

SEESOX Diaspora
Working Paper
Series
No. 12



Homeland crisis, party politics and the Greek diaspora vote

by Othon Anastasakis and Foteini Kalantzi

June 2021

Homeland crisis, party politics and the Greek diaspora vote

Othon Anastasakis (University of Oxford, SEESOX)

email: othon.anastasakis@sant.ox.ac.uk

Foteini Kalantzi (University of Oxford, SEESOX)

email: Foteini.kalantzi@sant.ox.ac.uk

SEESOX Diaspora Working Paper Series. Paper No. 12

All views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of SEESOX

Homeland crisis, party politics and the Greek diaspora vote

Othon Anastasakis and Foteini Kalantzi

Abstract

In December 2019, the Greek Parliament voted by an overwhelming majority a long overdue law which allowed Greeks of the diaspora to vote from their place of residence. The fact that this change took place 44 years after the right was first introduced in the Greek Constitution, is not a mere chronological coincidence but we claim had to do with a number of combined conjunctural factors that led to a breakthrough reform in homeland-diaspora political relations. By tracing the party-political and societal discursive and mobilizational dynamics, our article looks at the micropolitics of this policy change and argues that the post-2009 Greek economic crisis with its rising levels of emigration and a changing political class acted as catalysts in the redefinition of homeland diaspora political engagement. The aim of this paper is threefold: first, to test some theoretical diasporic debates using Greece as a case study; second, to discuss the conditions behind an important political change in the context of Greece's interaction with its diaspora; and third, to offer our empirical work as potential inspiration for other comparable cases.

Keywords: critical juncture, diaspora, diasporic vote, emigration, Greek crisis, Greek political parties.

Introduction

In December 2019, a law on the facilitation of the Greek citizens to vote abroad was adopted in the Greek parliament by an overwhelming majority of 288 out of 300 MPs. As it happened, it took 44 years - after the right for Greek citizens abroad to vote was first introduced in the Greek constitution of 1975 - for the Greek parliament to legislate how to facilitate this absentee voting. For years Greek parties had refused to vote for such facilitation, and registered Greek voters living abroad were expected to travel back to Greece to cast their ballot in the national elections. From that perspective, the law on the facilitation was a breakthrough moment in diaspora-homeland political relations, as well as one of the rare instances of parliamentary consensus across the political spectrum. In this paper, we propose as a starting point that the post-2009 period of Greece's severe economic crisis was pivotal for the adoption of this change.

Crises for states and their peoples are usually marked by compounding and consecutive difficulties, negative risks and backsliding. As has been abundantly documented, the Greek post-2009 crisis in Greece had massive impact on the economic, political and social affairs of the country (Katsikas, 2020; Bournakis, et al. 2017; Doxiadis & Placas, 2018). As such, and like in so many other areas, the Greek crisis and the austerity that accompanied it, had significant negative influence on Greek state-diaspora relations. This became visible in the faltering performance of various diasporic institutions: many consulates closed or saw their budgets shrink, the Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE) fell into irrelevance, many cultural and educational centres had to reduce their activities, and overall, the credibility of the Greek state in the eyes of its diaspora was lost. While crisis is always related to negative events, there are instances where it can be a catalyst for positive change. One such unintended positive change was the facilitation of the diasporic vote outside the country, a central feature in the relationship between the Greek state and its diaspora.

In this paper, our central question is how did this change come about? Or, put differently, what were the conditions that led the overwhelming majority of parties to adopt this important law at that particular moment in time? To address this central question we will be breaking it down into three sub-questions: First, how did the economic crisis contribute to the mobilisation in favour of the diasporic vote? Second, why did political parties, as the main agents in this decision-making process, end up supporting this reform? Third, did the international environment (increasing diasporic electoral involvement in many countries of the world) have any impact on the Greek case? This working paper is structured as follows: the first part, offers a succinct conceptual discussion on the issue of the diasporic vote; the second part discusses Greece's failed attempts to legislate on the implementation of the diasporic vote abroad; and the third, and main part, analyses the crisis-related factors that led to the adoption of the law on the facilitation of the diasporic vote.

Introducing the variables

In this paper, we adopt three propositions which form the core of our thinking and research agenda: first, the crisis acted as a critical juncture with transformative potential; the high volume of emigration and the changes in party politics acted as catalysts for change; second, political parties, as the most relevant actors in the implementation of the expat vote, could no more evade this change; third, the widespread implementation of the diasporic vote internationally left Greece an international outlier and functioned as normative pressure on the Greek political system to address the issue. By looking at these three propositions, we are attempting to discuss the motives, objectives and interests behind this significant change, and contribute with a case study to the wider diaspora literature which looks at 'microfoundations' of diaspora politics (Délano Alonso & Mylonas, 2017).

Crisis as critical juncture

Crisis as a critical juncture and catalyst for change is usually composed of a series of important moments and chain of events that lead agency to change. Capoccia (2015, p.148) defines critical junctures as 'those moments in which uncertainty as to the future of an institutional arrangement allows for political agency to play a decisive causal role in setting an institution on a certain path of development, a path that then persists over a long period of time'. The period that this paper is investigating (2009-2019), was one when the country underwent massive changes, many of them designed and dictated from abroad by the Troika overseeing the progress of the country, but also unintended changes which were created by the depth and longevity of the crisis. The most important and relevant catalysts in our case was the large wave of emigration caused by high unemployment (28% at its peak in 2013) and the reshaping of the party-political status quo.

The majority of case studies in the diaspora literature which explore crises as critical periods often focus on weak and conflictual states, and the ways their diasporas engage or mobilise in order to influence the political situation in the homeland along nationalistic, ethnic, religious or other divisive grounds (Kaldor, 2001; Adamson, 2005; Koinova, 2011). Some characteristic and contemporary cases of this include the post-Yugoslav states (Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo) and Ukraine during the Euromaidan revolution and the Crimean crisis (Koinova, 2009; Lapshyna & Duvell, 2015). However, as an advanced western economy and consolidated democracy undergoing severe economic depression, the Greek case raises the question how the diasporic communities and individuals engaged with, or disengaged from, their homeland in need, and vice versa. Our discussion in this paper is country specific but it can be generalisable to other cases, like Portugal, Spain or Italy - all three of them experienced negative rates of growth and waves of emigration during the eurozone crisis as well.

Parties as agents of change

Political parties are pivotal, and the main determining factors, for any changes in the diasporic vote (Lafleur, 2011). As Paarlberg argues (2017), the principal interest of parties in diaspora is that they are potential voters. However, the unpredictability and low controllability of the diasporic vote makes the facilitation of the diasporic vote a risky business for all political parties. Additionally, the high diasporic administrative and logistical electoral costs, and at times, the low participation rates are further considerations (Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015, p. 430).

The most convincing normative argument for supporting the adoption and implementation of the right to vote outside the country is that democracies ought to be inclusionary and avoid creating divisions between first-class citizens at home and second-class voting citizens abroad. Additionally, exercising the right to vote keeps diasporans engaged in homeland affairs and can bring further benefits to the home country, such as financial remittances, investments, and technical know-how (Lafleur, 2011; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Collyer, 2013). Also, it can benefit bilateral relations with host states or give a boost to the homeland's foreign policy through lobbying and support for issues of national interest (Collyer, 2013, p. xv). The counter-factual argument against diaspora voting claims that those who have left and are living in a host country should not have the right to decide on the internal matters of the homeland. The issue is not one dimensional and this is represented by the varieties of electoral practices adopted by different states which involve various types of conditions and restrictions, in how the vote is conducted (physical presence, electronic, postal), who should vote among diasporans (financial, chronological or other criteria) and whom to vote for (regional, diaspora or state ballots).

The international environment as transnational pressure

The third factor under scrutiny relates to the degree of external influence upon a country's decision to proceed with the adoption and implementation of the expat vote. Any diasporic participation in national elections is an expression of political engagement, nurturing the maintenance of political ties with the homeland. Diaspora voting constitutes a highly practical and symbolic issue, as a person that no longer lives in their country of origin, can still retain a meaningful stake in the elections of that country (Gamlen, 2019). Voting from abroad is an expression of political transnationalism that involves homeland electoral strategies and practices towards an electorally hybrid group of potential voters beyond the national borders and can influence the electoral outcome in the homeland from abroad. As Gamlen argues, such transnational electoral practices have been increasing over the last three decades creating an established international norm. In the present paper we explore the appropriateness of the 'norm internationalisation hypothesis' (Arrighi & Lafleur, 2017; Lafleur, 2014) in the Greek case and how significant the international practice of the expat vote was in effecting legislative change. We also discuss the inconsistency between the practice (since 1984) of allowing Greek voters abroad to vote in the consulates of their host

EU countries for European Parliament elections, while not allowing the same accommodation for voting in Greek national elections.

Methodology

In order to analyse our three propositions, we employed process tracing to establish whether and how relevant circumstances influenced a certain outcome. Our methodology is based on primary research by looking at the positions of parties from Parliamentary Hansards of the period 2009 to 2019. We also scrutinised reports such as those of the Special Permanent Committee on Greeks Abroad (SPCGA) to further support the evidence-based research. In addition, we consulted legal texts, such as the Greek Constitution, decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and EU Council decisions. Furthermore, we conducted research on a wide range of online media,¹ to retrieve further information about the positions of parties, political leaders, and to follow public discourse. We consulted secondary literature in order to include views of analysts, intellectuals and diaspora actors. Finally, we convened a series of panels and seminars with experts in the field, in order to have a more critical scientific view on the subject matter.²

Pre-2009: missed opportunities for the implementation of the diasporic vote abroad

Since its inception as a modern state in the early 19th century, Greece has grappled with a core division between two categories of Greeks: ‘natives’ and ‘outsiders’ (*‘aftochthones’* and *‘heterochthones’*). In addition, the large numbers of emigration before the Greek state borders were finalised in 1948 made it even more difficult to establish an institutionalised relationship between the Greek central state and wider Hellenism. Beyond the traditional connections with high profile and affluent Greeks abroad (merchants or the shipping sector), the Greek diaspora was a largely unknown entity and quantity to the Greek state. Moreover, the most organised form of involvement by the Greek state were the post-WWII emigration agreements with Western European countries.

The collapse of the military junta in 1974 was the first major event paving the way for a transition to democracy. Significantly, the 1975 constitution embraced the relationship

¹ Examples of Greek online media: Kathimerini.gr, enet.gr, iefimerida.gr, tvxs.gr, in.gr, tovima.gr, newsit.gr, zougla.gr. Also, examples of diasporic Greek online media covering the issue with regular reporting include greekreporter.com, newgreektv.com, neoskosmos.com, greekcitytimes.com, thenationalherald.com, tornosnews.gr.

² In the context of our Greek Diaspora Project at SEESOX, we organised a series of panels and conferences in Oxford and elsewhere on diasporic political engagement from a Greek and comparative perspectives. Among the many we highlight, one in Athens on the 29th of October 2018 on ‘The political participation of the Greeks abroad’ (<http://seesoxdiaspora.org/activities/joint-events/the-political-participation-of-greeks-abroad>) and one in London on the 17th of October 2019 on ‘Greek diaspora in the UK and beyond’ (<http://seesoxdiaspora.org/activities/events/seminars/contemporary-greek-diaspora-in-the-uk-and-beyond>)

between diaspora and homeland in article 108 which stipulated the obligation of the Greek state to 'take care of emigrant Greeks abroad and of the maintenance of their ties with the Fatherland' (Dufoix, 2003, p. 41). In addition, there were special constitutional provisions for the diasporic vote. Article 51 paragraph 4 of the 1975 Constitution states that 'matters pertaining to the exercise of the right to vote by persons living outside the country may be specified by law', leaving the matter (effectively) to the willingness of future legislators.

In 1984, following Greece's membership in the European Community, the Greek government legislated that expat Greeks could vote in European Parliament elections in polling stations in consulates in the EU states. However, there was no parallel law enacted for national elections. During the 1980s and the 1990s, the Greek state built substantial diasporic institutional architecture including, inter alia, the creation of the 'General Secretariat for the Greeks Abroad', the 'Council for Hellenes Abroad', as well as various institutes and foundations for the support of the Greek culture and Greek language abroad.

In 2001 an amendment to article 51 to facilitate expat voting was considered in the Greek Parliament, but it failed to get the needed two thirds of MPs to support it. The law explicitly mentioned the possibility of a 'postal ballot' as well as 'other appropriate means' to accommodate expat voting. The next attempt came with the 2009 Bill called 'Exercise of the right to vote in parliamentary elections by Greek voters living abroad' under the New Democracy (ND) government, which failed to secure the majority of two thirds, voted by just 159 out of 300 MPs.

Throughout the pre-2009 period, the diasporic voting issue never acquired any political urgency, and remained an affair between the two dominant parties of the centre-right New Democracy and the centre-left PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Party), approached through the prism of micro-political and short-term electoral calculations. Both parties developed their respective party mechanisms of electoral mobilisation in European states where large Greek communities lived. Yet, instead of legislating for the facilitation of the vote abroad, they opted for short-term clientelistic practices of granting free or cheap tickets via the national carrier, Olympic Airways, to their respective voters to travel to Greece to vote. Generally, the pre-2009 period of the Third Hellenic Republic lacked the critical juncture which would serve as a catalyst for the implementation of the expat vote. As it happened, the post-1974 period was one of uninterrupted economic growth, limited outward migration, considerable inward migration and remigration, thus weakening the urgency and topicality of the matter and confining the agency into micro-political and legalistic objectives.

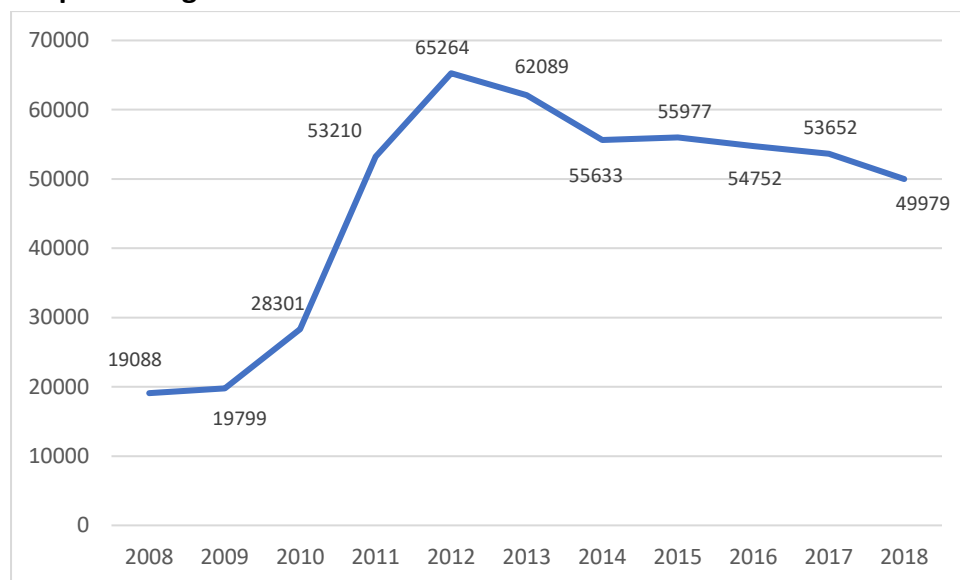
Post-2009: the crisis as critical juncture for the vote reform

Greece's severe economic crisis had significant economic, political and social repercussions. It saw a massive economic downturn, political polarisation and societal disaffection. As this paper argues, the crisis provided the context for this unintended reform in the diaspora's

electoral engagement in the national elections. This came about as a result of two significant developments: the rise of emigration and the party-political reconfiguration.

The dramatic rise in unemployment during the years of crisis led to mass emigration (see graph 1). This was the third large wave of migration in Greece’s modern history.³ Nearly half a million people left the country, some of whom were younger and educated, the so called ‘brain-drainers’, but with many more people from other professional and social backgrounds who left the country resulting in a substantial human and labour drain (Lazaretou, 2016; Peliccia, 2013; Pratsinakis & Labrianidis, 2017). This crisis-led migration led to a new first generation of diaspora Greeks, adding to the existing numbers of the existing diasporic populations. This new generation of Greek citizens abroad held strong connections with the Greek homeland forming a hybrid transnational ‘electoral constituency’, with a potential political voice that could not be ignored.

Graph 1: Emigration flows of Greek citizens



Source: Eurostat

The other major catalyst was the collapse of Greece’s post-1974 traditional two-party ND/PASOK system, with the centre-right ND retaining one pole, but with PASOK losing out massively to the new left-wing party of SYRIZA. SYRIZA became the alternative pole, and included a number of smaller and ephemeral parties in parliament from the far right Golden Dawn and the nationalistic Independent Greeks (ANEL) to the liberal centre left To Potami. (All three parties saw their entry into Parliament during the years of crisis and then disappeared after the 2019 elections). The rise of a new two-party system was sealed with the two national elections of 2015 (February and September) when SYRIZA secured first place

³ The first wave of emigration was induced by the economic crisis of 1893 that followed the rapid fall in the price of currants - the major export product of the country – in the international markets. The second wave was after WWII, when more than one million Greeks migrated to Western Europe, the US, Canada, and Australia (Kasimi & Kassimi, 2004)

with 36.3% and 35.5% respectively of the national vote, with ND second at 27.8% and 28.1%. In July 2019, ND came back to power with 39.7%, and that was the government which achieved the parliamentary vote of the expat voting bill during its first months in power.

The tremendous decline of PASOK, in particular, was a game changer in the diasporic outreach strategies of political parties during the crisis years. PASOK had been born during the Greek dictatorship by exiled centre-left politicians in western host countries like Sweden, Canada or the United States. It had traditionally enjoyed the support of Greek workers (*gastarbeiters*) in Germany. PASOK became the principal advocate of engagement with diaspora, and it was during its years in government in the 1980s and 1990s that most of the diasporic institutions were created. The decline of PASOK during the crisis offered the chance for ND, as we shall show below, to dominate the diasporic political space and to become the main advocate of the diasporic vote. Moreover, by espousing a technocratic cum nationalistic outlook, especially after 2016 under the leadership of Kyriakos Mitsotakis, ND aimed at appealing to what the party considered to be the dominant profiles of the majority of the diasporans who would be potentially interested to vote abroad.

Political parties: from veto players to agents of change

The role of political parties as the main potential beneficiaries or losers of the extended vote abroad is the crucial variable to understand such a decisive change. In this section, we will show how Greek political parties went from 'veto players' during the pre-crisis years to agents of change. According to Tsebelis (2002), a veto player is a political actor who has the ability to decline a choice being made and can stop a change from the status quo. For more than three decades the two main political parties in Greece claimed to support empowering diasporic voters, but in practice they repeatedly blocked legislation allowing easier expat voting. The uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of the expat vote was the main deterrent, as that constituency had the potential to be a deciding bloc in times of marginal elections. As with many other much needed reforms in Greece, this was a case of a gap between promise and performance, which bedevilled the modernisation of the Greek state (Alison & Nicolaidis, 1996).

In our analysis of the Parliamentary Hansards during the crisis period, we noticed that the voting rights of Greeks abroad became one of the most persistent discussions in the diaspora related debates, compared with other diasporic issues, such as cultural ties, Greek language and education abroad, or economic support from wealthy diaspora. Our analysis detected no major party divisions, with most of them flattering the diaspora and acknowledging the positive role that they can play vis-a-vis the difficult economic position of the country or fixing the negative image abroad. In the timeframe of our research (2009-19), we also noticed that the diasporic vote was discussed in Parliament not only in conjunction with other diaspora matters, but often in connection with the voting rights of legal migrants in Greece. Also, in the context of the wider electoral law, and more frequently as a proposal or question originating from ND party, which gradually became the most consistent supporter

in favour of the vote abroad. So, while the expat vote was not the first priority during the first years of the crisis, it became more prominent after 2016 when the impact of emigration became more tangible.

The ND government's 2009 attempt to pass the bill on the facilitation of the diasporic vote failed to achieve a majority. That provided the backdrop for the ND's criticism of the PASOK government for not supporting the 2009 Bill, and helped the ND build an image of a pro-diasporic party (tovima.gr 3/2/2011). According to the 2013 Committee report, SYRIZA had to take a position on the issue stating that they were in favour of the fair and free vote for Greeks abroad. They also proposed the creation of a separate electoral region for Greeks diasporans, from which a number of between 6 to 10 MPs would be elected during national elections. Being a newcomer in diasporic politics with the prospect of becoming a major party in Greek politics, SYRIZA did not possess the historical connections, or the know-how and the mechanisms to appeal to the diasporic vote. It was thus much more inclined to strike a balance between positive rhetoric and cautious practice.

In 2014, the diasporic vote was again a subject of tense discussion, in the context of a bill relating to European Parliament elections (13th term of Parliamentary Republic, Session C 26/2/2014). The bill in question incorporated, in effect, provisions for the exclusion of legal immigrants in Greece and repatriated Greeks from voting rights or to stand as a candidate in local elections based on the 460/2013 decision of the Council of State.⁴ The parties of the opposition fulminated against this legislation. For example, the nationalist ANEL argued that the particular legislation lumped foreigners and the diasporans ('of Greek blood) together, asking the government to grant full voting rights to diasporans through facilitation of their naturalisation.⁵ In December 2015, with SYRIZA in power, the Special Permanent Committee of Greeks abroad (2015) published a roadmap, setting out 'a frame of priorities' which included, among others, the expat vote.⁶

From then on, both party leaders of SYRIZA and ND, Alexis Tsipras and Kyriakos Mitsotakis respectively, competed for the affection of the diaspora with interviews in diasporic newspapers, like the National Herald. Tsipras, in his pre-electoral campaign just before his party won the elections for the first time, claimed that 'it is inconceivable that Greek citizens are the only EU citizens who are in effect deprived from the inalienable right to vote' which was what he called 'a longstanding governmental neglect' (thenationalherald.com, 16/1/2015). Mitsotakis, a few months after becoming ND party leader, announced in the same newspaper (9/4/2016) that the bill for the voting rights of the Greeks abroad would go through with the ND in power, signalling the ND's commitment if re-elected. In that same year, ND opposition submitted a law proposal concerning the expat vote, igniting parliamentary discussion on the subject. This proposal was discussed in

⁴ The Council of State considered that Law 3838/2010 (*'Current provisions for Greek citizenship and political participation of repatriated Greeks and lawfully resident immigrants and other adjustments'*) to be incompatible with the Greek Constitution.

⁵ 13th term of Parliamentary Republic, Session C 26/2/2014.

⁶ Roadmap of actions, SPCGA, December 2015

conjunction with the reform of the voting system, the latter being a top priority for SYRIZA. By then a major distinction was developing: New Democracy reacting to change in the electoral system towards more proportional representation, yet supporting an inclusionary system of diasporic vote, and SYRIZA espousing wider electoral reform towards more proportional representation, but more restrictive on the issue of the expat vote. Ever cautious, SYRIZA argued that the expat vote required a reliable census of the Greek citizens abroad (17th term of parliamentary Republic, Session A 19/6/2016).⁷ For its part, PASOK, a shadow of its former self with 4.7% of the vote and 13 seats in Parliament, argued that the ND, in essence, brought back its 2009 law on the basis of its 'usual vote extraction' mentality and suggested the election of diaspora MPs on specially designated diaspora constituencies (naftemporiki.gr, 2016).

Responding to SYRIZA and PASOK, Mitsotakis reiterated his promise that when in government he would materialise the expat vote (tanea.gr 31/12/2016) and asked the government of SYRIZA to support the ND draft bill (tovima.gr 23/10/2017).⁸ In general, ND was assumed to hold a close affinity with influential sectors of the Greek diaspora (conservative values, nationalist foreign policy and closer connections with Church), and in addition Mitsotakis, himself, sought to establish a special links with the recent wave of brain-drainers by appealing to their technocratic profile.

From that point on, we observed increased coverage in Greek newspapers on the expat vote issue. Gradually but steadily, the diasporic vote became not just a prominent parliamentary issue but a public one as well which invited wider dialogue on the issue beyond the confines of the party system and the constitutionalists, raising public awareness on the matter.⁹ Responding to this momentum, the government of SYRIZA set up a Special Committee of Experts in October 2018 to deliberate on the matter, a turning point, in terms of committing the more reluctant party of SYRIZA to engage with the issue. A possible factor that led to this move was the reform of the electoral law of the EU whereby the government had to ratify the Council decision 2018/994 of 13 July 2018.¹⁰ During its deliberations, the Special Committee, chaired by the General Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior and a group of experts and scholars, had to address three main questions: Who among Greeks abroad should be allowed and facilitated to vote abroad?; Whom - which list of MPs would they vote for?; How would they be facilitated? Among the most contentious points in the committee's deliberations was whether the vote of diaspora Greeks should be counted in the final election result, on the grounds that doing so would give the diaspora disproportionate power over the outcome. The committee proposed that all those who had Greek citizenship and were registered to vote had the right to vote abroad, regardless of how many years they

⁷ MP Ioannis Giolas

⁸ Kyriakos Mitsotakis submitted a draft bill in April 2016, and then resubmitted in 2017, and in 2018.

⁹ Examples of diasporic Greek online media covering the issue with regular reporting include greekreporter.com, newgreektv.com, neoskosmos.com, greekcitytimes.com, thenationalherald.com, tornosnews.gr.

¹⁰ The Council decision amended the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, annexed to Council Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom of 20 September 1976 (Council Decision (EU, Euratom) 2018/994, 2018).

had been absent from Greece. They also proposed physical voting at the consulates or special constituencies set up for this purpose, and for state ballots of the parties. While the report made concrete suggestions on the matter, these did not result in a bill to be voted in parliament. SYRIZA's skittishness around the upcoming national and European elections in May 2019 and its declining popularity at the time meant that it did not want to risk an external vote that would favour the opponent.

Once in power, ND brought the issue back to Parliament, adopting a maximalist inclusionary approach, i.e. all Greek nationals who were registered in the electoral lists should be allowed to vote abroad without any restrictions and should be counted in the overall electoral result. Despite the fact that SYRIZA disagreed with the new bill on a number of points (the number of Greeks who could claim citizenship; reaction to the postal vote; extra-territorial MPs and outcome not included in the overall result), in the end, voted for the bill, negotiating on points which they feared would detract votes from SYRIZA and KKE. SYRIZA arguably ended up supporting the bill because of the increasing pressure that was building between the government and the other two opposition parties - KINAL (PASOK's descendant) and the newcomer nationalist party, The Greek Solution. Fearing the prospect of being branded anti-diaspora, SYRIZA joined the wider accord (Kathimerini.gr 19/10/2019). At the same time, ND retreated from its initial maximalist positions in order to find a common ground and push the bill through. Effectively, in December 2019, the Greek Parliament voted in favour of a bill that facilitated the voting rights of the Greek diaspora. Out of a total of 296 parliamentarians present, 288 voted in favour, 1 abstained, and 7 voted against the bill.

The final bill was a compromise between the different party positions, primarily between those of ND and SYRIZA. Greeks abroad, or at least a portion of them, would be allowed to vote from their country of residence, but under strict conditions: to have lived for a total of two years in Greece during the past 35 years; to have submitted a tax return to the Greek authorities during the election year or the one preceding; to be able to vote only for candidates who are the party's chosen 'state deputies' and not the parliamentarians that represent a particular regional constituency. The law also required them to select areas where polling stations would be set up and could only vote if there were 40 voters eligible to cast their ballots in their districts. With this bill, the principle of the diasporic vote was finally adopted, but the actual practice entailed major restrictions.

The international norm: Greece as an outlier

The international normative environment and the increasing global significance of diasporic voting also impacted the Greek bill. From the mid-2000s, Greece was in the minority of countries that did not facilitate the expat vote abroad. Research in 2007 showed that external voting had been sanctioned by 115 countries and territories in the world. Of those countries, some two-thirds allowed all their citizens to vote from abroad, and one third partially restricted the right to an external vote (IDEA; The Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico, 2007).

In the European environment, Greek exceptionalism was even more visible on par with Ireland, another country with a big diaspora but without vote abroad.

The case of Sitaropoulos and Giakoumopoulos v. Greece at the ECHR proved a defining moment, constituting a milestone in the transnationalisation of the issue. This case concerned two Greek nationals living in France and who were denied the vote in their place of residence in the 2007 Greek national elections. The Greek Ambassador was forced to decline their request to vote at the Embassy in Paris because of the lack of any relevant domestic legislation to permit this. Subsequently, the two applicants argued before the ECHR that because they were not allowed to vote in their place of residence, their right to vote was adversely affected (Case of Sitaropoulos and Giakoumopoulos v. Greece 2012).

In March 15, 2012, the Grand Chamber of the ECHR, in its judgment on the case, held that there was no violation by Greece of article 3, on the right to free elections, pertaining to the applicants' right to vote from abroad (Press Release, ECtHR, 107/2012). Despite the fact that the applicants lost, this case was important for the progress on the subject matter, as it constituted a very important legal precedent and brought media attention to the issue.¹¹ Also, the ECHR in its judgement surfaced important considerations: firstly, the presumption that non-resident citizens are less directly or less continually concerned with their country's day-to-day problems and have less knowledge of them; secondly, the fact that non-resident citizens have less influence on the selection of candidates or on the formulation of their electoral programmes; thirdly, the close connection between the right to vote in parliamentary elections and the fact of being directly affected by the acts of the political bodies so elected; and, fourthly, the legitimate concern the legislature may have to limit the influence of citizens living abroad in elections on issues which, while admittedly fundamental, primarily affect persons living in the country (Case of Sitaropoulos and Giakoumopoulos vs. Greece 2012). The ECHR's ruling conferred gravity to the matter, however it was not definitively authoritative, as it couldn't dictate how national authorities would address the constitutional provision of Article 51 § 4¹², and furthermore, the Court faced fierce criticism for interfering with the sovereignty of the member states (Poula, 2019).

¹¹ We cite some titles (translated from Greek) from online media that focused on the issue: 'The right to vote has been violated for 30 years' (enet.gr, 10/7/2010); 'Trial against Greece because expatriates don't vote in their residence' (newsit.gr, 8/3/12); 'The decision of the ECHR for the vote of the expatriates is acquittal' (zougla.gr, 15/3/12); 'It is legal for expatriates not to vote in the place of their residence' (rodiaki.gr, 15/3/12); 'ECHR: No violation in the case of the expatriates (Kathimerini 15/3/12); 'The inability of Greek expatriates to vote in their place of residence does not constitute a violation of right (iefimerida.gr, 15/3/2012); 'ECHR: Greek inaction for the vote of residents abroad' (tvxs.gr, 9/7/2010);

¹² 'Matters pertaining to the exercise of the right to vote by persons living outside the Country may be specified by statute, adopted by a majority of two thirds of the total number of Members of Parliament. Concerning such persons, the principle of simultaneously holding elections does not impede the exercise of their right to vote by postal vote or by other appropriate means, provided that the counting of votes and the announcement of the results is carried out when this is also carried out across the Country' (The Constitution of Greece, as revised by the parliamentary resolution of May 27th 2008 of the VIIIth Revisionary Parliament and before its latest amendment in 25th November 2019) (Hellenic Parliament, 2008).

The 2018/994 EU Council decision constituted another important milestone in transnational pressure on lawmakers, in view of the upcoming 2019 European and national elections. The government had to ratify this decision and among other provisions, the Council encouraged EU Member States to motivate their citizens residing in third non-EU countries to vote in EP elections. Additionally, the European Elections in 2019 exposed a significant legal inconsistency in allowing expats to vote in some elections but not others, adding more pressure to the Greek Parliament to act.

Conclusion

This working paper's analysis focused on answering the question 'how did Greek political parties come to vote on an issue that they had long prevaricated on'? By focusing on the way political parties as principal actors operated in this process, it considered the impact of the crisis context and the secondary role of contemporary international developments. Utilising process tracing and the interpretations of some indicative discourses, it focused on the motives, interests and political calculations of the Greek political parties vis-a-vis diaspora voters and their right to be able to vote abroad.

The 2019 constitutional change was an important element for the redefinition of the homeland-diaspora relationship. However, the implementation entailed risks and it remains to be seen how successful this change will be for the diaspora's political engagement. Having said that, success is a contested term and depends on various factors: on the procedural and administrative implementation of the law and whether the voters abroad are actually accommodated to vote; on the number of registrations and those who will actually vote; on the quality of the electoral debate and whether this becomes more transnationalised or whether it reflects the domestic, often tense, polarisations; or on whether it leads to more substantive diasporic engagement with Greece's internal affairs with further ramifications in other areas as well. From a political parties' perspectives, the success is in the electoral competition and the support they get from the voters who live abroad.

All of the above are still 'unknown knowns' which only time will clarify. Yet, with the limited benefit of hindsight, there are already some 'known knowns'. First, that the restrictions imposed in the law allow, according to current estimates, a very small number of potential voters - between 200,000 and 300,000 eligible expat voters in a Greek diaspora population that is estimated between 4 and 7 million (comprising first through fourth generations). Second, the number of registrations in the first year after the law was passed was around 30,000 only, although this was still very early stages. And last, but not least, the issue of the diasporic vote did not go away with the 2019 vote. It came back a year and half later once again when the lifting of restrictions became a revisited issue and allowed for party competition and emotive rhetoric. New Democracy prepared a new bill removing the restrictions which was debated in Parliament but was withdrawn from the vote seeing that it would fail the legislative threshold. This demonstrates that the diasporic vote, even with all

the restrictions in place and its expected low voter eligibility, has the potential to be a major point of contention during election times and should be carefully observed.

References

- Adamson, F. (2005). Globalization, Transnational Political Mobilisation and Networks of Violence. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18(1), 31-49.
- Alison, G., & Nicolaidis, K. (1996). *The Greek Paradox: Promise vs. Performance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Alivizatos, N. (2019, September 6). *Diaspora vote: Let's not waste another chance*. Retrieved July 5, 2020, from <https://www.ekathimerini.com/244218/opinion/ekathimerini/comment/diaspora-vote-lets-not-waste-another-chance>
- Arrighi, J.-T., & Lafleur, J.-M. (2017). Where and why can expatriates vote in regional elections? A comparative analysis of regional electoral practices in Europe and North America. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 517-538.
- Capoccia, G. (2015). Critical Junctures and institutional change . In J. Mahoney, & K. Thelen (Eds), *Comparative Historical Analysis* (pp. 147-179). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Capoccia, G., & Kelemen, D. R. (2007, April). The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism. *World Politics*(59), 341-69.
- Case of Sitaropoulos and Giakoumopoulos vs. Greece, Application no. 42202/07 (European Court of Human Rights March 15, 2012).
- Collyer, M. (2013). *Emigration Nations: Policies and Ideologies of Emigrant Engagement*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan .
- Delano, A., & Gamlen, A. (2014). Comparing and theorizing state diaspora relations. *Political Geography*, 41, 43-53.
- Dufoix, S. (2003). *Diasporas*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- European Court of Human Rights. (2012, March 15). *The inability of Greeks living abroad to vote in parliamentary elections from their place of residence did not breach their human rights*. Strasbourg: European Court of Human Rights.
- Frangos, M. (2019). Failed institution: The World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE) since 2008. Oxford: SEESOX. Retrieved from [http://seesoxdiaspora.org/publications/working-papers-series/failed-institutionthe-world-council-of-hellenes-abroad-\(sae\)-since-2008](http://seesoxdiaspora.org/publications/working-papers-series/failed-institutionthe-world-council-of-hellenes-abroad-(sae)-since-2008)
- Gamlen, A. (2019). *Human Geopolitics: States, Emigrants, and the Rise of Diaspora Institutions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hellenic Parliament - Special Permanent Committee on Greeks Abroad. (2018, 11 21). *17th term of Parliamentary Republic, Seesion D*. Athens: Hellenic Parliament.
- Hellenic Parliament. (16/11/2011). *13 term of Parliamentary Republic, Synod C, Session L*. Athens.
- Hellenic Parliament. (19/6/2016). *17th term of parliamentary Republic, Session A*. Athens.

- Hellenic Parliament. (2008, May 27). *The Constitution of Greece*. Retrieved 7 17, 2020, from hellenicparliament.gr: <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf>
- Hellenic Parliament. (26/2/2014). 13th term of Parliamentary Republic, Session C. Athens.
- Hellenicnews.com. (2016, 5 8). *New Democracy's Law Proposal for the Postal Vote of Greeks Abroad: A Chance (Under Certain Conditions) for a True Policy Concerning the Greek Diaspora*. Retrieved 7 22, 2020, from Hellenic News of America: <https://hellenicnews.com/new-democracys-law-proposal-postal-vote-greeks-abroad-chance-certain-conditions-true-policy-concerning-greek-diaspora/>
- Hutcheson, D. S., & Arrighi, J. (2015). Keeping Pandora's (Ballot) Box Half-shut": A Comparative Inquiry into the Institutional Limits of External Voting in EU Member States. *Democratization*, 22(5), 884–905.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA); The Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico . (2007). *Voting from Abroad* . Handbook, Stockholm.
- Kaldor, M. (2001). *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kasimis, C., & Kassimi, C. (2004, June 1). Greece: A History of Migration. Migration Policy Institute . Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/greece-history-migration>
- Kathimerini.gr. (2009, 2 11). *Diaspora's vote is divisive (Dora Antoniou)* . Retrieved 5 2, 2018, from <https://www.kathimerini.gr/349096/article/epikairothta/politikh/dixazei-h-yhfos-twn-apodhmwn>
- Kathimerini.gr. (2019, 10 19). *SYRIZA's doubling back on the expatriates*. Retrieved 7 18, 2020, from <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1047797/article/epikairothta/politikh/anadiplwsh-syriza-me-apodhmoys>
- Koinova, M. (2009). Diasporas and democratization in the post-communist world. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 42(1), 41-64.
- Koinova, M. (2017). Critical junctures and transformative events in diaspora mobilisation for Kosovo and Palestinian statehood. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1-18.
- Lafleur, J.-M. (2011). Why do states enfranchise citizens abroad? Comparative insights from Mexico, Italy and Belgium. *Global Networks*, 11(4), 481–501.
- Lapshyna, I., & Duvell, F. (2015, July 15). The EuroMaidan Protests, Corruption, and War in Ukraine: Migration Trends and Ambitions. Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/euromaidan-protests-corruption-and-war-ukraine-migration-trends-and-ambitions>
- Lazaretou, S. (2016). *Φυγή Ανθρώπινου Κεφαλαίου: Η σύγχρονη τάση της μετανάστευσης των Ελλήνων στα χρόνια της κρίσης [Human Capital Flight: The new migration tension of Greeks in the years of crisis]*. Athens: Τράπεζα της Ελλάδος [Bank of Greece].

- Naftemporiki.gr. (2016, 4 8). *PASOK: ND treats the Hellenism of Diaspora disrespectfully* . Retrieved 7 22, 2020, from naftemporiki.gr: <https://m.naftemporiki.gr/story/1091765>
- National Herald. (2019, 5 26). *The expatriates have their eyes fixed on the polls* . Retrieved 7 18, 2020, from https://www.ekirikas.com/archive_euroelections2019/arthro/oi_omogeneis_exoun_to_blemma_tous_strammeno_stis_ellinikes_kalpes-55572/
- Østergaard-Nielsen, E. (2003). The democratic deficit of diaspora politics: Turkish Cypriots in Britain and the Cyprus issue. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29(4), 683–700.
- Paarlberg, M. A. (2017). Competing for the diaspora's influence at home. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.
- Pelliccia, A. (2013). *Greece: education and brain drain in times of crisis*. Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione e le Politiche Sociali - CNR.
- Poula, V. (2019, November). *The Greek diasporic vote: a constitutional duty or a political option?* Retrieved July 17, 2020, from <http://seesoxdiaspora.org/publications/briefs/the-greek-diasporic-vote-a-constitutional-duty-or-a-political-option>
- Pratsinakis, M., & Labrianidis, L. (2017). Crisis brain drain: short-term pain/long-term gain? In D. Tziouvas (ed.), *Greece in Crisis: The Cultural Politics of Austerity*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Special Permanent Committee on Greeks abroad. (2013). *Report of the Special Permanent Committee on Greeks Abroad*. Athens: Hellenic Parliament.
- Special Permanent Committee on Greeks Abroad. (December 2015). *Roadmap of Actions*. Athens: Hellenic Parliament.
- SEESOX Greek Diaspora Project Team. (2019, November). Do expats want to vote? The voice from abroad on the facilitation of the vote for non-resident Greeks . SEESOX. Retrieved from http://seesoxdiaspora.org/assets/site/papers/GDP_article_on_vote.pdf
- Tornosnews.gr. (2016, 7 10). *BrainGain: Vote of Greeks living abroad is forgotten again*. Retrieved 11 14, 2020, from <https://www.tornosnews.gr/en/greek-news/politics/17081-braingain-vote-of-greeks-living-abroad-is-forgotten-again.html>
- Tsebelis, G. (2002). *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*. New York, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Turcu, A., & Urbatsch, R. (2015). Diffusion of Diaspora Enfranchisement Norms: A Multinational Study. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(4), 407-437.
- World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE). (2017). *SAE at a glance*. Retrieved 12 8, 2017, from <http://en.sae.gr/?id=12378>

The Greek Diaspora Project at SEESOX

Mission statement

The Greek Diaspora Project (GDP) was set up at SEESOX with the overall aim to serve as a nexus between academic research and policy, and to help identify ideas to maximise the developmental impact of the Greek diaspora on contemporary Greek politics, economy and society. The project studies the relationship between Greece and its diaspora within the context of the current economic crisis and beyond.

Project objectives

- Become the preeminent forum for debate between the wider diaspora scholarship and scholarship dedicated to the Greek diaspora;
- Relate Greece and its diaspora to other similar countries and conduct in-depth comparative studies;
- Be a port of call for anyone interested in contemporary aspects of the Greek diaspora, in terms of its library and archival resources, activities, institutional affiliations, policy relevant research;
- Analyse the new trends characterizing the current Greek diaspora in conjunction to the historical context, socio-economic change, varieties of cultural affinities;
- Assess the developmental impact of the diaspora on the Greek economy and identify policies that can maximize its contribution;
- Inform Greek public debate and Greek policy makers on the Greek diaspora, its evolution and the policy implications of actual and potential interactions between the diaspora and Greece;
- Secure funding and research opportunities for a young generation of scholars dedicated to the study of the Greek diaspora.

About SEESOX

South East European Studies at Oxford (SEESOX) is part of the European Studies Centre (ESC) at St Antony's College, Oxford. It focuses on the interdisciplinary study of the Balkans, Greece, Turkey and Cyprus. Drawing on the academic excellence of the University and an international network of associates, it conducts academic and policy relevant research on the current multifaceted transformations of the region. It follows closely regional phenomena and analyses the historical and intellectual influences which have shaped perceptions and actions in the region. In Oxford's best tradition, the SEESOX team is committed to understanding the present through the *longue durée* and reflecting on the future through high quality scholarship.



SEESOX | St Antony's College | University of Oxford | OX2 6JF | United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 1865 274537 | Email: Julie.adams@sant.ox.ac.uk

Join our mailing list: seesox@maillist.ox.ac.uk

seesoxdiaspora.org #seesoxdiaspora