



*The Greek Diaspora as a factor in the
Greek government's response to
the coronavirus pandemic*

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The paper includes the views of the author alone and not of the SEESOX Greek Diaspora Project.

Abstract

This paper examines the interaction of diaspora and homeland actors in the management of the coronavirus pandemic in Greece from late February to late March of this year.

Elite diaspora scientists are examined through their roles in providing early warning on the pandemic's effects to the Greek government, participating in the selection and implementation of the government's social distancing measures and, overall, vigorously endorsing the government's pandemic-related policies through their participation in Greek public discourse. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of America are examined through their role in providing justification to the government's measures relating to the suspension of church services open to the public in Greece, through their related public pronouncements, at variance with positions taken by members of the Archdiocese of Athens and of its Permanent Holy Synod. Greeks, whether citizens or of Greek descent, are examined through their communication in various social and mass media to Greek audiences of the severity of the pandemic's impact in their host societies which were hit hardest than Greece was.

The Greek government's, and in particular the Greek Prime Minister's choice to privilege diaspora elite scientists as advisors and partners, in both an informal and a formal capacity, in the selection and public advocacy of its pandemic-related policies is examined. The paper also identifies the way Greek media editors, op-ed writers and reporters, have also privileged elite diaspora scientists, Greek Orthodox leaders outside Greece, and diaspora Greeks, particularly in comparison to other non-Greek actors from abroad, as authoritative voices or compelling witnesses of the pandemic's effects and the way in which the pandemic must be dealt with in Greece.

The central point of the paper is that in a crisis such as that of the coronavirus pandemic, which is experienced concurrently on a global scale, a diverse cast of diaspora and homeland actors are in a position to catalyse their mutual interaction in the mutually-held belief that such interaction can have a significant impact on how such a crisis will be dealt with in the homeland.

Introduction

The Greek diaspora has been highly prominent, through a variety of channels, in the articulation, selection and public debate and reportage of social distancing measures, adopted by the Greek government, and aimed at arresting the exponential dissemination of the coronavirus pandemic in Greece. This prominence is an outcome, first, of the willingness of diverse diaspora actors and institutions to engage with the issue of the public policy response to the coronavirus pandemic in Greece and to commit time and/or reputation and possibly to risk controversy. Second, of the willingness of a variety of actors resident in Greece to utilise such engagement, a willingness which also strongly indicates judgment that such engagement carries substantial potency. These actors primarily include Greece's Prime Minister (PM) and his government as well as print, electronic and TV editors, commentators and reporters. Relatedly, such measures reflected a more or less dominant global consensus, scientific as much as political, on the optimal way to confront the coronavirus pandemic. It is of course impossible, amidst the pandemic crisis itself, and lacking surveys focused on the diaspora's impact in Greece, to accurately establish the latter's impact to the selection, enactment and acceptance by the public, of social distancing policies. We do note however that this interaction, between diaspora and resident actors, would not have achieved the volume, range and visibility it has had, had both diaspora and homeland actors not judged it significant in its impact.

There are three factors which we would identify responsible for the diaspora's role in the evolution of the public policy response to the coronavirus pandemic in Greece. First, Greece's significant scientific diaspora, in numbers and scholarly distinction, which is a function both of Greece's relatively small size (thus there are economies of scale in scientific research which are obtained only by larger, more advanced states, such as the UK and the US) and of enduring weaknesses in the governance of Greece's higher education and scientific establishment. Second, the polycentric Greek Orthodox Church, which means that either due to historical legacy or the presence of large, ethnically Greek enclaves outside Greece, Greek Orthodox authorities, which are highly prestigious within Greece, might take a different stance on issues such as the coronavirus pandemic than the Archdiocese of Athens and the latter's Permanent Holy Synod. Third, the presence of Greek immigrant populations in European countries hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, most notably in Italy, including a sizeable group of doctors and nurses, populations which have been boosted by migration by Greeks to Europe during the preceding fiscal crisis.

This paper will examine all these three factors in turn before issuing its concluding remarks. The time frame adopted commences on the 24th of February, when the first publicly known cabinet level conference took place to address the coronavirus crisis, and ends in late March, by which time the government had adopted and implemented stringent social distancing measures aimed at containing the coronavirus in Greece.

While this paper provides an inventory of the main diasporic cohorts and actors who achieved prominence during the initial phase of the management of the pandemic in Greece, it also seeks to establish the elements they share in common in their interaction with the homeland.

First and foremost, these cohorts and actors represent in their various capacities, the opposite of 'othering' in relating their perspective of the pandemic to audiences back home in Greece. We are examining Greek scientists in elite universities of Western Europe and North America who tend to be fluent speakers of Greek, as they were mostly born and raised in Greece and received their undergraduate education in Greece; of religious personalities who are ethnically Greek, be they residing in Istanbul or New York, and who are personally and ex officio universally known to most Greeks; of mostly first generation Greek migrants who can barely be distinguished, if at all, by their peers resident in Greece.

Second, these cohort-members and actors are embedded in Greece, via familial, social, professional and political networks. Elite scientists may have been, prior to the breakout of the pandemic, active in Greek politics and policy making, maintained connections with fellow alumni of Greek state universities, and have had their work presented in the Greek media and/or translated and published by Greek printing houses. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of America are important interlocutors of the Greek government of the day as the status of the Patriarchate is an important Greek-Turkish bilateral issue and the Archdiocese of America is the Greek-American community's leading institution. First generation Greek migrants, particularly in the age of social networks, cheap travel and zero communication costs, maintain active connections with family, friends and professional peers in Greece.

Third, these cohort members and actors are motivated to engage in Greece in a time of crisis. Motivated by the 'patriotic discount' which has often been observed in the way diaspora scientists and technocrats, the world over, offer their expertise for free to their homelands, but possibly also by personal ambition to assume public office and recognition in Greece (perhaps in a way that would not have been possible in at least some of their host societies); motivated by concern for the welfare of the Greek Orthodox in Greece, but also by the strategic aim of being in the good graces of the Greek government of the day; motivated by the need to both relate an extreme experience to the nearest and dearest as well as to forewarn them of a danger that one knows can be fatal, in the individual and the collective sense.

Fourth, all these common elements – familiarity, embeddedness, motivation – make diaspora actors compelling as much as willing partners and interlocutors to actors in Greece. For example, an elite diaspora scientist can relatively easily be persuaded to join a task force established by the Greek government, can be an effective member of such a taskforce and, furthermore, lend internationally-established prestige to the proceedings of such a taskforce. Or, the pronouncement of a leading Greek Orthodox personality, residing outside Greece, can provide Greek op-ed writers a plausible alternative to the faithful on an issue of religious observance to that of church authorities in Greece, undermining accusations that government prohibitions of church-attendance are motivated by anti-clericalism. Or, a Greek doctor employed at an intensive care unit in an overwhelmed Italian hospital, interviewed by the evening news of a Greek TV channel, can bring to thousands of Greek homes the horror of falling victim to the coronavirus pandemic like no other non-Greek doctor abroad can.

Greece's scientific diaspora and the pandemic

There are two scientific faces that the Greek public has mostly identified with regarding the management of the pandemic in Greece: LSE public health expert, Professor Elias Mossialos, and Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Athens, Sotiris Tsiodras. The former acted in a primarily informal capacity, until the end of March¹, and the latter in a formal one, as the government's leading public health expert on the pandemic.

Professor Mossialos participated via teleconference in the first publicly known high level government meeting to examine the policy response to the coronavirus pandemic and immediately went public himself with his recommendations to the government². There are reports that he was also among the very first scientific experts to alert the Greek government to adopt aggressive containment measures of the coronavirus pandemic as early as late January³.

Importantly, he was the first Greek scientist to enjoy widespread public recognition, to publicly castigate members of the Greek public during the March carnival events for defying public orders not to engage in carnival festivities, primarily but not exclusively in the city of Patras, where the carnival is a very popular and commercially important event. He also took the lead in urging the Greek Orthodox Church to suspend church services in Greece and for the faithful to avoid risking contagion by church attendance and such activities as imbibing Holy Communion (which is given by a priest via the same spoon used to all attendees during church service)⁴. Particularly on the issue of church attendance by the faithful, various ministers of state studiously avoided taking a position prior to the decision by the PM himself to prohibit church attendance⁵. This initiative of his is consistent with the observation of this author that Greek diaspora scientists, because they are not beholden to the Greek state and other resident stakeholders, can afford to take unpopular and generally controversial public stances on issues of public import in Greece⁶.

Additionally, Professor Mossialos in numerous statements has supported vigorously the suitability of the government's response to the pandemic as well as the competence of Greek public health officials and personnel, frontline epidemiologists to clinical doctors and nurses,

¹ On the 26th of March the PM appointed Professor Mossialos representative of the Greek government in international organisations dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, see <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/03/26/politics/koronoios-o-ili-as-mosialos-ekprosopos-tis-ellinikis-kyvernisis-stous-diethneis-organismous/>

² See, <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/02/25/politics/protasi-gia-efarmogi-tou-sxediou-2004/>

³ See, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1071275/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/proswpa-ths-evdomadas> and Stigma, Anagnorisi, TA NEA, 28-29 March 2020, p.27

⁴ See, indicatively, <https://www.iefimerida.gr/politiki/mosialos-gia-karnabalistes-apagoreysi-gaidoyria> and <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/03/10/greece/pagkosmia-ygeia-kai-thriskeytikis-pepoithseis/>

⁵ See indicatively, <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/03/12/opinions/i-atomiki-eythyni-den-einai-arketi/>

⁶ <http://seesoxdiaspora.org/publications/briefs/andreas-georgiou,-diaspora-actor>

entrusted with managing the pandemic crisis. He thus deliberately lends his international credibility to the overall effort, by the Greek state, to manage the pandemic crisis⁷.

Significantly, from the point of view of our inquiry, although Professor Mossialos as a diaspora scientist was the first to become so visible he was soon followed by others. We note the interviews given by leading Yale University theorist, Professor Nicholas Christakis, on the dynamics of social networking and on the necessity of social-distancing, explicitly validating the Greek government's social distancing policies during the pandemic crisis to Greek media, as well as that of Professor Manolis Kellis of MIT⁸. Other highly credentialed, in terms of their epidemiological expertise, Greek scientists abroad have also seen their views supporting the Greek government's social distancing policies prominently displayed in the Greek media during the coronavirus pandemic crisis.⁹ Greek diaspora star academics, such as Konstantinos Daskalakis from MIT, whose mathematical expertise is only indirectly connected with the issue at hand, and whose distinguished scholarly record has made him a figure of authority with the Greek public, has also advocated to the Greek public the need to take social distancing measures to contain the pandemic in Greece¹⁰.

There are, possibly, institutional and operational reasons which made elite diaspora scientists valuable to the Greek government, in the present pandemic juncture, not only prestige-lending

⁷ See indicatively, Elias Mossialos, Koronoios, Ti na kanoume, TA NEA, and https://www.tovima.gr/printed_post/den-einai-eykolos-antipalos-o-ios-mporei-na-ginei-an-kanoume-ayta-pou-prepei/

⁸ See <https://www.capital.gr/epikairota/3441598/kathigitis-mit-h-ellada-apefuge-ta-xeirotera-logo-tis-grigoris-antidrasis-tis-kubernisis>,

<https://www.kathimerini.gr/1069208/article/epikairothta/ellada/n-xrhstakhs-ta-metra-poy-lamvanoun-oi-ellhnikes-arxes-einai-swsta>,

<https://www.tovima.gr/2020/03/17/society/o-altrouismos-stin-epoxi-tis-pandimias/>

⁹ See indicatively, the interview of Professor of Infectious Diseases at Brown University, Eleftherios Mylonakis <https://www.tanea.gr/2020/03/20/interviews/ta-dyskola-einai-mprosta-mas-me-ton-koronaio/>, and of Reader in Epidemiology at Imperial College, Dr Ioanna Tzoulaki, 'Russian Roulette with the Virus, TO VIMA, 22 March 2020. It is a coincidence, but nonetheless an illuminating one in terms of the range and distinction of Greece's scientific diaspora, that one of the leading minority voices, worldwide, arguing against stringent social distancing measures is himself a Greek Diaspora academic, namely Professor John Ioannides of Stanford University, see indicatively, <https://antifono.gr/%CE%BC%CE%AE%CF%80%CF%89%CF%82-%CF%80%CF%81%CF%8C%CE%BA%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B9-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CE%AD%CE%BD%CE%B1-%CF%86%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%83%CE%BA%CE%BF-%CF%83%CE%B5-%CE%B5%CE%BE%CE%AD%CE%BB/?fbclid=IwAR1mSgbzACyK3LpwejwMYX17UZzJXCp98eCN6IU9baFT7P0IxELOsnLslcY>

¹⁰ See, https://www.tovima.gr/printed_post/o-agonas-enantia-ston-sars-cov-2-einai-antoxis-kai-oxi-taxytitas/

ones. Diaspora scientists might have enjoyed an edge, compared to their resident Greek peers, in ringing the alarm bell early in an emergency such as the pandemic. Indicatively, Professor Mossialos' position at a leading western institution, the London School of Economics, afforded him insights through advisory mandates and other collaborations particularly with China¹¹. Professor Christakis at Yale University, who was also one of those to raise the alarm early in the US on the severity of the pandemic, ascribes his early response to communications he had due to an ongoing scientific collaboration with Chinese scientists¹². Greek scientists resident in Greece, through their past training and employment at elite, non-Greek academic institutions, relationships and partnerships with scientists abroad, their participation in European Research Council research consortia, memberships in international associations abroad, and editorial boards of scientific journals, their peer reviewed publications, and so on are, of course, thoroughly internationalised. Yet they might not have the same range of opportunities to get plugged into the international system as elite Greek scientists who are employed at leading institutions of the Western, metropolitan core. Even if that were not the case, and resident Greek scientists raised the alarm as early as, or even earlier than, their diaspora peers, confirmation of their judgment by their well-informed diaspora peers would have exerted additional influence in the ultimate government decision to implement timely social distancing measures.

Economies of scale in the funding of expensive research infrastructures obtained by large and wealthy countries, such as the US and the UK, compounded with institutional dysfunction in the case of Greece¹³, have shaped in quantity and quality Greece's exceptionally large scientific diaspora – and thus its capacity, briefly reviewed above, to inject Greek public policy and discourse with its expertise and credibility. Scholars have estimated that 85% of Greece's top scientists are employed abroad, uniquely among Eurozone countries. If diaspora and resident Greek scientists' record in European Research Council grants were to be jointly calculated - i.e., ERC grants won by Greek scientists working in Greece and in all other ERC eligible country - and then the total of their grants would be assigned to Greece, then Greece would have joined

¹¹ See relatedly Professor Mossialos C.V. where mention of some of his government advisory relationships is included at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/health-policy/people/professor-elias-mossialos>

¹² See relevant interview with the editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RscVhN2HX_8

¹³ Professor John Ioannidis who has surveyed the research achievements of Greece's scientific diaspora has identified as a key cause the lack of meritocracy and the politicization of Greek universities, see, http://21ax0w3am0j23cz0qd1q1n3u.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/John-Ioannidis_Free_Greek-science-from-political-hampering_EuroScientist-magazine-5th-October-2015.pdf. Another diaspora scientist has established the lack for scholarly achievement, in those scholars occupying leadership positions in Greek universities, due to their selection method, decreed by the 1981 education reforms, see Lazaridis, Th., O dromos gia tin anagenisi tou ellinikou panepistmiou, Kritiki, 2008.

the ranks of the top research-intensive countries, such as Germany, Great Britain and Finland¹⁴.

As these diaspora academics were born, raised and educated in Greece they might have collaborated scientifically with their peers resident in Greece, have served as evaluators of Greek state universities and advisors to Greek public bodies or even held public office. Professors Mossialos', Christakis' and Daskalakis' presence in Greek public life and/or public discourse, years before the breakout of the crisis, typify these extensive, longstanding linkages and interactions. It is illuminating of the density of these scientific networks, the diaspora and resident one, that when Greek state faculty were called upon by the educational reforms of 2011 to elect external members of the Boards of their institutions they selected more than one hundred Greek diaspora academics who, in turn, accepted to undertake this significant commitment at personal expense¹⁵.

With the growth of electronic communications, Greek diaspora academics have been steadily increasing their participation in Greek public discourse, mainly through commentary in the Greek quality print media, at least since the early 2000s, an activity which increased exponentially during Greece's fiscal crisis, an event of global significance which catalysed the involvement of diaspora academic and technocrats in Greek public life¹⁶.

It is also highly pertinent for our analysis that diaspora academics, from the natural sciences, have featured prominently from many years now in the science features and/or supplements of major Greek newspapers, being chosen by Greek science reporters to popularise noteworthy scientific breakthroughs with which their research is related¹⁷. This has meant that once the pandemic broke out, Greek science reporters could utilise contacts with elite diaspora scientists built over the years. By the same token, diaspora scientists were already accustomed to seeing themselves and their work in the Greek media and thus ready to respond to journalistic inquiries from Greece on the pandemic and the Greek government's response to it.

It can hardly be overstated that the other side of the coin of the scientific engagement with Greece is the commensurate engagement of homeland actors with diaspora scientists. For every press report on a diaspora scientist there is a reporter resident in Greece who solicited the relevant interview; for every participation in a state commission there is a Greek politician who requested the diaspora scientists' participation; for every jointly authored peer-reviewed

¹⁴ See Kritikos. A, Greece Needs a Strategy for its Transition to an Innovation Economy, DIW, Economic Bulletin, Vol, 4, Issue 10, pp.3-10, 2014 and <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2014/08/01/the-best-greek-scientists-exiled-from-greece/>

¹⁵ Lakasas, A., To fos ton 100 sofon sta panepistimia, KATHIMERINI, January 6, 2013.

¹⁶ See, <http://seesoxdiaspora.org/publications/briefs/andreas-georgiou,-diaspora-actor>

¹⁷ The science supplement of TO VIMA, one of Greece's most prestigious Sunday newspapers, has for years now dedicated approximately one third of its reports (author's own calculations) to the findings and scientific opinions of diaspora scientists, see typically on its pandemic reportage, <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/04/06/science/giati-ta-paidia-pairnoun-10-sti-maxi-me-ton-koronoio/>

publication by a diaspora and a resident scientist there is actually a resident scientist, to co-author this publication, and so on.

Starting with resident scientific peers, in our case of the coronavirus pandemic, we can identify career trajectories and professional accomplishments which are comparable, or indeed interchangeable, ‘birds of the same feather flying together’. Professors Tsiodras¹⁸ career path is typically transnational in nature, having trained and specialised in elite US universities and hospitals. The 26-strong committee of Greece’s National Organisation of Public Health (EODY), led by Professor Tsiodras, predominantly features medical professionals with extensive publications records, membership in specialised international bodies, and educational and clinical experience in prestigious institutions abroad¹⁹. In effect, we have a common cohort of distinguished diaspora scientists and of the more accomplished among the resident academics community, in the field of medicine, often equal to the former in academic distinction, which mutually constitute and specify the scientific consensus which informs government policy on the treatment of the pandemic in Greece²⁰.

That being said, Greece’s higher education’s governance regime’s weaknesses are well-documented, particularly in the older and largest universities of Athens and Thessaloniki,²¹ where the resulting politicisation and influence peddling can a) lead to positions of authority academics of limited competence and b) dilute scientific speech even from those scientists highly capable of articulating it. Such weaknesses are particularly prevalent in the medical schools in these two universities where testimonials and researchers have identified widespread nepotism and academic inbreeding²². Likewise, Greece’s public health system is highly politicised with, for example, appointments to state hospital directorships being reserved for often unqualified party insiders, a canon from which the current ND government did not diverge²³. Nor are clinical practices by most Greek hospitals subject to review by credible national or international authorities²⁴. And Greek hospitals suffer from widespread corruption, with one in four Greeks having to bribe in order to facilitate treatment²⁵. Perhaps

¹⁸ Sotiris Tsiodras’ and Ilias Mosialos’ credentials and career trajectories have been extensively registered by the Greek press as in <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/03/07/greece/stratigos-kata-tou-iou/>, <https://www.protagon.gr/themata/apo-ton-riga-sto-lse-o-polysxidis-ili-as-mosialos-44342025598>

¹⁹ See, O “Stratigos” kai to epitleeio tou”, Proto Thema, 29th of March 2010.

²⁰ Kritikos paper on calculation of the totality of Greek publications, diaspora and resident.

²¹ See Pasmazoglou, S., Government, Ideology and the University Curriculum in Greece, European Journal of Education, 29 no 3: 291-304.

²² See, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/411625/article/epikairothta/ellada/sthn-iatrikh-sxolh-einai-oloi-mia-oikogeneia> and <http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/chapter11.pdf>

²³ According to the center left KINAL party more than half of ND appointed state hospital directors are active ND party members, see <https://www.iefimerida.gr/politiki/kinal-60-apo-112-dioikites-nosokomeion-apotyhimenoi-politeytes>.

²⁴ McKinsey, Greece 10 years ahead: Defining Greece’s New Growth Model and Strategy, Athens, June 2012, at <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/europe/greece-10-years-ahead>

no other institutions reflects the Janus-faced aspect of Greece's scientific and medical community than the Medical School of the University of Athens which combines both pervasive lack of meritocracy, as referenced above, with respectable international rankings in various research domains and most relevantly in public health²⁶.

What has been the decisive factor in the interaction of these two essentially structural elements – and, in comparison with other European countries, exceptionally large and high quality scientific diaspora and a resident scientific-medical establishment that combines high achievement with politicisation and weak governance – is agency, in the person of Greece's PM and his government.

After all it was the Greek government, and at least in the case of Professor Mossialos, the PM himself who chose to receive and legitimise the public policy recommendations emanating from Greece's scientific diaspora. Likewise, it was the Greek government that chose Professor Tsiodras and gave him the latitude to recommend and propagate policy recommendations which met with the approval of his diaspora peers and were amplified by the latter's' vigorous advocacy.

Additionally, the government has institutionalised the engagement of diaspora scientists in the management of the coronavirus pandemic through ESETEK, the National Research and Innovation Council which is composed of both diaspora and resident scientists, the President of which, Manolis Dermitzakis, is a Professor at the University of Geneva. According to ESETEK's announcement, an effort is already ongoing, involving resident and diaspora Greek scientists, to implement the next steps in the management of the pandemic which involve mass testing and the tools and policies that the latter will enable²⁷. This initiative has been granted expeditiously funding of 2 million euros by the Greek government and has been highlighted by the PM himself who participated in a video conference with the relevant minister, Professor Dermitzakis and directors of major Greek research institutes²⁸.

Nor is ESETEK, as a diaspora-led advisory body formed prior to the breakout of the pandemic, a one-off. The government formed a Commission for a National Growth Plan, led by Professor Christoforos Pissarides, an LSE professor and Nobel Prize winner, with two out of the three

²⁵ See the relevant Transparency International survey results at <https://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/289824/files/GRI-2017-19391.pdf>

²⁶ See, <https://www.esos.gr/arhra/58931/se-ypsili-thesi-i-iatriki-sholi-toy-panepistimiou-athinon-stis-diethneis-katataxeis-gia>

²⁷ https://www.grtimes.gr/ellada/koronoios-eody-pos-tha-epektathoyn-ta-test-gia?_route_=ellada/koronoios-eody-pos-tha-epektathoyn-ta-test-gia

²⁸ See, https://primeminister.gr/2020/04/14/23762?fbclid=IwAR2gJKVP30dOnzQYIOOg4N0Rb7pm2IQRRZwWY9GIX-xFhZ4kC_CO_cgEyXI

other Commission members also distinguished diaspora economists²⁹. The latest example of this government preference for appointments of diaspora scientists and academics actually materialised during the pandemic with the announcement of the composition of ETHAAE (Anotato Symvoylio Ethnikis Arhis Anotatis Ekpaideysis), the supervising authority of Greek higher education, where out of the four members appointed to the Board of ETHAAE one is from Princeton University and another from George Washington University, the other two are from the University of Athens and the Athens University of Economics and Business³⁰.

It is revealing that prior to the breakout of the coronavirus crisis, the PM received the greatest criticism for his divergence of his promise of a 'government of the best' (*kyvernisi ton ariston*) when the Ministry of Health appointed hospital directors with clearly visible party links, as mentioned above – a criticism that the PM was compelled to acknowledge himself by forcing the resignation of one of the most egregious of this party-affiliated appointments. Commentators focused on the limits in the ability of PM that these appointments demonstrated - to contain the deeply entrenched clientelism in his own party³¹. The coronavirus pandemic, however, has clearly emboldened the PM to, on the one hand, enact science-based policies and on the other hand to validate himself and his government through its partnership, affiliation and approval of Greece's diaspora scientific community – with the PM and/or his staff choosing to highlight in the media these connections with diaspora scientists³². In a way, by doubling down on the fusion of diaspora and homeland scientific excellence and evidence-based policy during the coronavirus break out, the ND Government not only sought to fill the historical trust-gap in the country's political class, scientific community and state apparatus, but also the trust-gap that it had also created, in its brief tenure, by backsliding even if only to an extent from its promise, core to the PM's own identity, of meritocratic and professional public sector management.

In sum, Greece's diaspora scientific community has in fact and/or perception enacted, through the vigorous agency exercised by the leadership of the Greek government, the following roles relating to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Greece:

²⁹ <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1060446/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/ta-melh-ths-epitrophs-poy-8a-ekponhsei-to-neo-sxedio-anapty3hs>

³⁰ See, https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/318807_neo-anotato-symboylio-tis-ethnikis-arhis-anotatis-ekpaideysis

³¹ See, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1053722/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/den-rwth8hke-h-node>, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1053901/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/kwnstantinos-pateras-lwtoi>

³² Illuminatingly, the photo of the first cabinet meeting on the coronavirus crisis, very visibly included the video wall through which Professor Mosialos participated. Likewise, in the photo of Skype-type meeting of the Prime Minister with Professor Christakis of Yale University, the latter is clearly visible on the screen of the PM's portable, while a copy of Christakis' book on social networks is clearly shown next on the PM's desk. In one of the first accounts of the PM's daily routine through the coronavirus crisis, Professors' Mosialos and Christakis are highlighted as sources of counsel, see <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/04/04/politics/skines-apo-tin-aithousa-tou-polemou/>

1. Provide early warning on the severity of the coronavirus pandemic and argue for the enactment of rigorous social distancing policies, adding its judgment and authority to that of resident Greek medical scientists advising the Greek government.
2. Take the lead in castigating personal practices and institutional positions by the public and church authorities respectively which threatened to undermine the effectiveness of the government's social distancing policies.
3. Explicitly backing both the government, the PM himself as well as Greece's medical community, thus lending precious credibility to the pandemic-related policies a) selected by a government which after all shares, with all Greek political forces, in the low trust of the Greek public compounded by the preceding fiscal crisis, b) enacted by a resident scientific establishment and public health system which suffers from enduring institutional and operational weaknesses and thus does not enjoy the unqualified trust of the Greek people. We also note here that elite diaspora scientists, by mostly confirming the judgments and recommended policies of the government-appointed resident scientific leadership, itself highly credentialed in Greece and abroad, and personified by Professor Tsiodras, has probably further enhanced the latter's credibility with the Greek public.
4. Work with the government and with professional peers in Greece to select and develop the policy instruments designed to manage the highly dynamic effects of the coronavirus pandemic, beyond the implementation of social distancing measures.

As noted above, all of these roles materialised and were amplified through extensive and more or less favourable media coverage, with newspaper and TV editors and commentators a) accepting the significance of the diaspora scientists' input in the management of the pandemic's crisis, b) adopting the premise that the diaspora scientists' endorsement of the government's social distancing policies both lends credence and should be credited to the government, c) soliciting diaspora scientists and giving ample and prominent media space through which to propagate in advocacy of the government's social distancing policies.

Looking into the future – say the next six months – we should examine the extent to which the institutionalisation of this interaction, as per the ESETEK announcement, does indeed take place, to address the exit strategy from social distancing policies. Other avenues of inquiry might also include the impact of diaspora and resident collaboration in the selection of clinical protocols meant to mitigate the pandemic's impact of the virus on hospitalised patients. We note here that the literature has established the tendency of knowledge diffusion, from more to less developed countries, to be facilitated by cross-border, co-ethnic scientific collaboration³³. We should also expect the government to mobilise diaspora expertise in other fields of policy. Particularly in the economic front, we might see the Pissarides Commission providing substantial input and external validation and credibility to the inevitably far more contentious government policies seeking to address the impact of the corona virus pandemic to the Greek economy.

³³ Kerr, R.E., *Ethnic Scientific Communities and International Technology Diffusion*, *The Review of Economy and Statistics*, August 2008, 90 (3): 518-537

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Archdiocese of America and the pandemic in Greece

The Archbishop of Athens and the Permanent Holy Synod, Greece's highest deciding body, avoided in the time frame under consideration the suspension of church services and of the servicing of Holy Communion to the faithful, despite the accelerating onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic. While Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Athens, Ieronimos, has accepted that the faithful can, under the circumstances, not attend church service without the Church questioning their faith, he had not responded, according to various reports of the Greek press, to repeated entreaties of the Greek Prime Minister to suspend church services³⁴. Critically, religious attendance in many jurisdictions has been shown to have played a decisive role in the exponential spreading of the coronavirus pandemic while also, where organised religion is politically powerful, presented a major political problem in the effort of state authorities to implement comprehensive social distancing policies³⁵.

By contrast to the Archbishop of Athens, the Archbishop of the New York-based Archdiocese of America, Elpidoforos, Greek Orthodoxy's leader of the North American Greek community – the Greek diaspora's most numerous and affluent worldwide – has accepted that church service, and by extension, Holy Communion is a risk for the faithful³⁶. To provide some historical context, we must note that important seats of Greek Orthodoxy, led by ethnic Greeks, due to their distinct position and outlook have taken positions in the past that were either well-beyond the preoccupations of the Greek Orthodox Church authorities in Greece or in direct conflict with the latter's preferences. Archbishop Iakovos, of the Archdiocese of America, was a vocal advocate of US civil rights movement in the 1960s and an ally of Martin Luther King; while Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was a vigorous advocate of Turkey's European vocation, and thus in alignment with Greek foreign policy, at a time when the late Archbishop Christodoulos of the Archdiocese of Athens, had adopted a bellicose nationalist line against Turkey³⁷. Thus this lack of monopoly of outlook and doctrine by any single Greek Orthodox authority, can, on occasion, afford the opportunity to Greek political actors to challenge Church authorities in Greece by appealing to contrasting positions issued by Greek Orthodox authorities outside Greece.

³⁴ See indicatively, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1069218/article/epikairothta/politikh/h-krish-logw-korwnoiy-kai-oi-kinhseis-toy-ma3imoy>

³⁵ See, indicatively https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-a-prayer-meeting-at-a-french-megachurch-may-have-led-to-scores-of-coronavirus-deaths/2020/04/01/fe478ca0-7396-11ea-ad9b-254ec99993bc_story.html?itid=hp_world1-8-12_virusfrenchchurch-553pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory-ans and <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/calls-to-seal-off-ultra-orthodox-areas-adds-tension-to-israels-virus-response>

³⁶ See indicatively, <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/03/10/opinions/thraysmeni-fysi/>

³⁷ See respectively, Grammenos A., Political Advocacy along ethnic and national lines: the case of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, SEESOX-Greek Diaspora Project, Working Paper No 9 and Grigoriadis, I., The Orthodox Church and Greek-Turkish Relations: religion as a source of rivalry or conciliation? In Haynes, J, ed. Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Routledge.

Both the offices of the Greek Prime Minister and the office of the leader of the leading opposition party, Syriza, have leaked to the press that Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Alexis Tsipras respectively have spoken with Elpidoforos and have applauded his stance, a none too subtle hint to Archbishop Ieronimos to follow the same path³⁸. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomeos, also pronounced that church authorities should follow public health instructions issued by the relevant public health bodies, the implication being that orthodox churches in Greece should also suspend church services, including the giving of Holy Communion³⁹. To add to the pressure, the Diocese of Crete, which is under the supervision of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, took the decision while the Permanent Holy Synod, convened by Ieronimos, was deliberating on what instruction to issue relating to church services in Greece during the coronavirus pandemic, to prohibit the faithful from attending church services in Greece's largest island.⁴⁰

It is also important to note that those Greek opinion-makers and media who have vigorously advocated that the Church in Greece fall in line with regard to containment policies of the pandemic have amply disseminated the position of the Archdiocese of America as well as of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. They have favourably contrasted it with what they have castigated as the obfuscation, backwardness and even opportunism of the church authorities in Greece⁴¹. Greeks citizens active on social media and hostile to the attitude of the Archdiocese of Athens have disseminated the fact that Greek Orthodox authorities from such countries as Switzerland and Germany have also suspended Church services.

As with the diaspora technocrats and scientists, Greek Orthodox authorities outside Greece have put an even more heavy hand on the scales in favour of a rapid Greek government response to the pandemic. This was a critical intervention, considering that within the ND parliamentary team there was considerable reluctance to challenge the Archdiocese of Athens with, in some notable cases, ND MPs loudly declaring that they will attend church services, up to and including imbibing Holy Communion, during the pandemic⁴². In the judgment of Greek commentators, the ability of the government and opinion-makers to constantly point out to the contrasting behaviour, of highly legitimate and prominent Greek Orthodox authorities abroad, significantly contributed to making the Archdiocese of Athens' position untenable⁴³.

³⁸ As reported by Kathimerini's 'Theoreio' political column, see, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1068823/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/8ewreio-120320>

³⁹ See, <https://www.in.gr/2020/03/19/greece/vartholomaioi-gia-koronaio-ayto-pou-kindyneyei-den-einai-pisti-alla-oi-pistoi/>

⁴⁰ See, <https://www.in.gr/2020/03/16/greece/aystira-metra-apo-tin-ekklisia-kritis-gia-ton-koronaio-eno-synedriazei-dis/>

⁴¹ See indicatively, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1068930/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/o-ios-ths-apokalyews> and <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/03/10/opinions/thraysmeni-fysi/>.

⁴² <https://www.lifo.gr/now/politics/272893/elena-rapti-ego-simera-koinonisa-kai-tha-synexiso-na-koinono>

⁴³ See indicatively, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1065079/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/proswpa-ths-evdomadas>

As with the diaspora technocrats and scientists, we must point out the long standing interpenetration of these Greek Orthodox Church authorities and leaders abroad with Greece: Archbishop Elpidoforos was born in Istanbul but received his PhD from the Divinity School of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city, and was appointed a professor of Divinity there. Both in his various appointments in the Patriarchate of Constantinople and as Archbishop of the Archdiocese of New York, in effect the supreme leadership position of the influential Greek-American diaspora, he is thoroughly conversant with the intersection between church and state in Greece.

While we can speculate on the weighting of the various reasons which led to the divergence between the Archdiocese of America and the Archdiocese of Athens on the management of the pandemic, we can safely assume that its decision was a) acceptable, even if grudgingly, by its North American flock of faithful, perhaps more sensitive than the faithful in Greece to evidence-based public health recommendations, b) in accordance with the desires of public authorities there, local, state and federal⁴⁴, c) and perhaps also protecting the Archdiocese from being held legally liable for any injury that might befall individual lay members from continued adherence to Greek Orthodox liturgical practices. More generally, the Greek Orthodox Church in the US, and in other countries with significant Greek diaspora populations, probably is cautious in asserting itself in ways that might go either against wider public sentiment in host societies, or might displease the authorities of host states.

The Greek government's wish to highlight that Greek Orthodox doctrine can be flexible enough to accommodate the drastic measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic might also have been a factor for the Archdiocese of America, as well as to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople - the Greek state being an important stakeholder and interlocutor for both these institutions. Additionally, the Archbishop of America, appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarch, may have also been advised to support the Greek government by the latter, the Patriarchate being in an often contentious relationship over a variety of issues with the Archdiocese of Athens, and consequently competing with the latter for influence in the Greek government. It is also possible that the government actively solicited, and received, this intervention by the two most prominent figures of the Greek Orthodox religion, from the perspective of Greek citizens at any rate, to reside outside Greece.

While these hypotheses are entirely speculative, at the time of writing, we can safely assume that both the Archbishop Elpidoforos and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos were fully aware of the political help their stance on church attendance during the coronavirus pandemic, would provide to the Greek government. They would also be informed of how the public contestation, to which they were de facto participants, played out in the course of this crucial 2-3 week period. The possibility that their impact might severely displease the Archdiocese of Athens, and a majority of the latter's Permanent Holy Synod, has not been a decisive disincentive for either one of them.

⁴⁴ New York City authorities actually ordered the suspension of religious attendance in late March, more than a week after the Greek government did so, as voluntary guidelines to avoid mass gatherings were not fully observed, see, <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2020/03/27/new-york-city-to-shut-down-worship-services-as-coronavirus-spreads-1269450>

Regardless of whichever speculation and interpretation from the above is subsequently confirmed, qualified or negated by either reporting or subsequent research, the key point to emerge from this episode is the following: Greek Orthodox authorities outside Greece due to the diversity and the significance of their host societies and diaspora flock of faithful, and in consonance with the position of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, were both willing and able to lend a helping hand to the government in its effort to pressure the Orthodox Church authorities in Greece to accept the suspension.

The importance of these two major figures of Greek Orthodoxy, and that of aligned opinion-makers, to subdue reactions both by Orthodox church authorities in Greece as well as the faithful, is rendered even starker not by a presence but by an absence: neither the government nor opinion makers focused on the examples of other governments where the majority religion was non-Greek Orthodox, either Christian, such as Catholic and Protestant, or non-Christian, such as Jewish or Muslim. This is notwithstanding the fact that the issue of religious observance amidst the coronavirus pandemic has generated significant public reporting worldwide, ranging from non-attendance of relatives in funerals in Italy, to the suspension of mosque attendance in theocratic Iran, to the impact in the spreading of coronavirus by Hasidic Jews in New York City⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ The risk of religious attendance causing the exponential expansion of the coronavirus has been well-flagged by international media as well as the related as well as varying responses of state authorities, see

<https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-church-online-live-stream-congregation/>

<https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-are-major-religions-responding-coronavirus>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/22/world/middleeast/coronavirus-religion.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/nyregion/coronavirus-hasidic-weddings-brooklyn.html>

<https://www.ft.com/content/56214762-5647-11ea-abe5-8e03987b7b20>

The pandemic in Greece and the testimony of ‘average’ members of the Greek diaspora

Going beyond distinguished diaspora scientists and leading Greek Orthodox authorities outside Greece, we also observe a critical mass of social media interventions, often migrating to mass media such as television and print and electronic media, of diaspora Greeks who relate their experiences in European countries hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

This process unfolded already in China but has arguably culminated in its impact in Italy – Greece’s neighbour and, at the point of writing, Europe’s hardest hit country, with a society seen as very close to that of Greece in terms of the supposedly irrepressible gregariousness and sociability of its people. The dramatic entreaties of Greeks in Italy, students, professionals, and crucially doctors, for Greeks living in Greece to stay at home and not underestimate the ferocity of the pandemic, likely had considerable impact. These entreaties, after all, ‘brought home’ the fact that the pandemic is not something that happens to ‘other people’ but to people very much like Greeks, or even Greeks themselves, living not that far away from the homeland, in Greece’s neighbour, Italy⁴⁶. Additionally, and as the pandemic has gathered pace in exacting an ever greater human toll, in other countries such as Spain and the USA, Greek media has also interviewed diaspora Greeks residing in these countries, including doctors, on the severity of the pandemic⁴⁷.

We must also add the countless private communications between colleagues, friends and relatives, particularly in the context of the fiscal crisis-driven migration that has taken place, with most such migrants working and living in European countries. Notwithstanding the initially different policy treatment of the pandemic by UK authorities, Greeks living in Europe who left Greece recently must surely have impressed upon their compatriots back home the severity of the coronavirus crisis and the need to treat it with the utmost seriousness. Particularly doctors and nurses, who have been the most mobile professional category during the years of the fiscal crisis, with an estimated 25,000 migrating during that period⁴⁸, we speculate that they are in constant communication not only with their families back home but also former colleagues in Greek state and private hospitals.

These mass media, semi-public (social media) and private transmission channels, particularly in Italy, could have been impactful in two interacting ways. First, in raising awareness in the Greek public of the severity of the crisis and thus facilitating the adoption, at the individual level, of precautionary, social distancing measures. Second, and relatedly, in widening the

⁴⁶ See indicatively, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpQCgAFmaP0>, <https://www.facebook.com/george.milonakis.7/videos/10221368592865545/UzpfSTewMDAxMDgwMDA3NDAYMjoxMDc0OTM5NTcyODc2MDM1/>, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1068825/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/gramma-apo-thn-italia>, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1068885/article/epikairothta/ellada/mhn-kanete-to-la8os-poy-kaname-emeis>

⁴⁷ See indicatively, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRsNqsbJy7M> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMs2E1k2U0Y>

⁴⁸ See, <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/03/28/greece/to-esy-na-anteksei-simera-lfna-allaksei-ayrio/>

acceptance of the government's comprehensive response before the pandemic actually got out of control as it happened in Italy, Spain and increasingly in the United States.

Such awareness and acceptance, to the extent that they did materialise, are in turn a function of two factors. First, the ease and zero cost of private and public cross-border communications via smartphones and such mediums as Skype. Second, the fact that the coronavirus pandemic for approximately a period of one month has acquired an exponential growth trajectory in countries with a critical mass of diaspora Greeks – Italy, Spain, United States and, possibly next in sequence, in the UK – while the pandemic has only made incremental inroads in Greece. Thus, acceptance of the coronavirus pandemic's severity, and related behavioural change at the mass level, is to a considerable degree engendered not by lived experience in Greece but by the vicarious intensity of the lived experience of residents of those countries that are the hardest-hit and also host significant Greek diaspora communities⁴⁹.

But the ultimate validation of the government's social distancing policies has come from those members of the diaspora who have taken the ultimate step – to return to Greece, particularly from the UK, where the government was initially heterodox in delaying, and defending its choice to do so, in introducing social distancing measures. In a survey of UK Greeks, 88% have varying degrees of confidence in the Greek government's management of the coronavirus pandemic and only 43% for the UK government's response⁵⁰. While a variety of motives are in play, some of which irrelevant to risk of contagion – a lost job, the need to be closer to one's family members and so on – the perception of 'voting with their own feet', of 'entry and voice' to reverse-paraphrase the famous dictum by Albert Hirschman, sends its own powerful message as Greeks seek to abandon one of the most advanced western states, and founder of one of the world's first modern public health systems, the NHS, and return to the homeland and its historically inefficient and under-resourced Greek state health system.

⁴⁹ See typically these appearances in Greek TV of Greeks in Spain and in the US respectively,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRsNqsbJy7M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMs2E1k2U0Y>

⁵⁰ <https://greeksconnect.co.uk/greeksinlondon/convid-19-and-the-greek-community-in-uk-survey/14214/>

Concluding remarks

While crises are by definition exceptional and not routine affairs they also leave a deep imprint in the societies and polities that survive them. Concurrently, crises catalyse diaspora and homeland interactions, making the diaspora, via a variety of channels and actors, an influential factor in a homeland's society and polity.

The coronavirus pandemic, unique in the rapidity of its dissemination and ferocity of its impact in the history of the post WW II globalised world, has powerfully interacted with distinctive features of the Greek diaspora: an above average, diaspora scientific community in terms of its size and distinction; prominent Greek Orthodox religious authorities, of comparable and thus competitive prestige, within Greece, to that of Greece's own Greek Orthodox authorities; large diaspora populations, recently reinvigorated due to migration engendered by the preceding Greek fiscal crisis and residing in host countries which were hard hit by the coronavirus and/or failed to implement drastic social distancing measures just weeks before the Greek government implemented these measures.

This interaction was however catalysed by a Greek government, and its leader, who months prior the coronavirus's break-out had already chosen to privilege diaspora expertise and technocratic efficacy in various government bodies. The government and the PM formulated policies by inviting the relevant diaspora expertise and validated these policies through the involvement of the relevant diaspora actors.

Furthermore, the government was staffed at the cabinet and upper, bureaucratic echelon levels with resident actors who themselves were of comparable scientific and technocratic skill to that of eminent diaspora scientists and technocrats. This is not to say, however, that the ND government did not also reproduce clientelistic practices, as we noted with the case of the directorships of state hospitals. Still, these limitations and contradictions notwithstanding, the government was open and ready both to listen to advice offered by diaspora and resident scientific experts of equal stature and, as importantly, to act upon such advice.

The government as well as the PM also faced political risk in imposing its will on social distancing measures by ordering the suspension of attendance to church services by the lay faithful, both due to Greece's above average religiosity and due to the comparably greater strength of the Church authorities in Greece within the ranks of the centre right's ND voting constituencies. The government mitigated this risk not by becoming what it could not be – anticlerical and unapologetically secular – but by instrumentalising competing understandings of the Greek Orthodox response to the coronavirus pandemic articulated primarily by the Archdiocese of America and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The only domain where the government did not exercise its agency, but was nonetheless assisted by the diaspora, was in the countless testimonials of diaspora Greeks residing in Europe and the US who experienced first-hand the consequences of the pandemic's exponential growth. Their print, electronic and TV media did its work for it by privileging these diaspora voices in their reporting of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in such countries as Italy, Spain and the USA.