

## Uncertainty and insecurity have pushed Greek society to its limits, and there is no improvement in sight.

by Blog Admin

*The eurozone crisis has had a profound effect on Greek society. Drawing on in-depth interviews with a cross-section of Greek citizens, **Athanasia Chalari** finds that the combination of harsh austerity measures and a dysfunctional state has created a social reality in Greece that is characterised by anger, disappointment, and an extreme pessimism about the future.*



The last three years have been a period of economic and political crisis for Greece, exacerbated by unprecedented austerity measures. These policies have led to an uncontrollable destabilisation within Greek society, which has dramatically affected the everyday lives of Greek citizens. Since such measures have not been implemented before in any other EU country, the possible political and social consequences have not been effectively calculated or, in many respects, even anticipated.

Modern Greek society has suffered ongoing discontinuities over a prolonged period, which has caused significant delays in terms of social, political and economic development. In addition, the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century was extremely turbulent for Greece in terms of political, social, economic and especially historical stability, which did not allow Greek society to be formed and organised freely and fully. After the fall of the Military Junta in 1974, democracy in Greece was restored rapidly, but not systematically and thoroughly. This inevitably allowed certain structural dysfunctions.

As part of my research, I conducted over thirty five in-depth interviews in the last year, all over Greece, with young and old, employed and unemployed, male and female, married and unmarried, Greeks from affluent families, the middle-class and the lower class. I found that today Greeks are experiencing a new social reality characterised by uncertainty, insecurity, distress, disappointment and the inability to produce specific projections about their future lives.

The participants in this study expressed negativity, pessimism and disorientation, particularly regarding the lack of any specific plan to improve their everyday lives. As one respondent stated, “the situation creates insecurity for everyone about the future”. Unemployment rates have increased continuously (currently at 24.4 per cent), and the young generation in Greece, especially, suffers the most as the unemployment rate for people up to 24 years old is currently estimated to be 55 per cent.



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Everyday life has become more challenging, as criminality increases, inflation is still high, and redundancies are common. For those who have an income, cuts in salaries and pensions are still progressing (40 per cent over the last three years). The basic monthly salary has fallen from 739 euros

in 2009, to 586 euros in 2012. The prices of basic goods have not dropped, whereas taxation increases annually. Participants felt cornered and angry as they explained that they were trapped in a 'system' (referring to the way Greek government works) that was only concerned about maintaining its power without offering anything in return:

*"we lived part of our lives in a way we didn't deserve, but the system [i.e. the Greek state] allowed us to do it. They didn't stop us. They even encouraged us. So if the system works in a certain way you have no option but to follow".*

Greeks are progressively losing their trust in the political system, which consists mainly of parties (and politicians) who have governed Greece for the last 30 years. This year's elections resulted in a coalition government in which, for the first time, the two major parties who have governed Greece since 1974 joined forces (along with a smaller new left party). They did so in order to renegotiate the Memorandum of Understanding, which outlines how Greece will reform its economy in exchange for its bailout.

The faith of Greek citizens in the current government is falling, and they perceive the implementation of austerity measures as an on-going punishment imposed on them by the EU with no result, and no end. This is leading to the collective feeling in Greece of despair at any possibility of future improvement:

*"The situation is tragic, not because of the economy but because of the fact that there is no future. We have been convinced about that. There is no prospect. This is killing us".*

Participants explained that the lack of a political figure or party currently able to inspire them, along with the realisation that "the worst is yet to come", makes them more concerned with how to make their living from day to day, than they are about joining one of the "unpersuasive political parties or non governmental movements". Their main priority is to gain employment or to keep their job. They felt that they had to be grateful if they were still employed, although employment conditions are becoming more exploitative:

*"Professionally, I don't know if I will have a job tomorrow and, personally, I have no desire to do anything joyful anymore. There is so much insecurity about everything".*

As Greek society experiences unparalleled circumstances of social, political and economic crisis, it is still unknown what peoples' tolerance levels are towards more austerity measures. Participants expressed anguish over the future of their country, although they have also accepted their own partial responsibility for the crisis (even if it was passive): "I have contributed through my tolerance"; "I tolerated a corrupt political system that buys votes". They seem determined not to pass harmful attitudes to their children.

Greek society and the Greek state have suffered a prolonged period of dysfunctional operation. The current crisis has brought to the surface impairments which could no longer remain hidden and the country's inability to handle the crisis has been fully revealed. Greek society has been pushed to its limits for the last three years and as Greeks continue to see no improvement in their everyday lives, or any actual structural reform of the state or any aspect of the political life, they will remain feeling angry and cornered. This has resulted in the [increased popularity](#) of the fascist 'Golden Dawn' party, which enables and promotes the legitimization of violence. From a sociological point of view this economic crisis has activated an unpredictable domino effect in terms of incalculable social consequences and it is unknown where the end lies. It remains to be seen if other European societies will follow the Greek path or if social stability and cohesion will be adequately valued and protected in the future.

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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