy,” in *Post-Dictatorship. Greece between two ages*, 417-420. See also Giannis Papamihail, *End of era. Economic supervision, social crisis, political submission and ideological rearrangements in contemporary Greece* (Athens: Pedio, 2010); Leonidas Vatikiotis and others, *The map of the crisis. The end of the illusion* (Athens: Topos, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> See George Kontogiorgis, “Introduction,” in *Reflections of the Crisis. Myths and Realities of Modern Society*, ed. Christiana Konstantopoulou (Athens: Papazisi, 2017), 15-37; Alike Mouriki, and others (eds.), *The social portrait of Greece 2012 – Facets of the crisis* (Athens: National Center for Social Research, 2012); available from <[http://www.ekke.gr/images/PDF/Social\\_portrait\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ekke.gr/images/PDF/Social_portrait_2012.pdf)> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Rubini Gropa, Hara Cuci, and Anna Triantafylidou (eds.), *Greek Crisis and European Modernity* (Athens: Kritiki, 2013); Manolis Alexakis, “Global economic crisis and Greece: an opportunity for a new Post Dictatorship period?,” in *Greek Society 1975-2010: Transformations, Rearrangements and Challenges*, eds. Maria Antonopoulou and Socrates Koniordos (Athens: EKE, 2012), 21-30; available from <[http://www.hellenicsociology.gr/sites/default/files/eke\\_praktika\\_2011.pdf](http://www.hellenicsociology.gr/sites/default/files/eke_praktika_2011.pdf)> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Socrates Koniordos (ed.), *The Greek Society at the crossroads of crisis* (Athens: EKE, 2016); available from <[http://www.hellenicsociology.gr/sites/default/files/praktika\\_5ou\\_sunedriou\\_me\\_isbn.pdf](http://www.hellenicsociology.gr/sites/default/files/praktika_5ou_sunedriou_me_isbn.pdf)> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Thanos Papadopoulos, *Who led us and how they led us to crisis* (Athens: Gutenberg, 2016); Christiana Konstantopoulou (ed.), *Narrations of the crisis. Myths and realities of contemporary society* (Athens: Papazisi, 2017). For another point of view, see also Konstantinos Tsoukalas, *Greece of oblivion and truth. From a long adolescence to a violent adulthood* (Athens: Themelio, 2012); Takis Pappas, *Populism and Crisis Politics in Greece* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Stathis Kalyvas, *Destructions and Triumphs. The 7 cycles of modern Greek history* (Athens: Papadopoulos, 2015).

it, however, was the explosion of the 2008 international financial and economic crisis, which manifested itself in Greece in 2010 as a sovereign debt crisis.<sup>11</sup> Greece's inability to cover its debt to the markets led to borrowing from other Eurozone countries as well as the International Monetary Fund, which consequently put it under the control of the three international organizations (the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), the so-called Troika.<sup>12</sup>

The terms of the creditors are accepted by the Greek political leadership through three successive memoranda that contain measures aimed at the consolidation of public finances, regulation and supervision of the financial sector, implementation of "structural reforms" that would improve the country's competitiveness.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, they include rigorous austerity measures that reshape the Greek economic field and cause a sharp drop in the gross domestic product (over 25%), a sharp rise in unemployment rates ranging between 24-28%, an increase in tax burdens for citizens and businesses that represents a loss of about 86% of income of the middle and low social strata, wage and pensions cuts in the public and private sector with a view to reducing labor costs, closure of ¼ of the private businesses due to the limitation of working

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<sup>11</sup> See Paul Krugman, *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008* (N. York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); Andriana Vlachou, Nikos Theocharakis, and Dimitris Mulonakis (eds.), *Economic crisis and Greece* (Athens: Gutenberg, 2011); Xenofon Giataganas, "The thirty years of Greece in the European Union," *Diethnis kai Europaiki Politiki* 21-22 (2011): 105-112; Michalis Nikiphoros, Dimitris Papadimitriou, and Gennaro Zezza, *The problem of the Greek public debt* (Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, 2015); available from [http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/pn\\_15\\_2GR.pdf](http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/pn_15_2GR.pdf) [accessed: 20.10.2017].

<sup>12</sup> See European Commission, *Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences, and Responses* (Luxembourg: European Communities, 2009); James Pettifer, *The Making of the Greek Crisis* (Penguin Specials, 2015); George Papaconstantinou, *Game Over: The Inside Story of the Greek Crisis* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> See Dermot Hodson, *Governing the Euro Area in Good Times and Bad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert Boyer, "The Four Fallacies of Contemporary Austerity Policies: The Lost Keynesian Legacy," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 36 (2012): 283-312; *The Chronicle of the Great Crisis: The Bank of Greece 2008-2013* (Bank of Greece/Centre of Civilisation, Research and Documentation, 2013); available from <<http://www.setee.gr/images/pdf/ToXronikoKrisiTE.pdf>> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Dimitris Katsikas, Kyriakos Philinis, and Marianthi Anastasatou, *Understanding the Greek Crisis: Responses to crucial questions for the State, Economy and Europe* (Athens: Papazisi, 2017).

capital or other bank loans and limited consumption, precariousness of labor relations, budget cuts for social welfare and public services and decreased expenditure in the education and health sectors.<sup>14</sup> The negative consequences of the crisis and austerity policies have greatly aggravated the living conditions of Greek citizens as well as migrants living in Greece, creating poverty and social exclusion and broadening the social inequalities.<sup>15</sup>

The criticality of the situation is exacerbated by the refugee crisis, as it has been characterized, namely the mass exodus of refugees and immigrants from the Middle East, and Syria in particular, due to civilian conflicts, and their movement towards Europe. The official report of the Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Media mentions that over the years 2015-2016, 1,200,000 refugees mainly from the Eastern Aegean islands and 7,000 refugees from the land borders entered Greece, while 62,681 refugees and immigrants remained in the country. The temporary passage of such a large number of migrants

<sup>14</sup> See Savvas G. Robolis, *Economic Crisis and Social State* (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2013); St. Mpoutsiou, and Pavlos Sarafis, "Southern European model welfare state and economic crisis," *Interscientific Health Care* 5/4 (2013): 147-161; Tassos Giannitsis, and Stavros Zographakis, *Greece: Solidarity and adjustment in times of crisis* (Macroeconomic Policy Institute, March 2015/38); available from <[https://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p\\_imk\\_study\\_38\\_2015.pdf](https://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p_imk_study_38_2015.pdf)> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Giannis Kouzis, "The work in the posse during the period of Crisis and Memorandum," *Koinoniki Politiki* 3 (2015): 7-18; Georgia Petraki and Giannis Kyriatopoulos, "Transformations to the work model during the period of internal devaluation (2010-2015)," in *The Greek Society at the crossroads of crisis*, 534-545.

<sup>15</sup> See D. Balourdos and N. Spiropoulou, "Portraits of poverty in Greece of crisis," in *The Social Portrait of Greece – 2012: Facets of Crisis*, 161-183; Christos N. Tsironis, "Looking for the Causes of Economic Crisis from an Orthodox Point of View," in *Economic Crisis and Poverty: Challenges for Europe Today. III Forum Europeo Cattolico-Orthodoxo*, ed. CCEE (Bologna: EDB, 2013), 49-68; Manos Matsaganis, and Chryssa Leventi, "Poverty and Inequality during the Great Recession in Greece," *Political Studies Review* 12 (2014): 209-223; Sophia Zabarloulou, and Maria Kousi (eds.), *Social Facets of Crisis in Greece* (Athens: Pedio, 2014); Dimitris Katsikas, and others, *Exposition for the social profile of Greece in relation to poverty, social exclusion and inequality before and after crisis* (Athens: ELIAMEP, 2014); available from <[www.crisisobs.gr](http://www.crisisobs.gr)> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Eleana Velentza, "The social profile of Greece during the Recession: The conditions of living in Greece through the multidimensional term of quality of life," in *The Greek Society at the crossroads of crisis*, 69-82; Exposition of Greek National Committee of UNICEF, *The situation of children in Greece 2017. The children of crisis* (Athens 2017); available from <https://www.unicef.gr> [accessed: 20.10.2017].

and refugees as well as the settlement of a part of them exacerbates the situation in Greece, already aggravated by the economic crisis, and creates ambivalent feelings among Greek people.<sup>16</sup>

Together with the financial hardship, the economic crisis is causing a crisis in the political system, which is expressed by sweeping upheavals in the political party system, and successive reversals of the political standards that stood in place throughout the post-dictatorship period (1974-2010). During the crisis, many governments are being dissolved, many elections are being held, and political forces are rearranged, especially after the “crucial elections” of May and June 2012 (with the collapse of the former mighty PASOK, the rise of SYRIZA and nationalistic ANEL to power and the emergence of the extreme right-wing party Golden Dawn).<sup>17</sup> These elections overturn the traditional political party-oriented Greek system, actually terminating the long-standing bi-party scheme and giving power to SYRIZA in 2015.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Ministry for Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Media, *Refugee Crisis 2015-2016*, (Athens, February 2017); available from [http://mindigital.gr/images/GENIKOI/FLORENTIS/factsheets/feb\\_2017/gr\\_fact\\_sheet\\_refugee\\_feb2017.pdf](http://mindigital.gr/images/GENIKOI/FLORENTIS/factsheets/feb_2017/gr_fact_sheet_refugee_feb2017.pdf) [accessed: 20.10.2017].

<sup>17</sup> See Sophia Vasilopoulou, and Daphne Halikiopoulou, “In the Shadow of Grexit: The Greek Election of 17 June 2012,” *South European Society and Politics* 18/4 (2013): 523-542; Giannis Voulgaris, and Ilias Nikolakopoulos, *The Double Electoral Earthquake* (Athens: Themelio, 2014); Jannis Kompopoulos, and Jannis Chasoglou, “The Collapse and Transformation of the Greek Party System,” *Socialism and Democracy* 28/1 (2014): 90-112; Eftichia Teperoglou, and Emmanouil Tsatsanis, “Dealignment, De-legitimation and the Implosion of the Two-Party System in Greece: The Earthquake Election of 6 May 2012,” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 24/2 (2014): 222-242; Nikos Demertzis, and Nikos Georganakis (eds.), *The Political Portrait of Greece. Crisis and Deconstruction of the Political* (Athens: Gutenberg/National Center of Social Research, 2015); Sofia Vasilopoulou, and Daphne Halikiopoulou, *Greek politics: An economic crisis or a crisis of democracy?* (World Affairs, October 2015); available from <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282798242>> [accessed: 20.10.2017].

<sup>18</sup> Christoforos Vernardakis, “The Greek Left in the 2012 Elections: The Return to the Class Vote,” available from <[http://www.vernardakis.gr/uplmed/155\\_The%20Greek%20Left%20in%20the%202012%20Elections%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.vernardakis.gr/uplmed/155_The%20Greek%20Left%20in%20the%202012%20Elections%20(1).pdf)> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Kostas Lavdas, “Greek politics in hard times: Between Europe and an Imaginary Place,” *KAS Katoptron*, 21/01/2015; available from [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_15640-1442-1-30.pdf?150416142344](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_15640-1442-1-30.pdf?150416142344) [access: 20.10.2017]; Yiannos Katsouridis, *Radical Left parties in Government: The Cases of SYRIZA and AKEL* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016).



In the context of the economic crisis gradually transforming into a political one, SYRIZA, which started as a coalition of small and marginal parties, eventually became, over a few years, a power party that took over the country's rule in 2015. SYRIZA was mainly voted by the Greek citizens as a new political power that could practise new alternative politics with a view to resolving the economic problem of the country, ending the period of painful memorandums, regaining social justice, and effectively addressing the humanitarian crisis that the country is experiencing.<sup>19</sup> Promoting populism as a predominant element of political life,<sup>20</sup> it uses a divisive rhetoric that separates “pure people” from the “corrupt elite,” and activates nationalist reflexes so that the “people” coincide with the “Nation.”<sup>21</sup> Besides, the common basis of populism seems to unite SYRIZA with the nationalist right-wing party ANEL, forming in this way what is unique in Europe, namely the coalition government of the populist radical Left and the populist nationalist Right.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See *The 40 points of SYRIZA program*; available from <<https://left.gr/news/diavaste-programma-toy-syriza>> [accessed: 20.10.2017].

<sup>20</sup> The populist discourse preexisted in the political system of Greece long before the domination of SYRIZA, but without being the single dominant element. On the populism of the previous period, see Petros Papasasantopoulos (ed.), *PASOK and Power* (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1980); Christos Lyrintzis, “The Power of Populism: The Greek Case,” *European Journal of Political Research* 15/6 (1987): 667-686; Demetres Sotiropoulos, *Populism and Bureaucracy: The Case of Greece Under PASOK, 1981-1989* (South Bend IN: University of Notre Dame Press 1996); Michalis Spourdalakis (ed.), *PASOK. Party – State – Society* (Athens: Patakis, 1998); Andreas Pantazopoulos, «*For the people and the nation*». *The moment of Andreas Papandreou* (Athens: Polis, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> See Cass Mudde, *SYRIZA: The Failure of the Populist Promise* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014); Yannis Stavrakakis, and Giorgos Katsambekis, “Left-wing populism in the European periphery: the case of SYRIZA,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19/2 (2014): 119-142; Giorgos Katsambekis, *SYRIZA 2004-2012: from the “youth” to “people”: A discourse-theoretical approach of the populism of the radical left* (Greek Society of Political Science, Network for the Analysis of Political Discourse, Working Paper 5, January 2014). See also Yannis Stavrakakis, “The Return of «the People»: Populism and Anti-Populism in the shadow of the European crisis,” *Constellations* 21/4 (2014): 505-517.

<sup>22</sup> See Rosa Vasilaki, “*Syriza's choice: the coalition government in Greece from a different perspective. LSE Greece@LSE*,” (19 Feb 2015); available from <<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/79338>> [accessed: 20.10.2017]; Paris Aslanidis, and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Dealing with populists in government: the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition in Greece,” *Democratization*, 2016; available from <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297721292>>

Regarding the management of religion and the issues related to it, SYRIZA, in accordance with its political program, advocates the constitutional separation of State and Church, which actually leads to independence of the State from ecclesiastical or other religious commitments; it proposes the abolition of the obligatory churchgoing and morning prayer at school; it seeks to abolish religious education and replace it with education of scientific rather than catechistic orientation; it professes the exclusion of religious affairs from the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and their assignment to another Ministry. In addition, it aims at ensuring religious neutrality of the State through the institutional equalization of all religious beliefs existing in the country, a fact that is conducive to the elimination of discrimination among citizens based on religious affiliation. Moreover, it promises the creation of worship spaces for the citizens of all doctrines, the establishment of the civil oath and the recognition of the right to burn the dead. Finally, SYRIZA seeks full taxation of ecclesiastical property and the abolition of state pay for the clergy.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Despite the progressive secularization of the Greek State in recent years (in the post-dictatorship period), the separation between religion and politics is not always distinct, as according to the current type of relationships the Church is recognized by the State to be the official (national) Church.<sup>24</sup> The “intertwined” relationship between religion

[accessed: 20.10.2017]. See also Daphne Halikiopoulou, Kyriaki Nanou, and Sofia Vasiliopoulou, “The paradox of nationalism: The common denominator of radical right and radical left euroscepticism,” *European Journal of Political Research* 51 (2012): 504-539.

<sup>23</sup> See SYRIZA’s political positions; available from <<https://sites.google.com/site/voiotospcom/oi-theseis-tou-syriza-gia-to-chorismo-kratous-ekklesias-kai-to-mathema-ton-threskeutikon>> [accessed: 20.10.2017]. See also the unpublished paper of Tasos Kourakis, parliamentarian of SYRIZA in the Conference “Church and Left” organized by the Department of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in collaboration with the Saint Synod of the Church of Greece, Thessaloniki, 22-23 January 2013.

<sup>24</sup> For a typology of institutional relationships between State and Church in the European countries, see Ioannis Petrou, *Christianity and Society* (Thessaloniki: Vaniias, 2004); Penelope

and politics is enshrined in Article 3 of the Greek Constitution according to which the Orthodox Church is recognized to be the dominant Church. Despite the fact that this term, according to most constitutionalists, is simply interpreted as the majority Church of Greek people, in fact it establishes a special relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Greek State that is expressed by the presence of religion in public ceremonies, such as the oath of office of the President of the Greek Republic and Greek governments, the confirmation given by the Bishops to the President of Republic, obligatory religious education in primary and secondary schools, the pay of the clergy, non-taxation of ecclesiastical property, equal recognition of religious and civil marriage, and so on.

The starting point of this special relationship can be found in the historical ties between Orthodoxy and the Greek nation as well as Greek national identity. Some milestones of this relationship are (selectively): the role of the Orthodox Church in the preservation of Greek identity during the Ottoman (15<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century) and the Greek Revolution (1821-1829) period, the establishment of the Autocephalous (national) Church after the liberation (1833) and its connection with the State (the State is involved in religious issues and religious issues are recognized as public<sup>25</sup>), its function as an ideological carrier of the Greek State for the dissemination and consolidation of national ideology, the involvement of the Church in the movements of Greek irredentism (the Great Idea, etc.), the support of the anti-communist nationalistic ideology after World War II and the Greek civil war that ensued, the engagement with dictatorship (1967-1974) on the basis of the Greek-Christian ideology that is expressed by the motto “Greece of Christian Greeks.”<sup>26</sup>

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Foundedaki, “Religion and State in Europe: Secularization and Functional Differentiation,” in *Religion and Politics in Modernity*, eds. Th. Lipovac, N. Demertzis, and B. Georgiadou (Athens: Kritiki, 2002), 183-210; Vassiliki Georgiadou, “Religions and Politics in Modernity,” in *Politics and Religions*, ed. Konstantinos Zorbas (Athens: Papazisi, 2007), 55-69.

<sup>25</sup> See Antonis Manitakis, *The Relationship between the Church and the State-Nation in the Shadow of Identities* (Athens: Nefeli, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> See Evangelos Karagiannis, “Secularism in Context: The Relations between the Greek State and the Church of Greece in Crisis,” *European Journal of Sociology* 50 (2009): 133-167.

This privileged position of the Greek Church deriving on the one hand from the historical relationship of Orthodoxy and the Greek national identity, and on the other from the constitutionally established relationship between Church and State, creates a special place for the Orthodox Church in the public sphere and oftentimes causes conflicts involving its relations both with the ever growing secular State and the other religious communities. The issue of redefinition of relationships or even State and Church separation arises at times with greater or lesser intensity depending on the events that influence the Greek political landscape, but without having reached, for the moment, the point of formal separation of the two institutions.<sup>27</sup>

The tensions between the Church and the Greek State do not seem to diminish the social influence and the significant presence of the Church in the public arena.<sup>28</sup> Relevant research proves that the Church as an institution enjoys, to a great extent, public trust, unlike other institutions, such as political parties or the Parliament.<sup>29</sup> In the Greek public sphere, seemingly at least, there emerges the image of a politically active Church, especially in the national-political domain, which is interested

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<sup>27</sup> Whenever this problem arises, the Church defends its position in a usually apologetic way. For example, in one of the circulars (No. 2824/R16.11.2005) it is stated that “the Church was the par excellence factor of unity in the free Greek State, the most fundamental institution of social-charitable ministry, the inexhaustible source of artistic inspiration, the stable foundation of humanitarian rules of justice, the decisive accomplice to the work of our National Education.”

<sup>28</sup> See Vasiliki Georgiadou, and Ilias Nikolakopoulos, “The People of the Church. Aspects of Church Religiosity in Greece,” in *Public opinion in Greece* (Athens: VPRC Institute, 2001); Christina Varouxi, “Confidence in Institutions,” in *Recent Social Trends in Greece. 1960-2000*, eds. Dimitris Charalambis, and others (Montreal/Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004); Theoni Stathopoulou, “Religiosity and Trust in Institutions. Emerging Trends in Greece and Europe,” in *Politics and Religions*, 161-186.

<sup>29</sup> Theoni Stathopoulou, “Religiosity and Trust in Institutions,” 165. According to a survey by Kapa Research for the newspaper *Vima*, as shown by the responses to the question “How much do you trust each of the following institutions for the progress and prosperity of our country?,” the Church enjoys the trust of 20.8% of Greek citizens and ranks the sixth position of all institutions. See “How Much has the Crisis Changed our Life and Perceptions,” *Vima*, September 7, 2014, sec. A, p. 10-11. A recent survey also shows that the Church ranks among the first five institutions Greek people trust, see the study “What Greeks believe – 2016” of the research and analysis organization “diaNEOSis,” available from <[http://www.dianeosis.org/research/greek\\_values/](http://www.dianeosis.org/research/greek_values/)> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

in the salvation of the Greek national identity, interferes in the decisions of the State and claims its “interests” either at a symbolic or material level. Despite the occasional tensions with the Greek State, the Church conserves not only its constitutional position as the dominant religion, but also its symbolic importance in the conscience of the majority of Greeks as a carrier of the Greek-orthodox identity.

In the period following the dictatorship, the Church seeks ways of legitimation in the public sphere with a strongly interventionist presence in the national-political field that increasingly becomes all the more important and puts emphasis on its role in rescuing and conserving the Greek national identity. The interventions of Archbishop Seraphim (1974-1998) and, especially, his successor Christodoulos (1998-2008), constitute an expression of ethnocentric discourse and function in a complementary way to the national ideology of the State.<sup>30</sup> Archbishop Christodoulos in particular, a charismatic and media-savvy personality, emphasized a conception of the Greek Orthodox Church as the exclusive carrier of the Greek-Christian tradition.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Christodoulos believed that the Church of Greece should intervene in all matters, thus challenging the distinct roles of religion and politics and being accused of interfering in the political field.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, in recent years, due to the economic crisis, the Church has shown a shift in strategy. Under the pressure of the economic crisis and the newly created problems, the nation-based orientation of the Church is gradually transformed into a society-based one. During the period of post-dictatorship, the Church battles to prove its contribution to the Greek nation using an ethnocentric discourse, because of the crisis, it searches for a social discourse, able to penetrate the national-

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<sup>30</sup> On the formation of Greek-Christian ideology, see Efi Gazi, *The Second Life of Three Holy Hierarchs* (Athens: Nefeli, 2004); Gerasimos Makris, and Dimitris Bekridakis, “The Greek Orthodox Church and the Economic Crisis since 2009,” *The International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 13/2 (2013): 111-132.

<sup>31</sup> See Gerasimos Makris, and Dimitris Bekridakis, “The Greek Orthodox Church and the economic crisis,” 111-132.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed analysis of Christodoulos’ era, see Dimitris Oulis, Gerasimos Makris, and Sotiris Roussos, “The Orthodox Church of Greece,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10/2-3 (2010): 192-210.

religious field, take a critical position towards the political power and create an openness to broader civil society.<sup>33</sup> This period coincides with the change of leadership in the Church of Greece and the election of Hieronymus as the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, who, contrary to the ethnocentric profile of his predecessor,<sup>34</sup> presents a profile oriented to a more open, extrovert and sociocentric, non-nationalistic Church.

To be more specific, Hieronymus, a thoughtful, modest and low-key person, takes a distance from the nationalistic discourse of his predecessor, adopts the phrase “distinct relationships between State and Church,” avoids the ethno-political interventions, does not identify with any political party, but instead he opens up even to the pro-secular Left, suggests collaboration between State and Church for the exploitation of church property, and considers national identity to be a dynamic and evolving process, without considering the Church responsible for its preservation.<sup>35</sup> He actually changes the strategy from the mobilization of his predecessor to a “controlled compromise,” i.e. “the rejection of rigorist views within the Synod and the flexible management of issues that have so far been perceived by the former ecclesiastical administration as «sacred cows».”<sup>36</sup> Taking the crisis into consideration, he turns his interest towards humanitarian and social problems, organizes the philanthropic work of the Church and establishes the NGO “Apostoli”

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<sup>33</sup> See Niki Papageorgiou, “Rethinking the Role of Religion in Public Sphere: The Case of Greek Orthodox Church under crisis,” unpublished paper presented at ESA Conference – Sociology of Religion Research Network, Belfast, 3-5 September 2014.

<sup>34</sup> On the socio-political role of the Church, see Yannis Stavrakakis, “Politics and Religion: On the «Politicization» of Greek Church Discourse,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 21 (2003): 153-81; Dimitris Oulis, Gerasimos Makris, and Sotiris Roussos, “The Orthodox Church of Greece: Policies and Challenges under Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens (1998-2008),” *The International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10/2-3 (2010): 192-210.

<sup>35</sup> See the interview of Archbishop Hieronymus, *Vima*, 6 February 2009, sec. A, p. 10 & 12.

<sup>36</sup> Konstantinos Papastathis, “From Mobilization to a Controlled Compromise: The Shift of Ecclesiastical Strategy under Archbishop Hieronymus,” in *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*, eds. Trine Stauning Willert, and Lina Molokotos-Liederman (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 212; See also the same author, “Authority and Legitimation: The Intra-Ecclesiastical Strategy of Archbishop Hieronymus of Athens,” *Religion, State & Society* 39/4 (2011): 399-415.

(Mission), which offers rich social work in the framework of the project “The Church in the streets.”<sup>37</sup>

With the signs of a socio-political and financial meltdown becoming increasingly evident as the months were passing by, the humanitarian role of the Church acquired an added significance, fast becoming the principal field wherein the Church could articulate a more vocal, but equally vague position when it came to attribute concrete political responsibility. What is more, the Church reacted to the crisis by expressing – through two encyclicals – an almost political discourse that was targeted against the memorandum and the policies that brought Greece to this adverse situation.<sup>38</sup> In these terms, the Church appears as a natural ally of the Left (and populist parties), which had turned against austerity memorandums imposed by the Troika (the European Union, the European Bank, the International Monetary Fund) and seized power by investing in an anti-memorandum discourse.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, on the one hand, the friendly attitude of the Archbishop towards leftist ideas, or, at least, his non-identification with the Right, in contrast to his predecessor, and, on the other, the adoption of an anti-memorandum discourse by the official Church had a positive effect on the prospective “encounter” of the Church and the Left, when the latter took power.

#### 4. CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES BETWEEN THE LEFT AND THE CHURCH

Under the abovementioned circumstances, when the Left comes to power, the Church is actually a hegemonic factor of public life, making

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<sup>37</sup> About the role of the Orthodox Church in the Greek economic crisis, see Lina Molokotos-Liederman, “Orthodox Social Service and the Role of the Orthodox Church in the Greek Economic Crisis,” available from <<http://www.faithineurope.org.uk/lina.pdf>> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

<sup>38</sup> See Niki Papageorgiou, “Religious Discourse and Social Power. The Church and the Financial Crisis,” in *Education of love and freedom*, ed. Department of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Thessaloniki: Vaniias, 2012), 333-346.

<sup>39</sup> See Cass Mudde, *SYRIZA: The Failure of the Populist Promise* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

serious interventions in the social field, having as its leader a modest low-profile Archbishop who exercises a non-interventionist policy of neutrality and respects the distinct roles of the State and the Church. The official meeting of Alexis Tsipras, as leader of the majority party, with Archbishop Hieronymus took place the day right after the parliamentary elections that brought SYRIZA to power (25 January 2015).<sup>40</sup>

This symbolic gesture, i.e. the visit of the leader who had the mandate to form a new government, the future Prime Minister, to the Archbishop, in fact signifies the following things: a) official recognition of the Church as an institution, already recognized by the Constitution; b) symbolic maintenance of religious authority with the support of the new government; c) recognition of the social work of the Church and what it offers in the social (and humanitarian) domain due to the financial crisis and the refugee issue – a favourite field for the party of SYRIZA before the elections;<sup>41</sup> d) interest in collaboration between the new government and the Church and reaffirmation of the good atmosphere that had been created before;<sup>42</sup> e) removal from the political agenda of SYRIZA of the topic of the separation between State and Church.

Since then, the Prime Minister has met the Archbishop many times,<sup>43</sup> showing in this way “recognition” to him as a person but also

<sup>40</sup> “Meeting of Tsipras with the Archbishop of Athens Hieronumus,” *Avgi*, January 26, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/5257114/sunantisi-tsipra-me-ton-arxiepiskopo-athinon-ieronumo-stis-2-30-to-mesimeri>> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

<sup>41</sup> “We believe that solidarity towards fellow human beings as well as the change in the migration policy are two positions shared by both the European Left and the Orthodox Church,” stated the president of SYRIZA Alexis Tsipras, when he was leader of the opposition at the meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew, see “Alexis Tsipras: The solidarity connects the Left to the Orthodox Church,” *Avgi*, January 9, 2014; available from <<https://left.gr/news/al-tsipras-i-allileggyi-sto-synanthropo-syndeei-tin-aristera-me-tin-orthodoxi-ekklisia>> [accessed: 05.07.2017]. On the meeting of Tsipras and Hieronymus focusing on the economic crisis, see “Greece of crisis in the epicenter of meeting of Tsipras and Hieronymus,” *Avgi*, December 22, 2014; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10842/5160905/h-elladates-krises-sto-epikentro-tes-synanteses-tsipra-ieronymou>> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

<sup>42</sup> As leader of the opposition, Tsipras had met not only with the Archbishop and the Ecumenical Patriarch, but also visited the Holy Mountain and Pope Francis, causing ironic comments on the part of conservative parties (and newspapers).

<sup>43</sup> “Three-hour talks and lunch between Tsipras and Hieronymus,” *Avgi*, October 14, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/5938266/triori-sunantisi-kai-geuma-tsipra->



to the Church as an institution of humanitarian and social values as well as important social work, an institution which may contribute, with its experience in social diaconia, to addressing the dire consequences of the crisis and handling the care of the refugees. For this last issue, the Prime Minister allows political ground to the Church, as he held a meeting at the Government headquarters where, except the political leadership, the responsible ministers and the local authorities, the Archbishop and the Bishops of the Aegean Sea islands, who are the first to host the refugees, were also invited.<sup>44</sup>

The political and religious leadership encounters continue to take place as there follow meetings of many members of the government (primarily ministers) with the Archbishop, indicating in this way corresponding convergence and cooperation points between the Church and the government. More specifically, the Archbishop, after the formation of the new government, had successive meetings with the Ministers of Social Welfare,<sup>45</sup> Culture,<sup>46</sup> Education and Religions.<sup>47</sup> Then, with the new government of SYRIZA that was formed after the elections of September 2015, he followed the same strategy that involved further meetings with the Ministers of Health, External Affairs, and Rural Development and Food.<sup>48</sup> Fields of

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<sup>44</sup> See the front page of *Vima*, “Tsipras invites mayors and bishops to Maximou. SOS for the islands and the refugees,” *Vima*, November 1, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> See “It takes all,” *Avgi*, February 13, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10811/5311060/chreiazontai-oloi>> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

<sup>46</sup> See “N. Xidakis to Hieronymus: Offering is civilization,” *Avgi*, February 18, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10842/5326334/n-xydakes-pros-ieronymo-e-prosphora-einai-politismos>> [accessed: 05.07.2017]; “N. Xidakis - Hieronymus Meeting: The humanitarian effort of the Church denotes civilization,” *Avgi*, February 19, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/5326723/synantese-n-xydake-ieronymou-politismos-e-anthropistike-prospatheia-tes-ekk>> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

<sup>47</sup> See Kostas Papagiannis, “Continued operation of the Commission on the Dialogue between Church and State,” *Avgi*, February 27, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/5342624/synechise-tes-leitourgias-tes-epitropes-dialogou-ekklisias-kai-politeias>> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

<sup>48</sup> “Meeting of Kouroumplis with the archbishop Hieronymus,” *Avgi*, October 6, 2015; “Meeting of Amanatidis with the archbishop Hieronymus,” *Avgi*, November 20, 2015; avail-

stable cooperation proved to be the refugee problem, with the government supporting the relevant initiatives of the Church; the humanitarian issue, with the government accepting the social service of the Church; but also the cultural issue, with plenty of room for collaboration between the authorities of both institutions in the preservation and maintenance of Christian and ecclesiastical monuments under separate State and Church roles. The Church is characterized as one of the “natural allies” of the government in facing the humanitarian crisis concerning refugees, immigrants and also the poor, a group created by the economic crisis. Even the meetings with the successive Ministers of Education and Religious Affairs are valued positively and held “in good atmosphere,” despite the fact that during these encounters the hot issue of the Church – State relations keeps constantly recurring.

What is of particular importance is the emerging and very promising cooperation between the government and the Church on the issue of ecclesiastical property disposal and management. This issue provoked a lot of controversy and tension between the Church and the State during the post-dictatorship period. On many occasions, the two authorities reached the point of rupture,<sup>49</sup> particularly when governments with a clearly secular orientation sought to retain control of church property thus provoking the reaction of the Church.

In the case of the SYRIZA government, even before this issue appeared, the Archbishop repeated the proposal that he had made to the former Right government of New Democracy for the use of church property to help pay off the debt.<sup>50</sup> For that purpose, the Company for the Development of Religious Property was established on the proposal of Hieronymus, but it has never been in operation. In response to the Archbishop’s intention

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able from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/5910792/sunantisi-kouroumpli-me-ton-arxiepiskopoi-eronumo>> [accessed: 05.07.2017].

<sup>49</sup> See Tritsi’s case. The great tension, which reached the point of becoming a crisis between the State and the Church, arose mainly when PASOK was in the government, in the decade of the 1980s, and discussed taxation of church property.

<sup>50</sup> Nikos Papadimitriou, “The Archbishop looks forward to working closely with the government,” *Avgi*, April 18, 2015; available from <<http://avgi.gr/article/10842/5470573/-xepagonei-e-epitrope-ekklecias-politeias-gia-themata-koinou-endiapherontos>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

to utilize church property to pay off part of the debt,<sup>51</sup> the Prime Minister appears to be a strong supporter of the work and role of the Church.<sup>52</sup> In his letter sent to the Archbishop, after thanking him “from the heart” for this offer, the Prime Minister praises the Church recognizing that “it sends an important message of unity in this difficult moment of a great challenge that we are called to face all together. It also shows that our greatest weapon against the crisis is solidarity, concern and care for the other, the neighbor. It finally reveals that the Church listens to the voice of the times and comes to meet the big demands of society.”<sup>53</sup>

This “courtship period,” as it was characterized by the bourgeois press,<sup>54</sup> between the left-wing government and the Church, does not show signs of stability, as periods of convergence are succeeded by periods of tensions. To be more specific, when the government promotes or shows a tendency to promote some changes in the direction of implementation of secular principles of a modern state, particularly in the fields of human and religious rights (i.e. the use of religious symbols in public space, the curriculum of religious education, the extension of civil partnership to same-sex couples, the issue of the cremation of the dead), there appear tensions between the two authorities. This occurs because the Church seems to retain a privileged position on such issues (family life, religious education, and so on), claiming those to be its own fields of action, there-

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<sup>51</sup> “Archbishop Hieronymus: Use church property to pay off debt without selling it out,” *Avgi*, April 13, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/5460907/archiepiskopos-ieronimos-as-axiopoiethei-choris-na-polethei-e-ekklasiasti>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>52</sup> “Tsipras’ letter to Hieronymus: Positive initiative for the utilization of church property,” *Avgi*, April 17, 2015; available from <<http://www.topontiki.gr/article/125384/eyharisto-toy-tsipra-ston-arhiepiskopo-ieronimo>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>53</sup> “Archbishop Hieronymus: Use church property to pay off debt without selling it out,” *Avgi*, April 13, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/5460907/archiepiskopos-ieronimos-as-axiopoiethei-choris-na-polethei-e-ekklasiasti>> [accessed: 06.07.2017]; “Tsipras’ letter to Hieronymus: Positive initiative for the utilization of church property,” *Avgi*, April 17, 2015; available from <<http://www.topontiki.gr/article/125384/eyharisto-toy-tsipra-ston-arhiepiskopo-ieronimo>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>54</sup> See “The courtship between Alexis and the Church is continuing! A new meeting of Tsipras – Hieronymus,” *The Caller*, November 4, 2015; available from <<http://thecaller.gr/politiki/sinexizetai-to-flert-tou-alexi-me-tin-ekklisia-nea-sinantisi-tsipra-ieronimou/>> [accessed: 06.07.2017]; “Does the Church give its hand to Tsipras or Tsipras to the Church?,” *Exapsalmos*, January 8, 2015; available from <<http://www.exapsalmos.gr/2015/01/08/>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

fore causing friction and tension with the government. In fact, in such cases the governmental newspaper *Avgi* does not simply cover the events, but hosts extensive opinion articles which express the leftist ideology and further escalate the ideological confrontation with the Church.

Tensions start when a question arises on the issue of implementation of human rights in the family field, a field that has generated many conflicts in the past between the Church and the State (civil marriage, etc.). At present time, it is the extension of cohabitation agreement to same-sex couples, which, when it was passed in 2008, applied only to different-sex couples. The vindication of same-sex couples by the European Court of Human Rights and the required compliance of the Greek State to this decision brought this issue back into the spotlight and provoked the Church's reaction. The Archbishop and the Holy Synod responded, supporting the traditional positions of the Church, i.e. that "[the] union of two people through marriage is a great mystery ... [a]ny breach of this mystery is alien to ecclesiastical life."<sup>55</sup> The Archbishop points out that "any other form of cohabitation outside Christian marriage, either «civil marriage» or «cohabitation agreement», is rejected by the Holy Synod."<sup>56</sup> The government, through the Minister of Justice, refuses to negotiate this issue with the Church arguing that it is a matter of legal and constitutional order which concerns one's right to self-determination and difference.<sup>57</sup> The extension of cohabitation agreement was finally passed in December 2015 with the Church maintaining its position, questioning the voting process by the Parliament that passed the agreement as a new law of the State.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See "Hieronymus: The Cohabitation Agreement is alien to ecclesiastical life," *Avgi*, June 11, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/5609528/ieronimos-xeno-ros-ten-ekklasiastike-zoe-to-symphono-symbiotes>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>56</sup> See Kostas Papagiannis, "Letter of Hieronymus to N. Paraskevopoulos about the Cohabitation Agreement," *Avgi*, June 17, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10808/5624609/epistole-ieronimou-ston-n-paraskeuopoulo-gia-to-symphono-symbiotes>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>57</sup> See "Letter of N. Paraskevopoulos to the Archbishop about the Cohabitation Agreement," *Avgi*, June 19, 2015; available from <<http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=714531>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>58</sup> See Kostas Papagiannis, and Mina Mitropoulou, "Submission of the bill on cohabitation agreement for same-sex couples," *Avgi*, December 10, 2015; available from <<http://www>

In addition, the issue of simplification of the procedure for the exemption from the compulsory subject of religious education, and in general the change of the orientation of this course from a confessional one to the one focusing on the history of religion with a view to better implementing the right to religious freedom of all students, was another issue of controversy, which is still under negotiation.<sup>59</sup> Despite the fact that religious education is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the courses are designed by the Institute of Educational Politics, any change or transformation initiates interventions on the part of the Church. The Church claims that the content and format of religious courses should remain confessional and obligatory, because they summarize the principles of the Greek-Orthodox tradition which the Church is prepared to preserve (as the task assigned to them), something that nevertheless contradicts the principles of religious freedom in a secular state.

A third issue that triggered friction in the relations between the government and the Church is the cremation of the dead. Although there has been legislative framework for cremation in Greece since 2006, no crematorium has yet been built due to a variety of reasons (reaction of the Church, negligence of the municipalities where cemeteries belong, etc). In October 2015, the government made some amendments to the law on cremation that concerns the environmental licensing process of Cremation Centers.<sup>60</sup> It brought the issue to be voted by the Parliament

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[avgi.gr/article/6096086/katatethike-to-nomosxedio-gia-to-sumfono-sumbiosis-sta-omofula-zeugi](http://avgi.gr/article/6096086/katatethike-to-nomosxedio-gia-to-sumfono-sumbiosis-sta-omofula-zeugi) [accessed: 06.07.2017]. See also “Hieronymus: What is needed is collaboration between State and Church and Tsipras knows that,” *Avgi*, December 13, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/6106430/ieronimos-apaiteitai-synergasia-kratous-ekklesias-kai-o-tsipras-to-echei-k>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>59</sup> See “Archbishop Hieronymus: The Constitution is only competent for the education character,” *Avgi*, September 27, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/5889975/arxiepiskopos-ieronimos-armodio-mono-to-suntagma-gia-ton-xarakтира-tis-paideias>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>60</sup> See “Cremation has been made possible – it was signed by Skourletis,” *iefimerida.gr*, October 15, 2015; available from <<http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/231052/anoixe-o-dromos-gia-tin-apotefrosi-nekron-ytegrapse-o-skoyrletis#ixzz4ISgW7Qid>> [accessed: 06.07.2017]. “It is paved the way for the Cremation Centers,” *Proto Thema*, October 16, 2015; available from <<http://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/518697/anoixe-o-dromos-adeiodotisis-gia-ta-kedra-apotefrosis-nekron/>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

arguing, through the Minister of Internal Affairs, that incineration “is an element of quality of democracy and as such it ensures the free will of each individual to determine themselves.”<sup>61</sup> The resurfacing of the issue led again to the reaction of the Church that, through the Holy Synod, expressed its strong disagreement, maintaining its positions “that the human body, as the temple of the Holy Spirit” cannot be disposed of in the same way that rubbish is disposed of and recycled.<sup>62</sup> However, the Archbishop, in a more moderate tone, using the same arguments as the government, i.e. the right to religious freedom, maintains that everyone is free to choose their way of burial but without having the right to demand an Orthodox funeral service from the Church.<sup>63</sup> He accepts crematoriums, provided they operate away from Christian cemeteries.<sup>64</sup>

The following table presents schematically SYRIZA’s attitude before and after taking power:

<b>SYRIZA’s positions as the opposition party (before 2015)</b>	<b>Practices of SYRIZA as the government (2015)</b>
Separation between State and Church	Maintaining State-Church relations
Abolition of compulsory churchgoing and morning prayer at school	No discussion
Abolition of religious education	Preservation of religious education – modernization of its content
Removal of religious affairs from the responsibility of the Ministry of Education	No change/No discussion
Creation of worship spaces for the citizens of all doctrines	No action

<sup>61</sup> See Electra Viskadouraki, “Pan. Kouroubilis: The issue of cremation of the dead has matured,” *Avgi*, December 18, 2015; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/6121470/pan-kouroumples-echei-orimasei-to-zetema-tes-apotephroses-nekron>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>62</sup> See Kostas Papagiannis, “The Church considers cremation of the dead to be «Recycling»!,” *Avgi*, January 15, 2016; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/6185229/-anakuklosi-aporrimmaton-theorei-i-ekklesia-tin-kausi-nekron->>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>63</sup> See “Hieronymus on cremation: Everyone is free to choose whatever they wish,” *Avgi*, January 15, 2016; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/6186953/ieronumos-gia-kausi-nekron-kathe-anthropos-einai-eleutheros-na-dialexei-auto-pou-thelei->>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

<sup>64</sup> See Kostas Papagiannis, “Hieronymus: Build crematoriums away from cemeteries,” *Avgi*, January 23, 2016; available from <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10813/6204386/ieronumos-apotephroteria-nekron-makria-apo-ta-koimeteria->>> [accessed: 06.07.2017].

Recognition of the right to burn the dead	Adjustments to the existing law since 2006
Taxation of ecclesiastical property	No discussion
Removal of clerical salaries from the state payroll	No discussion

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, one could summarize that during the first year of the left-wing government in Greece, the Church has retained its hegemonic position in the Greek public life. Despite the leftist political positions on State and Church separation as well as control of the ecclesiastical field by the State, for the moment, there has been no institutional change concerning the Church whatsoever. The leftist government accepts the ecclesiastical authority, adopting a strategy of respect and recognition that was evident in a series of symbolic actions, such as the meetings of the Prime Minister and Ministers with the Archbishop, but also real ones, such as the collaboration in the humanitarian and social fields.

What seems to play a significant role in shaping this direction is the personality of Archbishop Hieronymus who, as a moderate and conciliatory religious leader, respects the distinct roles of the State and the Church and does not get involved in politics. This paves the way for a harmonious and dialectical coexistence, which is characterized by multiple convergences and mutual acceptance at the institutional level. Nevertheless, this coexistence is disturbed by controversies and tensions, whenever the government, in accordance with the principles of a modern secular state, promotes the implementation of human rights, particularly in fields that are considered privileged for the Church, i.e. family issues and religious education.

To sum up, the relations between the two fields are characterized by convergences and divergences, and phases of collaboration and conflict. It seems that one year of leftist governance is actually a miniature of the whole post-dictatorship period, with alternate spells of cooperation and tension between the secular and religious institutions. However, this tension does not seem to be sufficient to disrupt, at least for the time

being, the established relationship between the two institutions, given the critical socio-economic situation in Greece.

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LEWICA I KOŚCIÓŁ W GRECJI:  
AMBIWALENTNY KSZTAŁT RELACJI  
POMIĘDZY SFERĄ POLITYKI I SFERĄ RELIGII

### Streszczenie

Dojście do władzy w Grecji przez lewicową partię w styczniu 2015 r. odmieniło scenę polityczną i po długim okresie rządów tzw. partii systemowych stworzyło podstawy dla nowych oczekiwań politycznych. Lewicowa partia SYRIZA została wybrana przez greckich obywateli jako nowa siła polityczna, która zapoczątkuje nową politykę, jako że do jej ambicji należało rozwiązanie problemów ekonomicznych kraju, przywrócenie sprawiedliwości społecznej i przeciwstawienie się głębokiemu kryzysowi humanitarnemu spowodowanemu długotrwałym kryzysem ekonomicznym. Jeśli chodzi o kwestie religijne, stałym celem partii lewicowych była separacja między Państwem i Kościołem, co miało prowadzić do pełnej niezależności Państwa od wpływów religijnych i kościelnych, jak również upaństwowienie majątku kościelnego, przeniesienie ciężaru wynagrodzenia duchownych na Kościół oraz wiele podobnych postulatów w kwestiach, które wpływają na kształt relacji między Państwem i Kościołem w Grecji. Niniejszy artykuł odnosi się w szczególności do relacji między SYRIZĄ i Prawosławnym Kościołem Grecji w czasie pierwszego roku rządów lewicowych, przedstawiając omówienie oficjalnego dyskursu i politycznej praktyki rządzącej partii. Dla przedstawienia tych kwestii analizie poddano publikacje ukazujące się na łamach gazety *Avgi* będącej oficjalnym medium SYRIZY.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Lewica; Kościół; Grecja; polityka; religia; wolność religijna

**Key words:** the Left; the Church; Greece; politics; religion; religious freedom

*Tłumaczenie: Daria Bębeniec*