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**THE EVOLUTION OF TERRORISM IN GREECE  
FROM 1975 TO 2009**

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## **THE EVOLUTION OF TERRORISM IN GREECE**

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On June 29, 2002, in Piraeus Port –the largest port in Greece- the bomb that was suppose to target the offices of a Greek shipping company, exploded accidentally in the hands of its owner. His serious injury obstructed his escape; thus resulting in its immediate arrest, followed by a sequence of actions by the Greek authorities that led to the capture of the members of the most lethal Greek terrorist group, the Revolutionary Organization November 17 (17N). The 9-month trial that followed the arrests and the convictions to life imprisonment put an end to nearly 30 years of continuous terrorist activities in Greece.

In 2003, amidst the trials of the 17N members an explosive device that was detonated outside the main court buildings, signaled the emergence of a new terrorist wave that troubled greatly the Greek authorities and confused the Greek society, putting a quick end to the optimism that followed the arrests of the 17N members.

The history of modern terrorism demonstrates that a new generation of extreme violence should not come as a complete surprise. Almost 130 years of ongoing terrorist activities by numerous different groups across the world indicate that sociopolitical transformations based on political or religious differences, human rights violations (Apartheid) or even territorial disputes (Israel-Palestine, Northern Ireland) could lead to the emergence of new theories (Marxism, anarchism, Islamic extremism) and to the eruption of reactions through public demonstrations and strikes (May '68) or individual acts of violence that eventually inspire or trigger extreme behaviours like terrorism.

Nevertheless, each and every terrorist organization constitutes a unique entity that has been inspired, influenced and evolved under different social, political and economic circumstances. To that extent, when the first generation of terrorism in Greece emerged in the mid 1970's domestically, the country was coming out of a 7-year military junta after several decades of



sociopolitical turmoil; while internationally, an era of continuous and intense sociopolitical activity was coming to an end. On the contrary, during the period of the second generation's emergence, Greece was under political and economic stability for nearly 30 years; while the international new religious terrorist wave had no direct links with the Greek society.

Under these circumstances, one could easily raise the question why a small democratic country like Greece was and still is for that matter, amidst two terrorist waves. The answer is the result of the combination of several different factors that derive from the Greek modern history and the current social, political and economic environment.

From its emergence terrorism in Greece was defined as ultra-left oriented; it was neither religious nor linked to a territorial dispute. It was the result of the sociopolitical transformations Greece underwent during the last two centuries, namely since the country's independence from the Ottoman Empire. As it will be examined in the following chapters the inability of the middle class to become an active component of the Greek society allowed the plutocracy and the monarchy to concentrate all privileges. Moreover, in order to safeguard their social status, the latter granted to the law enforcement agencies the right to suppress the middle class. Within this context, the Greek society gradually developed resentment towards the establishment; eventually, when the international and domestic transformations allowed it, it was unleashed in the form of violence.

Nevertheless, history alone does not justify the continuous presence of terrorism in the country. The inadequacy of the Greek authorities primarily, and secondly, the excellent operational structures of the groups allowed the

latter a continuity of almost thirty years; while they set the ground for the emergence of new terrorist groups.

Terrorism however is not an end; is merely the mean to an end. Terrorist groups emerge in order to achieve a certain objective, namely to alter the current status quo in order to establish a new one based on their ideology.

The present study aims primarily to examine the evolution of terrorism in Greece from 1975, when it firstly emerged, until the present day. In the first chapter, there will be a brief analysis of the international patterns of terrorism in order to establish a general overview of the phenomenon. The second chapter analyses the Greek modern history; namely what were the factors that led to the emergence of left oriented terrorism in the country. The third chapter will examine the case of Revolutionary Organization N17 as not only it constitutes the most lethal terrorist group in the country but also it is a unique case of terrorist organization as although it emerged as an authentic left-oriented group within the years it managed without any actual proposals or solid ideology to build a myth around it. Finally, the last chapter will offer an analysis of the current situation; namely the causes that fuel the emergence and preservation of terrorism in the country.

Due to the particularity of the subject, the majority of sources are in Greek. Furthermore, there are no academic reports on the current situation; hence the research was based mainly on journal articles.

However, of great significance was the personal interview with Mrs Mary Bossis, a Greek academic who specializes in terrorism in Greece. It will not be inaccurate to say that currently, she is the only academic expert on the field.

Her placement in the Ministry of Public Order during the crucial years of the November 17 developments had provided her excellent knowledge of the subject.

### ***I. Patterns of international terrorism***

Terrorism does not constitute a new phenomenon. There are writings on terrorist activities during the antiquity; the Jewish Zealots or *sicarii* and the Assassins were the most known groups of that era that used violence in order to achieve their objectives (Chaliand & Blin 2007: 9, 55-60). Many centuries later, during the French Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the newly established regime would use violence, in particular *terreur* from which derived the English term *terror*, in order to deter and punish those acting against the new establishment. Although it is defined as 'state terrorism', it certainly was deliberate and organized; while it was aiming to achieve a political objective as were the subsequent terrorist organizations (Chaliand & Blin 2007: 95-96, Hoffman 2006:2-4).

The beginning of contemporary terrorism however, is placed in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ever since, the international community has experienced continuous terrorist activities on international or intrastate level. Academics detect four major trends of terrorism –or 'waves' according to Rapoport (2002)- during the last 130 years since its emergence, based mainly on the terrorist groups' ideology and objectives; anarchism (1880-1920); anti- colonialism (1920-1960); the new left ideology period (1960-1990); and the current religious wave.

A number of various reasons triggered the emergence of numerous terrorist groups during these waves. The anti-colonialists for example were inspired by Woodrow Wilson's point on the right of peoples to self determination that was included in the Versailles Peace Treaty and later, in the UN Charter and sought their independence (Rapoport 2002, Chaliand & Blin 2007:97-98, 113-116, Hoffman 2006:5-7); whereas the sociopolitical transformations of the 1960's triggered the left terrorist groups of that era (Chaliand & Blin 2006:230-240, Rapoport 2002, Hoffman 2006:16-41, Ioakimoglou & Triantafyllou 2003, Bossi 1996). Several years later, the theories of radical Islamists like Abdallah Azzam and Syed Qutb would influence the terrorist groups of the 'religious wave' that were triggered by the 1973 Iranian Revolution and the Afghan-Soviet war of the 1980's (Burke 2007, Chaliand & Blin 2007).

Nonetheless, despite of the variety of factors that lead to the eruption of terrorist activities, all terrorist organizations seek to achieve a certain objective. They have different motives, ideology and operational tactics, however they all aim to accomplish the same objective; the change of the current situation in favour of a new status quo based on the groups' principles. To that extent, they develop their ideology in order to on the one hand, publicize their aim and therefore attract supporters or even new members, and on the other hand, to justify their acts of violence against their enemy. Despite of any obvious differences in their doctrines or operational methods, all terrorist groups envision themselves as a vanguard on the defense of the 'weaker', namely the populace; the 'simple people' (17N 2002), against the 'stronger', the enemy, that usually is the state; the law enforcement mechanisms; a foreign state or even a different religion. In particular, when

anarchism emerged in the 1880's, the technological development and the industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had led to economic growth; hence, to the formation of social classes, the upper class or *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat* or working class that had almost no access to privileges. To that extent, anarchists would use violence in order to mobilize the proletariat towards a revolution against the exploitation of the bourgeoisie (Chaliand & Blin 2007: 113-116, Hoffman 2006, Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou 2003). Later, the groups of the 'anti-colonial wave' would fight for their country's independence from the colonial powers, like the FLN in Algeria that used terrorist activities against France; whereas the left groups of the 1960's, inspired by the fights of the underdeveloped countries against the Western super powers (Vietnam War, Latin America) and the human rights violations in the Third World countries (Apartheid), would operate against the state apparatus (Rapoport 2002, Hoffman 2006). Nowadays, Islamic extremism recognizes its enemy mainly in the United States; thus, is seeking to 'awaken the Muslim community' towards the establishment of a united Muslim state that would terminate the exploitation of the 'western invaders' (Burke 2007).

In order to best succeed their objectives, terrorist groups use violence; they develop a modus operandi. The latter differs amongst the numerous organizations throughout the years and is based on what the group aims to achieve, its funds and its equipment that evolves as technology constantly develops. For example, the anarchists were using dynamite (Chaliand & Blin 2007); whereas in the present day the international community deprecates against the use of chemical and biological weapons. Moreover, according to their objective, terrorists have different target groups. For example, while

anarchists targeted members of the government, the anti-colonialists believed that military personnel would prove a more effective target (Rapoport 2002). Later, in the 1960's, terrorists introduced to the international community hijackings, hostage seizures and kidnappings that in some cases could lead to the killing of the victim (Red Brigades- Aldo Moro case) (Rapoport 2002, Bossi 1996, Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou: 2003). On the other hand, while the previous generations tried to avoid hurting civilians, in 2001 Al Qaeda was responsible for the deaths of approximately 3500 people. As a consequence, it becomes apparent that unfortunately, as years pass by, the terrorist groups seek to differentiate from their predecessors; hence, they become more ruthless and aim to spectacular actions rather than effective ones. In other words, an explosive device in a car is a 'weaker action' compared to the explosion of a building.

Their 'golden era' succeeds a deterioration that in the majority of the cases leads to the end of a terrorist group. Rapoport (2002) argues that an ideological wave lasts approximately 40 years; then, as noted earlier, it is succeeded by a new movement. However, the longevity of a terrorist organization is not directly linked with the evolution of its ideological environment. The end of a group is the result of various factors. The main factor is the objective; more precisely, how the objective that the group aims to achieve preserves its substance through the years. This is closely linked to the tolerance or acceptance of the public opinion. In other words, as the international patterns demonstrate, terrorist movements on territorial disputes tend to last longer than any other ideologies. For example, the IRA could be characterized as the most durable terrorist group in the history of terrorism;

similarly, the Basque ETA is still active; whereas the left oriented Red Brigades or the German RAF had a short active period. In short, an objective that appears more realistic to the public opinion –hence it evokes its sympathy or toleration and consequently, provides new members to the group- could result to a longer period of activities than an ideology that seems utopian.

On the other hand, the loss of its primary audience could accelerate the dissolution of the organization or result in its deterioration. In other words, when a terrorist group aims to provoke a people's revolution, to awaken the society towards a public struggle, has failed its mission if the society does not offer its support.

In general, when a group first appears to the public scene attracts a number of sympathizers or even supporters that may identify with its ideology. For example, the terrorists of the anti-colonial movement had evoked the public opinion's sympathy to such extent that they were frequently recognized as 'freedom fighters' instead of terrorists (Rapoport 2002). At this point, the organization reaches its peak, its 'golden era' as mentioned earlier. However, it is then that terrorists tend to become arrogant or even over-ambitious; this behaviour eventually results in great mistakes. As a consequence, these mistakes on the one hand, lead to the loss of any sympathizers or supporters and on the other hand, allow the state authorities to recruit and attack. In any case, they lead to the end of the groups' existence either by dissolution or by captivity. For example, after the 9/11 attacks that resulted in the deaths of thousands of people and led to two wars in the Middle East, the Muslim community turned its back to al Qaeda (Burke 2007). Similarly, when the Red Brigades kidnapped and killed the former Italian PM Aldo Moro, the public

opinion that until then was in a way tolerating the group's ideology and activities was shocked; a few years later the group announced its disbandment (Bossi 1996, Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou 2003, Pappas 2002).

International experience indicates that there are similarities, patterns, amongst the terrorist organizations in terms not only of operational tactics but of ideology as well. The religion motivated the Assassins in the antiquity; the religion is the mobilizing force behind the current terrorist wave. Similarly, the anarchists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were against the state apparatus, so did their successors of the new left movement 60 years later. Undoubtedly, there are similarities but there are also many differences. Each terrorist group should be regarded as an independent, unique organization since it has been developed under different social, political and cultural circumstances that led to its emergence and influenced its ideology and modus operandi.

## ***II. Modern Greek history; the route to terrorism***

Terrorism in Greece in general, could be characterized as ultra-left oriented; the Greek terrorist groups operate mostly against the establishment, the law enforcement agencies, especially the police, US targets and the plutocracy (Bossi 1996, Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou 2003, Kassimeris 2001, 2004, US Department of State 2009, Economist 2000, 2002). In short, Greek terrorism is neither religious-motivated nor linked to a territorial dispute. Its main ideology is based on the notion that the Greek establishment in cooperation with the United States and the bourgeoisie are responsible with their authoritarian behaviours and the exploitation of the proletariat for what they see as the social, political and economic deterioration of the country



(Kassimeris 2001, 2004, Karyotis 2007, Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003). Undoubtedly, there are numerous different factors that contributed to the emergence of two generations of terrorism in Greece; nonetheless, the deeper causes to their main ideology lie in the country's modern history. It was a combination of behaviours, actions, reactions, ambitions and in many cases of apathy from the country's main actors, namely the political world, the social classes, the monarchy and the army, that resulted in that conception (Kassimeris 2001).

Since Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century until the late 1970's, the predominant governing scheme would be the triarchy 'throne-army-parliament alliance' (Kassimeris 2001: 21), in which the 'throne' was an imposed foreign monarchy and the 'parliament alliance' was mainly a right government supported by the elite and the crown. In combination with the powerful presence of foreign powers, these 'main institutional pillars of the political system' (Kassimeris 2001:21) would obstruct other components of the Greek society, namely the middle class or later, the left ideology supporters from the development of an active role within the society; thus, preserving for a long-term period social unrest and political dysfunction (Kassimeris 2001, Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou 2003, FHW 2007).

When terrorism emerged for the first time in the mid 1970's, despite its great political and cultural heritage, Greece was relatively a new state. It had only gained its independence in 1830, after nearly 400 years under the Ottoman Empire's rule. As a result to the occupation, the country was isolated from the rest of the world and subsequently, from any social, political and cultural transformations that were taking place in Europe during these years, such as

the Renaissance and the Enlightenment (Kassimeris 2001). As part of the Ottoman Empire, Greece had developed a different way of governing that was in a way imposed to it by the Ottoman rulers. When independence was achieved in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Greek upper class members struggled over the acquisition of state power; suppressing the privileges and the rights of the middle class and resulting to a weak state apparatus. Moreover, under these circumstances, the major European powers of that period, namely England, France and Russia, sought to establish strong links with the new state mostly because of its geostrategic importance; the Ottoman Empire was gradually deteriorating; thus, the Great Powers wanted access on its natural resources and control of the major commercial routes (FHW 2007). As a consequence, partly because of the country's political forces to promote anything else than their personal interests and partly because of the country's fragile international position, Greece became greatly dependent to the 'power, or powers, which favoured its claims' (Kassimeris 2001:10).

Until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was not a significant change in the country's social, political and economic status quo. The middle class had not yet established a unite front to claim equal rights within the society; hence, it had no participation in main structures of the new state; allowing the elite to establish a dominant role in the social and political scene.

Nevertheless, the development of commercial activities in other parts of Europe, in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contributed to the spread of the new ideologies that were emerging at that time in Europe, such as Marxism, communism and anarchism. These ideologies would offer a new perspective in the proletariat; they would awaken to a point the middle class to challenge

the political actors of the society and claim equal rights and privileges (FHW 2007). The Greek middle class at this point began to move towards the claim of an active role within the society but as it was still unorganized it achieved nothing. They would not form a compact force against the upper class until the 1922. Until then, nothing had changed drastically towards the amelioration of the Greek sociopolitical environment. The 1909 military coup and later the 'national schism' over the country's participation in World War I resulted in further political and social turmoil (Kassimeris 2001).

In the meantime, the World War I that followed the Balkan Wars contributed greatly to the gradual deterioration of what was left of the Ottoman Empire. By 1922, the major European powers that were interested in acquiring control over the Ottoman region were able to establish links with the new political actors of the deteriorating empire. This signified that they could break their ties with Greece which at the moment had sent its army in a campaign against the Ottoman Turkey, claiming its former territories in Asia Minor. Without the foreign support the Greek army suffered a major defeat that consequently, put an end to a quite superfluous ambition that predominated the aspirations of the Greek people ever since the independence (Kassimeris 2001, FHW 2007). The Asia Minor disaster that put an abrupt end to the desire to repossess the *hamena edafi* or 'lost territories' in order to fulfill the country of the 'two continents and the five seas' notion, resulted in great social, political, and economic transformations in Greece. The nearly 1.5 million refugees who sought a new life in a country of fragile borders and a population of 5 millions led to the change of the country's political and social scene by introducing new ideas and perceptions (Kassimeris 2001). Unlike the mainly rural

population of Greece, the Asia Minor refugees were coming from a highly developed region. This new wave of population was well educated, open-minded and determined to seek its rights within the Greek society (FHW 2007). It constituted a new social actor that mobilized the middle class towards a social revolution against the authoritarian forces of that era. Under the new circumstances that potentially could endanger the current status quo, namely the privileges of the political and social elite of that era, the latter developed 'a series of repressive measures' in order to prevent, stop and punish anyone who might seek the change of the status quo.

In the post 1922 era, the country was under social, political and economic dysfunction that reached its peak in 1936 when Ioannis Metaxas established a new military dictatorship<sup>1</sup> that was supported by the throne. The Metaxas oligarchic administration was rather 'anti-democratic and authoritarian' (Kassimeris 2001: 15). During his governing, the police obtained a more powerful role than a mere law enforcement mechanism. It became the regime's tool for, not only the suppression but also the punishment of those opposed the regime and in particular, those who might express any pro-communism opinions. Police was given the authority to prosecute any civilian on just the suspicion of being a communist or an enemy to the regime. Unjustified arrests, torture and 'classification of citizens in discriminatory categories' became the prevalent practices of the Metaxas 'monarcho-fascist regime' (Kassimeris 2001, FHW 2007).

World War II put a temporary end, more likely a pause, to the chaotic circumstances of the intra-war period. In fact, the socio-political turmoil

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<sup>1</sup> There were three more in 1909, 1916 and 1922.

resumed after the end of WWII. In the post-war era however, the domestic and international circumstances were different compared to the intra-war period. On the one hand, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) that was in political isolation and had chosen neutrality during the intra-war middle class struggles, was determined to challenge the pre-war political status quo and consequently, the until then predominant social actors, namely the monarchy, the army, the bourgeoisie and the right political forces. The active and important role of the party against the Axis occupation forces during WWII contributed significantly to the KKE's radical change of position (Kassimeris 2001).

On the other hand, in the international scene, Cold War had just emerged. The anti-communism mania that would dominate the US way of thinking for the next 40 years had just been expressed through the Truman doctrine. After years of isolation from the international community, the United States chose to assume an active role in the international scene. Determined not to allow the establishment of any communist regime across the world, the US supported the Greek post-WWII government in order to suppress successfully any left-oriented behaviours. While the rest of the war-affected western European countries were being reconstructed under the aid of the US Marshall Plan, Greece was at war. The 4-year civil war between the pro-communist EAM/ELAS (National Liberation Front/Greek People's Liberation Army) and the state forces resulted in the deaths of over 80,000 Greeks; while nearly 700,000 lost their homes (Ioakimoglou & Triantafyllou 2003, Kassimeris 2001, FHW 2007, GlobalSecurity.org).

The post-WWII civil war signaled the change from the post-1821 era when the state was being formed under the political and social elite's predominance to an era of new social, political and economic transformations that would define the next at least 40 years of the Greek sociopolitical stage. The Greek civil war was of great significance. On the one hand, it became the first battle of the 40-year rivalry between the two super powers of the period, the United States and the Soviet Union. It became clear that both sides were determined to use any means in order to deter each other across the world. On the other hand, the civil war affected greatly the Greek social and political status quo. Firstly, as the country was once again in economic crisis as a result of two wars and in rivalry with Turkey over territorial claims, it was in need of external help which found in the United States. The latter that were aiming to develop as many spheres of power against the USSR, wanted Greece to fight communism; whereas Greece needed the US help to safeguard its sovereignty against the Turkish threat. This opportunistic yet dependence relation from the Greek part, would continue to exist for many years to come; thus, becoming a matter of dispute within the Greek society (Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou 2003, Kassimeris 2001).

Greek civil war ended in 1949 with the defeat of the communist forces. Despite that however, the crown-supported right government of Alexandros Papagos and later, of Konstantinos Karamanlis' ERE, was determined not to allow any similar actions against the current status quo in the future. To that extent, having the support of the States, the government continued its 'crusade' against communism frantically. As a consequence, the Greek Communist Party, as well as anything related to communism and left ideology

was banned from the Greek society (Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou 2003, Kassimeris 2001). The armed forces became government's tool to the campaign against communism. In particular, the police was authorized by anticonstitutional laws to use violence against any civilian on just the suspicion of having a different political opinion. As Kassimeris (2001) points out 'until *metapolitefsi* (the post- 1967 junta period) all Greek citizens were categorized to *ethnikofrones* (nationally-minded citizens) and the non-*ethnikofrones* (the communists, fellow-travelers and sympathizers)'. This social discrimination describes clearly the post-civil war environment.

In the meantime, the socio-economic problems of the 1950's, poor education, urban migration, unemployment to name but a few, added up to the already problematic environment and resulted to social unrest. Public dissatisfaction against the governing powers was evident (Pedaliu 2007, Kassimeris 2001). It was expressed eventually in the 1963 national elections, when after almost 10 years of continuous right governments the Greeks gave their trust vote to George Papandreou's Centre Union on the hope that he could make a difference. Indeed, during his brief governing, Papandreou showed the will to ameliorate the sociopolitical environment of the country. He introduced, among other things, better social services and education system but more importantly, he was determined to put an end to the unlawful and obscure practices of the post-WWII era regarding communism and to that extent, freedom of expression and speech. Under his administration 'political participation and mobilization were encouraged under freer conditions of expression and conduct' (Kassimeris 2001).

However, the social and political changes that Papandreou was determined to implement would end the long dominance of the triarchy 'throne-army-parliament' in which parliament signified a long period of throne supported right governments. Through the years, these actors had managed to establish a powerful presence in the country; hence, they had immediate reactions in order to suppress any movements that might threaten their status, that resulted to several military coups, later the civil war and eventually, to a state of strong police presence. Papandreou's aspirations for radical changes would strengthen the parliament through the equal and freer participation of various political parties. Consequently, the army that until then had obtained great power at first during Metaxas' coup and later, during the civil war, would lose a significant part of its dominance. Therefore, following the example of General Metaxas, in 1967 the army leadership established a military dictatorship under the pretext of firstly, putting an end to the "anarchy and chaos" that the "King and the right" had brought to the country; secondly, preventing a potential "communist coup" (Pedaliu 2007, Kassimeris 2001).

The seven years of military rule were defined by human rights abuse, tortures, fear and uncertainty. Academics, politicians and many other Greeks sought refuge abroad in order to on the one hand, avoid the strict, authoritarian rule of the dictators and on the other hand, to organize the resistance. Papahelas and Telloglou (2003) argue that during the first years of the dictatorship, the Greeks out of fear did not react to the authoritarian establishment. Indeed, the Colonels had established a state of fear where the police would arrest and even torture those that opposed the establishment. However, as Kassimeris points out in his book, undoubtedly there was fear



but up to a certain point, the people that were tired by the continuous political and social unrest, found that the military junta was better than the available alternatives (2001:22).

The Greek students from abroad and in Greece were the firsts that attempted a mass reaction against the coup. In November 17, 1973, a great number of students were locked up in Athens Polytechnic demanding better educational system but above all, freedom. The revolt evolved to be a major bloodshed for the students; however, it marked an era of resistance. Abroad many students, academics and politicians inspired by the international sociopolitical transformations of that period would establish resistant movements (Kassimeris 2001, Papahelas 2003, Ioakimoglou & Triantafyllou 2003, Pedaliu 2007). Eventually, in July 1974 the military regime quit its position and asked the politicians to return to the country. At this point, it should be stressed that as Kassimeris points out, the collapse of the regime was not a result of a counter-coup or of a popular revolution. The invasion of Cyprus by Turkey alarmed the colonels that in front of the possibility of war between the two countries, were forced to abandon the government (2001:23).

### ***III. The first generation- the case of the Revolutionary Organization November 17***

Terrorism in Greece emerged in 1974-75, shortly after the collapse of the military junta. It was defined as an extra-parliamentary ultra-left movement that aimed to establish socialism through violence. Two were the main groups of that period that managed to remain active for almost 30 years; the Revolutionary Organization November 17 (17N) and ELA (Epanastatikos

Laikos Agonas/ Revolutionary Popular Struggle). Both groups argued that the previous governments in association with external forces, namely the US, were responsible for the social, political, and economic deterioration of the country; hence, the time was right for the proletariat to revolt and to change the current status quo (RO17N 2002, Chalazias 2003). They envisioned themselves as the vanguard that would mobilize the society towards that perspective which eventually would result in the establishment of a socialist state. Thereafter, and until their capture in 2002, they would target the police, the Greek political world, the plutocracy and US targets as the crucial factors of Greek society's deterioration.

### ***The Revolutionary Organization November 17***

When the RO17N first introduced itself to the Greek society through the assassination of the CIA's station chief in Athens, Richard Welch, in December 1975, there were voices amongst the authorities that linked the group to the organizations of resistance during the seven-year military junta. This notion was strengthened further when the group's subsequent targets were officers of the military regime whom the group accused of conducting tortures against civilians. However, as the organization was continuing its activities, it was also expanding its target group to targets not directly linked to the dictatorship; thus, it became more difficult for the Greek authorities to configure the group's background (Papahelas 2003, Bossi 1996).

Nonetheless, the 2002 arrests revealed that the assumptions of the early years were to a certain degree correct. The convicted as founder and chief ideologue of 17N, Alexandros Yiotopoulos, was a member of the Greek

Communist Youth in Paris during the military junta and was actively involved with the resistance (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, BBC Greek 2003).

Yiotopoulos was the son of a politically active man in the side of the Soviet Marxist theorist, Leon Trotsky. As a student of economics in Paris during the 1960's, young Yiotopoulos was quite interested in the social and political changes that were taking place in the world. A supporter of Trotskyism, he allegedly commented on Stalin's atrocities in the USSR that "deaths are of no importance compared to the movement's [Socialism] evolution"( Papahelas 2003: 15, Labropoulos 2003).

When the colonels established a totalitarian regime in 1967, Yiotopoulos was greatly troubled with the situation in Greece. As a member of the Communist Party in Paris, he was disappointed by the Party's apathy against the developments. As the Greek students in Paris were organizing their actions against the new establishment, Yiotopoulos was promoting the notion of an armed struggle. His perception of armed resistance was in contradiction with the Party's idea of action (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003). As a consequence, Yiotopoulos –independently from the Party- created the May 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (29M), a small group of five people. As the informal leader of the group, Yiotopoulos would set the plan of action of the movement, leaving no space for arguments to the other members. Through 29M, he was determined to organize an armed movement in Greece that would revolt against the military junta but more importantly, against "monarchy and imperialism"( Papahelas 2003:27); in other words against the former establishment which he accused of being responsible for the current situation. He was against the Greek Communist Party that with its practices was aiming to become a

parliamentary entity; thus, erasing, according to Yiotopoulos, the civil war's struggles. On the contrary, he believed in the power of violence as a mean to succeed an objective. To that extent, as an admirer of the armed struggles in Latin America, in particular of Che Guevara and the Tupamaros movement in Uruguay, he organized an 'educative' trip in Cuba for 18 members of 29M in 1969, in order to be trained in conditions of guerilla warfare in urban and rural areas. During the 8-month training in Cuba however, the military regime in Greece arrested the remaining members of the group, resulting in 29M's disbandment before operating any action against the regime (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003).

Despite the developments, Yiotopoulos was determined to achieve his objective; the creation of an armed popular movement against the Greek establishment. With a few of his former associates, he created LEA (Laiki Epanastatiki Antistasi/ Popular Revolutionary Struggle) in 1969. LEA managed to organize a number of attacks against the dictatorship in Greece namely two car explosions and some explosive devices. Once again, the group's proclamations reflected the aspirations of Yiotopoulos of an armed struggle. In a LEA communiqué in 1971, it was written that the organization was created "not to promote resistance as a mean of pressure against the military junta but to overthrow the entire edifice of dependence that gave birth to the dictatorship"( Papahelas 2003:27, Labropoulos 2003).

LEA was amongst the groups of resistance that managed to survive until the collapse of the colonels' regime in 1974. After the end of the military junta and the establishment of a new democratic regime, there were many voices among the groups that favoured the continuity of the armed struggle. The

supporters of the armed struggle, amongst them Yiotopoulos as well, believed that on the one hand, there was still a great danger of a new military coup from the supporters of dictatorship; and on the other hand, that the end of junta did not signify the end of the establishment that led to the deterioration of the country. On the contrary, it assumed its previous role after the collapse of the totalitarian regime; hence, it was imperative to continue their armed struggles (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003).

Under these circumstances, Yiotopoulos and a great number of other groups' members formed ELA (Epanastatikos Laikos Agonas/ Revolutionary Popular Struggle) in 1974. Operating against the Greek political world – including the Greek Communist Party-, the US, the NATO and the police, ELA was aiming to mobilize the populace towards a revolution against the existing capitalist and imperialist establishment, in order for socialism to prevail. It is believed that at the time of its emergence, ELA had nearly 60 members. The new group was an open-type organization, more like a “federation of groups”, namely it consisted of independent cells across the country; its members could join the organization even for a brief period of time. ELA that managed to remain active until the early 1990's carried out mostly non-lethal low-level bombings (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2003, Chalazias 2003).

As a consequence, Yiotopoulos who was in favour of a close-type organization and believed in the effectiveness of 'spectacular' attacks detached himself from ELA. In 1975, in association with other breakaway members, Yiotopoulos formed the Revolutionary Organization November 17 which was named after the Polytechnic incidents in November 1973. Since its

emergence and until the capture of its members in 2002, 17N dominated the Greek society as the most lethal terrorist organization. It carried out 106 attacks and killed 23 people (Kassimeris 2005:105); while it issued more than 80 communiqués, always claiming responsibility for every operation.

### ***i) Ideology***

17N has been classified as an ultra-left extra-parliamentary terrorist organization (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2004, Karyotis 2007, Bakoyiannis 2001, Council on Foreign Affairs 2007). Indeed, at the time of its emergence, it was a left-oriented organization. However, during its 30-year existence, 17N underwent certain ideological transformations that in the end, led to the existence of a different organization. Its ideological route could be divided into three main periods: 1975-1983, 1983-1990 and 1990-2002.

#### **a) 1975-1990**

The international and domestic social, political and economic transformations of the past decades were reflected in the activities of the group's early years. The 17N founders –strong supporters of the Marxist-Leninist theory- envisioned the establishment of a socialist state, namely state power to the populace and equal rights and privileges for everyone; in short, the absence of capitalism and social distinctions (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2001, 2004, Karyotis 2007, RO17N 2002). 17N however, as all the left-oriented groups of that period like the Italian Red Brigades and the German RAF, believed that “socialism could only be achieved through violence (RO17N 2002:42)” since the parliamentary practices of the past had failed resulting in sociopolitical deterioration. In

particular, the 17N members argued that the “state fascist mechanism”, a term that was used excessively in the group’s first communiqués to describe the political world, the police and the presence of foreign forces like the USA and the NATO, was responsible for the deterioration of the country (RO17N 2002). The group’s first communiqué wrote “Our People [the Greeks] knows very well what the American imperialism is; the public enemy number one, responsible for the domestic fascists, the numerous problems and crimes against our People for many decades. Wherever we turn our eyes, the finger of CIA is behind everything”. It continues later that “The government is mocking [the people]. The parliament is burbling without any results.”(RO17N 2002)

In addition, as was the case with the Red Brigades in Italy, the group held also responsible the Greek Communist Party (KKE) (Bossi 1996, Ioakimoglou & Triantafillou 2003). According to the organization’s first manifesto in 1977, “*Apantisi sta Kommata kai stis Organoseis*<sup>2</sup>” 17N accused KKE of incapability and unwillingness to defend the working class’s interest against the existing capitalistic establishment (RO17N 2002). They advocated that after the civil war, and particularly during the military junta, KKE had failed the expectations of its supporters by choosing neutrality. According to the manifesto, the Communist Party “did not resist during the coup and it did not mobilize the populace for resistance” (RO17N 2002:35). Hence, the populace had to develop its own mechanisms of resistance, as they were for example the students’ revolts. Moreover, since the collapse of the dictatorship, KKE sought to acquire parliamentary substance; erasing in that way the movement’s past

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<sup>2</sup> A Response to Parties and Organisations

struggles against the establishment and failing the expectations of its primary force, the proletariat.

Consequently, according to the organization the time was right for the populace to claim its rights. As stated by the group, the resistance that had been developed during the dictatorship and especially the Polytechnic events in 1973 that influenced the group significantly, were indicative of the people's desire to overthrow the existing "capitalism and imperialism" in order to establish a socialist society. Therefore, the primary "strategic task of the organization would be the creation of a popular army" (RO17N 2002:62). To that extent, through the attacks of the first years the group on the one hand, sought to prove to the public that the "establishment is not invincible" and on the other hand, to mobilize the masses towards an armed revolution (RO17N 2002:65).

Moreover, it is apparent that through these first attacks against US and junta-related targets, 17N aimed to gain public recognition, like the Red Brigades that, at least during the first years, had the public's acceptance (Pappas 2002: 52). For RO17N, the public opinion's recognition if not support was of great significance. According to its proclamations, the public was its primary target audience. Hence, in an attempt not to lose public sympathy, the group attacked the other extra-parliamentary armed organizations for their unorganized operations that could result in casualties (RO17N 2002:83-105).

The victory of Andreas Papandreou's PASOK in the national elections of 1981 resulted in a 3-year period of group's inactivity; thus raising a certain optimism that 17N had disbanded. In 1983 however, the assassination of US



Navy Captain and head of the JUSMAGG<sup>3</sup> naval division George Tsantes marked a new era for the organization; as well as the beginning of a new circle of bloodshed. As stated in the subsequent communiqué, Papandreou's active role during the military junta in combination with the Party's pre-election plan to transform radically the existing state structures, namely to establish socialism and to abandon the US-NATO alliance, had given hope to the group which decided to abstain from any activities in order to allow the new administration to carry out its project unobstructed (RO17N 2002). However, according to the author of the communiqué, the first years of PASOK administration were not much different from the previous governments. PASOK did not establish socialism; on the contrary, it continued the capitalist governing of the New Democracy administration that was promoting the interests of the bourgeoisie; while it never distanced the country from the imperialistic influence of the US. As stated in the Tsantes communiqué, during the PASOK administration there was "compromise and obedience instead of fighting against the monopolies". Consequently, the organization had to resume its previous violent role (RO17N 2002:125-139).

Despite the 17N proclamation however, experts argue that in the early 1980's the convicted as chief ideologue and founder of 17N, Alexandros Yiotopoulos, used these three years of inactivity to recruit new members (Pappas 2003:26). To that extent, Greek authorities believe that during the 1980's, the organization had the most members than any other period of its existence (Papahelas 2006:134).

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<sup>3</sup> Joint US Military Advisory Group in Greece

In contradiction to the early years, 17N rhetoric of the '80's reflected the ideology and beliefs of its new members. The later, the majority of whom were young persons, were more identified with the current sociopolitical environment than with the Greek civil war or the dictatorship. In other words, they were triggered by the system's corruption, the exploitation of the working class by the plutocracy and the concentration of wealth by certain social strata (Labropoulos 2003:67, 70). As Vasilis Xiros, an operational member, stated in his confession in 2002, his beliefs at the time of his recruitment were against "the rich people that are trying to drink our blood and the Americans that have the money and the power to destroy the world" (Papahelas 2003:251).

As a consequence, there was a shift in the organization's target group. The "state fascist mechanism" was replaced by a new term, the LMAT (Lumpen Megaloastiki Taxi<sup>4</sup>), which would define the group's rhetoric the following years. Although it did not stop the operations against the police or US targets –for example, in 1987 the organization attacked a US military bus–, 17N expanded its target group to members of the plutocracy. In 1986, it assassinated the industrialist Dimitrios Angelopoulos; followed in 1988 by the assassination of the industrialist Alexandros Athnasiadis-Bodosakis (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2001). In the following communiqués, 17N argued that the targets were part of the LMAT which through the exploitation of the working class was increasing its wealth, under the 'blessings' of the government; obstructing in the same time the national economic growth. In particular, the Angelopoulos communiqué wrote "[...]

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<sup>4</sup> Lumpen Big Bourgeois Class

nearly 100 families that by 'leeching' the working class obstruct any potential development" (RO17N 2002:194).

It can be argued that the 1980's were the 'golden period' of the group. Having the most active members than any other period of its 30-year existence, 17N developed the arrogant belief that it had achieved the public opinion's recognition and support. The armed organization advocated that its campaign towards the mobilization of the populace had resulted in public demonstrations and strikes as a form of expression of people's dissatisfaction against the establishment. Moreover, based on a poll that was conducted in February 1989 on behalf of the newspaper "TA NEA", according to which 17% of the interviewees agreed with 17N's arguments, in combination with the fact that despite the great money reward no one provided information on the organization, the later translated all these as a popular mandate to continue its activities (Pappas 2003:13, RO17N 2002:369).

Under these circumstances the group envisioned itself not only as a vanguard on the defense of the populace's rights but also, as an active political entity within the Greek society (RO17N 2002:315). It wrote "no one can seriously argue that we are the fourth political power in the country" (RO17N 2002:458). To that extent, 17N inspired by the Italian Red Brigades and the Tupamaros movement in Uruguay, attempted to influence the results of the 1989 national elections. In particular according to the communiqué that followed the failed attack against the PASOK former Minister of Public Order George Petsos, 17N urged the Greeks either to abstain or to cast a 'blank vote' in the subsequent elections. To strengthen even more their political propaganda, the group issued leaflets that were distributed in several

neighborhoods in Athens shortly before the elections, encouraging the Athenians to vote against the three major political parties. In subsequent communiqués, the organization would claim responsibility for the 20, 41% of abstention at the 1989 elections; arguing that 3-4% of this were 17N supporters (RO17N 2002:456, Papahelas 2003:154).

The assassination in point-blank range of Pavlos Bakoyiannis, a New Democracy MP and son-in-law of Konstantinos Mitsotakis, the party's leader, was a major turning point in the organization's course. This attack shocked the public opinion that saw no obvious reasons for Bakoyiannis' assassination; while it troubled significantly the political world of the country (Bakoyiannis 2001, Kassimeris 2001, Karyotis 2007, Labropoulos 2003, Papahelas 2003). 17N was forced to issue two communiqués in order to clarify the rationale behind this attack; it accused Bakoyiannis of having an active role in the major economic scandal of the post-junta period<sup>5</sup>. In fact, in the second proclamation, by redefining its ideology, its objective and its position within the Greek society, 17N attempted to attract again the public opinion's support. Apart from justifying the Bakoyianis' assassination, the organization praised the Polytechnic events of November 1973 as a significant step towards a popular revolution against capitalism and imperialism; thus, arguing that RO17N was not a terrorist organization as it never sought to instill fear in the public. According to the communiqué, RO17N was an urban guerilla group which aimed to "rescue" the Greek society from the deteriorating existing system (RO17N 2002:461).

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<sup>5</sup> The Koskotas Scandal was a case of embezzlement by a bank employee, George Koskotas, which implicated many members of both political parties, including the former Prime Minister and leader of PASOK Andreas Papandreou.

From RON17's first years derives the conclusion that the group emerged in a period of sociopolitical turmoil under the delusion that it could make a difference. Although, it early declared its objective to establish a socialist state by abolishing all previous and current state structures; it mistakenly assumed that through violence namely assassinations, explosions, bombings and so forth could evoke public support. Hence, it would create a revolutionary public army to overthrow the current establishment and establish socialism; a misconception that all left-oriented organizations of that period shared. However, despite any early recognition that some groups like the Red Brigades might have obtained, none succeeded its aim to establish socialism through a public revolution.

On the contrary, the blunt practices that the groups adopted resulted in public resentment. Consequently, even though Greeks could relate up to a certain point with the attacks against the junta torturers or the US military personnel; they could not see the rationale behind the expansion of the targets to other social groups, for example the assassination of MP Bakoyiannis.

In the same time, 17N although a lethal terrorist group, was merely that; an ultra left extra-parliamentary armed organization. It never had the power to actually resemble a Latin America movement like the Tupamaros that 17N leadership admired, namely to motivate the masses and undertake a social revolution. To that extent, until the early 1990's, 17N never proposed any actual solutions to the Greek state's problems that so eloquently pointed out in each and every communiqué, unlike other European terrorist groups, like the

Action Directe or the Red Brigades that would issue frequently guidelines or journals (Kassimeris 2001).

In other words, 17N never succeeded in becoming an active political component of the Greek society capable to alter or influence the state's decision mechanisms. On the contrary, even though 17N emerged as an ultra left terrorist organization by the end of the 1990's it had lost its ideological substance.

### **b) 1990-2002**

By 1990, it was obvious that 17N had not succeeded its objective to establish socialism through a popular revolution. Although the group believed that it had achieved public recognition, the 1989 Bakoyiannis assassination shocked the Greek society that demanded drastic measures against the terrorist group.

In addition, the international changes namely the collapse of the Soviet Union and thus, of communism, proved that popular sovereignty was a utopia. In the meantime, other European left-oriented organizations have either been arrested or ceased their activities; hence, one would expect the disbandment of 17N. On the contrary, the Greek armed organization continued its activities. In 1990 alone the group attacked 16 times (Kassimeris 2001:93).

Nevertheless, it was apparent that throughout the '90's the group, in a continuous effort to remain in the spotlight, attempted to redefine its rhetoric. Without putting aside its criticism against the Greek establishment and the plutocracy, in the 1990's 17N adopted an international perspective for its ideology and actions.

To that extent, apart from the usual police, governmental and US targets, its attacks included also British, Dutch, German and Turkish targets. The rationale behind the new operations varied according the case; however, as Kassimeris pointed out “the group no longer acted in accordance with a coherent political strategy”(2001:93). For example, in 1991 17N targeted the German Lowenbrau brewery, attacking in this way the German government for not paying the WWII war reparations to Greece (Kassimeris 2003:95).

In July 1992, a typical 17N attack against the Finance Minister Ioannis Palaiokrassas resulted in the death of the 20-year old student Athanasios Axarlian who coincidentally was in the scene. The death of Axarlian was a shock not only for the Greek society but also, for the organization which issued four different communiqués on the matter. Axarlian’s death was the only casualty in the organization’s 30-year existence and its first operational mistake (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2001). 17N that until then operated with extreme cautiousness in order to prevent any fatal mistakes argued in the subsequent communiqués that Axarlian’s death was a result of police’s attempt to frame the organization, as it had left the injured student on the scene for nearly 20 minutes before seeking medical help (RO17N 2002). For example, the group’s second communiqué after the tragic event begun “The police have the main responsibility for Thanos Axarlian’s death- They let him intentionally bleeding for half an hour so that they could use it against us” (RO17N 2002:697). In any case, this operation was a clear indication of the group’s confused status as it took place in a busy area of the city centre during rush hour.

In November of the same year, 17N issued a new manifesto; a clear attempt to reestablish itself in the spotlight and attract supporters. In the manifesto, after recognizing the Red Brigades' influence to the development of armed resistance in Europe and especially in 17N's evolution, the latter attempted to place its rhetoric in the new sociopolitical environment, particularly after the collapse of USSR and communism. It argued that as long as the establishment continued to exploit the proletariat, 17N would operate in its defense. It pointed out however, that since the group's emergence in the 1970's, the working class had evolved, including as well economic immigrants from Third World countries (RO17N 2002:741).

Until its capture in 2002, the group continued to attack foreign firms and banks, Greek industrialists and military targets for which it had a rationale; it lacked however a clear and distinct objective. The 2002 arrests and the subsequent trials would result eventually in the demystification of the "phantom organization" (Karyotis 2007).

The testimonies revealed that the operational members had no ideological background similar to a left terrorist other than their disappointment, resentment or even anger against the establishment. This became particularly apparent during the trials when apart from Koufodinas –the operational leader-, none other operational member developed a left-inspired rationale for their participation in 17N. To that extent, without any ideological background they were merely pawns to the leadership's decisions. As Xiros stated "sometime we didn't know who the target was and we couldn't see the rationale behind some attacks but Yiotopoulos would convince us eventually"(Papahelas 2003).



For them, their participation in the terrorist organization was a full time occupation; there is not a universal precedent of terrorists referring to their participation to a terrorist group as a “company” where they would “get hired” or “fired” (Personal Interview with Bossi 2009).

Moreover, as to strengthen more the ideological absence, contrary to Nechayev’s arguments on the personality of a revolutionary as stated in his book “The Revolutionary Catechism” in 1969, “he [the revolutionary] has no personal interests, no business affairs (...) no property” (Chaliard& Blin 2007: 95,139,157), there are indications that 17N members were aiming to satisfy their personal interests. The 9-month trials never succeeded in establishing the whereabouts of large amounts of money. Furthermore, Vasilis Xiros stated that his brother Christodoulos “had returned to the organization after a few years of absence because he had to pay an older loan (Papahelas 2003:252)”; while Koufodinas had invested successfully in the stock market and had applied for EU funding (Labropoulos 2003).

Despite of what Papas (2002) argues in his book that low level operational members are merely executive tools thus, they do not need to have an ideological background as they will not need it at any point; ideology constitutes a key element for a terrorist organization. It distinguishes a terrorist from a common penal code criminal; it defines their motives and their objectives. By 2002, it was obvious that 17N had lost its former ideological background; it had no clear political objective other than its criticism on the social, political and economic circumstances in Greece.

To that extent, at the time of the arrests, 17N was an extra-parliamentary armed organization that under some ultra left “catch-phrases”(Kassimeris

2001:150) would carry out violent activities that instilled fear in the society. Nonetheless, as Kassimeris (2004) points out, although history will classify 17N as a failure, it surely managed to discredit the Greek authorities for a long period of time.

### ***ii) Modus operandi***

Unlike other ultra left terrorist organizations like the Red Brigades or Action Directe that gradually escalated to lethal operations, 17N introduced itself to the society through an assassination (Kassimeris 2001). Thereafter, it carried out approximately 116 attacks namely bombings, kneecappings and assassinations. The group's trademark weapon was a .45 caliber revolver; it also used rockets, bombs, grenades and other explosive devices (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2001, Karyotis 2007).

Throughout the years, the Greek organization evolved its operational tactics; however it never sought a spectacular attack that would result in casualties. As was constantly pointed out in the communiqués, 17N was particularly concerned not to harm any civilians. To that extent, it would abort many operations on the fear of causing casualties (RO17N 2002). The death of student Athanasios Axarlian that was the only fatal mistake in the group's 30-year existence had even shocked some of 17N members.

Contrary to other European terrorist organizations that guaranteed their income through kidnapping ransom, 17N never carried out a kidnapping operation (Rapoport 2002). 17N members were full-time terrorists (Personal Interview with Bossi 2009); as they did not have legitimate sources of income, the group would acquire the necessary funds through bank robberies only. 17N's first bank robbery was in 1984, when the organization acquired nearly 8

million Greek drachmas (approximately €26,000 or 24,000 GBP) (Papahelas 2003). Following the same pattern, the organization would obtain the necessary operational equipment namely rockets, bullets, explosive devices and more by invading police stations in Athens or by robbing military warehouses. In a 1989 communiqué, the group described how it had succeeded to invade a military warehouse in Larissa and still remain undetected; while in the same communiqué, in an attempt to draw publicity, it claimed responsibility for stealing military equipment from the War Museum in Athens city centre, in the middle of the day, when the museum was packed with visitors (Papahelas 2003, Bossi 1996, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2001, RO17N 2002).

Undoubtedly, 17N operational skills were remarkable. In thirty years, it succeeded in becoming impenetrable to the authorities; it did not lose any member on the field; no member was arrested until 2002; while it had only one casualty in the early '90's. In the '92 Manifesto (RO17N 2002:730), a few lines describe clearly the rationale behind the development of the group “before you start any armed action, you have the obligation to seriously study the political, operational and military experience of similar struggles [...] not to copy them of course but to learn from them” and it continues by specifying that “if 17N [members] had not studied the practices of the Red Brigades [...], the illegal activities of the Greek Communist Party and the other groups of resistance during the dictatorship [...] then we would all have been in prison long ago.”

Alexandros Yiotopoulos who himself had been trained in Cuba during the 1960's, was particularly concerned on the organization's structure.

Testimonies revealed that unlike the Red Brigades or ELA that were 'open type' organizations, 17N was the opposite. In other words, while ELA and the RB had an operational base of a great number of people and were composed of multiple cells across Greece and Italy respectively, 17N operated only in Athens. This structure would eventually protect the group from infiltrations and possible operational mistakes. To that extent, recruitments were really under strict conditions; it is no coincidence that in a Mafia-style structure, the majority of members were related in some way<sup>6</sup>. This tactic would guarantee secrecy; thus, longevity (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003).

Until the group's capture in 2002, experts argued that 17N like the majority of left-oriented terrorist groups, was structured in a horizontal way. Consequently, there was not a formal leader; decisions were taken with consensus (Bossi 1996). On the contrary however, the testimonies revealed that 17N was structured under a vertical hierarchy. Yiotopoulos although he denied any participation in the group, was recognized by all the operational members as the leader of the organization. All operational members were divided into independent cells of 3 or 4 persons, one of which was their operational leader (Papahelas 2003). However, Yiotopoulos was the sole responsible for the selection of the targets and the construction of the communiqués. As it was the case in LEA, Yiotopoulos did not leave any space for other members to argue the choice of a target or propose something else. According to Christodoulos Xiros, "he [Yiotopoulos] chose each time our targets that even though he would discuss them with us, in the end, it was his

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<sup>6</sup> For example Christodoulos Xiros was responsible for the recruitment of his brothers Savas and Vasilis; while the chief operational Dimitrios Koufodinas was married to Savas Xiros' ex-wife. Tzortzatos and Psaradellis were close friends before entering the organization.

decision". Similarly, Savas Xiros stated that "Only Lampros<sup>7</sup> was selecting our targets. If someone expressed a different opinion, he [Yiotopoulos] would say 'I will think about it' and in the end he would never return to it" (Papahelas 2003:135).

Indicative of Yiotopoulos' obsession on the group's proper structure and operational tactics was an informal manual that was found in 2002 in one of the 17N hideouts, entitled "*For Organization*". The latter included directions on recruitment, operational tactics, decision making within the organization; in short, anything a member needed to know in order to protect the organization and themselves. According to the manual that was also confirmed by the member's testimonies, all members were obliged to have aliases and a "normal life" as their cover. Until their arrests in 2002, 17N members did not know their partners' real names and background (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003, Kassimeris 2004, Karyotis 2007).

Undoubtedly, 17N had developed great operational skills that ensured the group's longevity. Nonetheless, the latter was not only a result of good structure and well-organized operations. Unfortunately, for nearly thirty years the Greek state mechanisms namely the authorities and the government failed to counter successfully the phenomenon. The state's inefficiency was the result of numerous different factors.

### ***iii) State response***

The excellent operational skills of 17N that made the group impenetrable and almost, unmistakable resulted in its characterization as a "phantom organization". Shortly before the 2002 arrests, a poll that was contacted in

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<sup>7</sup> Yiotopoulos' alias

2000 on behalf of the Ministry of Public Order showed that the majority of Greeks, based on the continuous failures of the Greek authorities, believed that the latter would never capture the terrorist group (Papahelas 2003:194).

The main reasons for the authorities' 30-year inability to capture the group lie in the early years' politicization of the investigations (Economist 2002). From the very first years, there was a common belief amongst the authorities that 17N could not be merely what it said, namely an ultra-left extra-parliamentary armed organization (Papahelas 2003). The common belief was that behind the group were foreign security agencies and in particular, the Soviet KGB. It was inconceivable for the Greek law enforcement agencies of that period that a number of Greeks could carry out such well-organized operations. Later, when the US CIA intervened in the investigations, as a result of US targets, the conspiracy theories thickened even more. A statement by the PASOK leader Andreas Papandreou after the collapse of the dictatorship that the armed resistance should continue and the state should abandon the US-NATO alliance, was enough for CIA to point him and the party as the mobilizing forces behind Greek terrorism. Papandreou was even accused of being the leader of 17N (Papahelas 2003, Pappas 2002).

New Democracy on the other hand, was more than willing to preserve and support this theory. The latter was more strengthened as 17N chose to target ND more than PASOK and abstained from any activities during the first years of PASOK administration. Thereafter and until 2002, there were 30 years of continuous conspiracy theories and accusations from both parties. ND would accuse PASOK of harboring terrorism; whereas PASOK which had many

members of the junta resistance would avoid thorough investigations on the fear of what might be revealed (Papahelas 2003).

Moreover, even though there were two different attempts to establish an anti-terrorist law, there were both abolished later. First, in 1978 New Democracy adopted an anti-terrorist law called the “Bill to Combat Terrorism and Protect Democratic Polity”. When PASOK came into power in 1981, it abolished the law on the ground that the Greek society was not ready yet to accept a strong police presence, as the memories of the military junta had not faded (Karyotis 2007, Kassimeris 2001). Similarly, based on the same argument, the PASOK administration of 1993 abolished the new anti-terrorist law that the ND government had adopted shortly after the assassination of its MP Bakoyiannis in 1989 (Karyotis 2007, Kassimeris 2001). This tactic however, strengthened even more the theories that PASOK was behind 17N.

Conspiracy theories affected not only the political world, but also the police and the national intelligence agency that cooperated closely with the CIA and the FBI. Officers of both agencies would operate based on their personal political belief. Hence, quite frequently they would act based on a misleading theory rather than on solid proofs. CIA and FBI delegates contributed significantly to that. (Papahelas 2003)

In the same time, Greek law enforcement agencies lacked the necessary training, in some cases the basic training, to handle such a serious issue like terrorism. During the 30 years prior 17N’s capture, the police had managed to come across a number of important clues that would have led eventually to the capture of the group. However, the lack of experience in combination with the lack of proper training and equipment resulted in childish yet crucial

mistakes that allowed the group to escape (Papahelas 2003, Labropoulos 2003). For example, when investigations on a motorbike led to the Vasilis Tzortzatos, an operational member as it was proved later, the police simply called at his house asking him to drop by the police station for some questions; this tactic allowed him to prepare his story and to notify its partners (Papahelas 2003:168).

The presence of the US agencies was not helpful; on the contrary it was misleading as it was based on wrong assumptions. Greek law enforcement agencies managed to receive the necessary training when the British Scotland Yard came to assist with the investigations after the 2000 assassination of the British embassy military attaché in Athens, Brigadier Stephen Saunders (Souliotis 2009, Papahelas 2003).

British agents who unlike their US colleagues were not influenced by any premature and without proof theories came to Greece in the right time. A few years before the Olympic Games Athens 2004, a security challenge for every hosting country, the PASOK government adopted a new anti-terrorist law, even stricter than the previous two. The new Minister of Public Order Michalis Chrissochoidis was determined to end the problem of terrorism in the country (Antoniou 2002, Papahelas 2003). In a time when the society was urging the authorities to take action against terrorism, Chrissochoidis had the correct perception of the situation “17N was always what it claimed to be; we chose to regard it as something else” (Papahelas 2003). When in 2002 Savas Xiros did the fatal mistake, the authorities had already gathered all the necessary information on the organization and had received a proper training so that they would not allow any mistakes to destroy this opportunity (Economist



2002-2003). Although a great success, there is no possible way to know however whether the authorities would have captured the group had it not been for Xiros' mistake.

Nevertheless, within a few months from Xiros' mistake, the authorities arrested 15 persons accused of participation in 17N. In the subsequent 9-month trials six members including the convicted as chief ideologue Alexandros Yiotopoulos and the operational leader and main recruiter, Dimitris Koufodinas, received multiple life sentences (Kassimeris 2004, Karyotis 2007).

#### ***IV. The new generation of terrorism in Greece***

##### ***i) The Revolutionary Struggle and the Sect of Revolutionaries***

Revolutionary Organization 17N, ELA and other smaller terrorist groups of the last thirty years never succeeded their main objective to establish a socialist state through a popular revolutionary movement. Nonetheless, they managed to alter in a certain way the Greek social environment, namely they succeeded in establishing new perspectives in the Greek society. In particular, the terrorist groups of the first generation in a way 'legitimized' violence as a mean of expressing anger, disappointment, disapproval and resentment against the existing sociopolitical and economic status quo. Within this context, during the past thirty years, small groups or individuals that call themselves 'anarchists' would revolt against the police during a demonstration; would carry out low-level bombing attacks –mostly in the early hours of the day against governmental or US-related targets-; in short they

would express their dissatisfaction of the current sociopolitical environment through violence.

These “known unknown” individuals, as the Greek society and Media usually call them, do not constitute terrorists according to Ioakimoglou (2003) and Bossis(1996). Indeed, their objective is not to cause harm or instill fear in the society; they do not aim to achieve a political goal other than express their disapproval against the state structures. That was for example the case in December 2008 when the sudden death of a 15-year old student by a police officer in the city centre fuelled the eruption of continuous riots across the country. For nearly ten days, rioters mainly youths attacked shops, banks, governmental buildings and police personnel; while the latter would choose neutrality and minor interference out of fear of fuelling even more the incidents.

As a consequence, when in September 2003, an explosive device was detonated in the main court buildings in Athens, the Greek authorities although alarmed, linked the incident to -at the time- ongoing trials of the first generation of terrorists and attempted to diminish it to a ‘typical random bombing’. However, the subsequent attacks of the newly emerged group *Revolutionary Struggle/ Epanastatikos Agonas* (EA) signaled the emergence of a new generation of terrorism in the country (TANEA 2005). Thereafter and until September 2009, despite a 20-month period of inactivity in 2007, the group has carried out several attacks, mostly with explosive devices against governmental, police and US targets, with the frequency of two or three attacks per year (Oi Neoi Fakeloi 2009).

From its early activities, the Greek authorities, the media and some experts linked the new EA with previous generation's 17N and ELA. They placed EA in the ultra-left extra-parliamentary ideology and detected similarities with ELA and 17N. In particular, they argued that the modus operandi of the new group as well as its ideological profile indicate the participation of still on the loose ELA members that wish to continue the former organization's campaign. This notion requires further elaboration however, before it is unconditionally accepted (Oi Neoi Fakeloi 2009, Labropoulos 2009).

Although Revolutionary Struggle is active the last six years, the group's actions and ideology as it is expressed through its proclamations, indicate that EA has not yet defined clearly its ideological profile. In its first communiqués had adopted a more international approach to its ideology similar to the late years of 17N and ELA. Inspired by the German RAF the group aimed to establish a European revolutionary movement in order to fight the current imperialistic and capitalistic status quo. However, later it altered its perceptions, adopting a more domestic character to its proclamations (To Pontiki 2006-2009). The modus operandi of EA suggests similarities with ELA, although there are also differences. EA carries out –until the present day- only bombing attacks; while it stresses its intension not to harm any civilians. This however, contradicts the methodology of the group that uses extremely powerful explosives in large amounts that could at some point result in mass casualties. For example, in early 2009 a large amount of ANFO, the same explosive that was used in the Oklahoma bombing in the 1990's, was found in a branch of Citibank in an Athenian suburb. The attack somehow failed,

however it instilled grave concerns in the authorities on the capabilities of this new generation, although the group argues to the contrary.

EA constitutes a terrorist organization; a public threat that jeopardizes as well the international position of the country. To that extent, the US State Department has designated the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization that could potentially harm US interests in the country (CFA 2007, US Dept 2009).

Furthermore, the newly emerged *Sect of Revolutionaries/ Sekta ton Epanastaton* troubled even more the Greek authorities. The Sect first appeared in the scene in February 2009, shortly after the riots of December 2008. Within five months it carried out two low level bombings against police stations in Athens; while last June it assassinated in point-blank range a police officer of the anti-terrorist squad. The latter was working undercover for the protection of an ELA witness who until that moment was in the witness protection program (TimesOnline 2009).

Although it is too early to predict the evolution of the group, it appears to be far more dangerous than any other terrorist group in Greece. Unlike 17N and ELA and later, EA, the Sect could not be defined as an ultra-left organization. On the contrary, it has developed a nihilistic ideology that has no clear objective. The group attacks all state structures but more importantly, for the first time a Greek terrorist organization targets the people. By using jargon and out of any ideological framework, the group attacks the Greeks of apathy and opportunism opposite the social, economic and political problems of the country. In particular, paraphrasing 17N, they introduce the term LMAT – Lumpen MikroAstiki Taxi<sup>8</sup> as the source of all problems. Within this context,

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<sup>8</sup> Lumpen Middle Class instead of 17N's Lumpen Big Bourgeois

unlike other Greek groups, the Sect does not exclude the possibility of attacking civilians (Iriotou 2009).

There are indications however, that between the first bombings and the assassination, the group changed. The authorities argue that as was the case with the Revolutionary Struggle, members of older terrorist organizations have infiltrated the new group. The argument is not completely inaccurate. The change was particularly apparent in the group's last communiqué. Although there is still a nihilistic approach of the Greek sociopolitical environment, there is a clear attempt in the first half to adopt certain ultra left theories.

In the past, numerous armed extremists would carry out usually one or two low-level attacks, only to disappear later. Two months after its last attack the Sect has not given any signs of existence. Taking into consideration that the Revolutionary Struggle and the Sect operate in close dates, the Greek authorities should be of extreme concern as the EA has attacked only a few days ago (Carassavva 2009).

### ***ii) Why there is a second generation of terrorism in Greece?***

One could easily argue that disappointment, dissatisfaction or even anger towards the state's structures are not sufficient reasons –if not at all reasons– for a person to become a terrorist. Indeed, unlike the previous generation of terrorism that emerged within an environment of international and domestic sociopolitical turmoil, there is no obvious rationale behind the emergence of a second terrorist wave in Greece. However, there is still a murdered police officer and several destroyed buildings as a result of terrorist activities.

Certain media argue that the riots of last December resulted in the emergence of the new generation (BBC 2009, Smith 2009, Guardian 2009). However, this argument is not accurate. Firstly, the Revolutionary Struggle had emerged five years before the riots; secondly, as international history of terrorism demonstrates social unrest in the form of spontaneous and brief revolts are not the actual reasons for the emergence of terrorism but merely the trigger that unleashes what lies beneath.

The emergence of terrorism in Greece is the result of various reasons. Firstly, as it was established in the second chapter, the evolution of Modern Greek history, namely the actions or the neutrality of certain political and social actors of the Greek society, led to the common belief that the Greek establishment comprises of inadequate governments and political parties that are in close cooperation with foreign powers, especially the US which in reality, enforces its policies to the country. Moreover, the police elevated from a law enforcement agency for the protection of the Greeks to a governmental tool that would often act against the people. Consequently, for the people the state mechanisms, the US and the police became responsible for every problem that arose in the Greek society; hence, the easy target against people's disappointment, resentment and anger.

Secondly, based on this hatred against any form of authority, the first generation of terrorists, under numerous ultra- left clichés, carried out a great number of violent acts in the name of the populace's well-being. Although it did not succeeded in its objective, namely to mobilize the masses towards a popular revolution, as noted earlier, it managed to 'legitimize' violence as a mean of expression.

On the other hand, 17N and ELA managed to operate successfully, that is without any arrests or injuries for almost thirty years. This alone inspired a whole new generation of potential terrorists. In other words, although there are social reasons that fuel the emergence of armed groups, the inadequate state response to the phenomenon constitutes a crucial factor that allows the emergence and preservation of terrorism in the country. The longevity of the first generation's groups is an excellent proof to that. As it was underlined in the third chapter, for nearly twenty years the Greek authorities were in a witch-hunt. Their lack of experience and proper training, in combination with numerous conspiracy theories allowed the terrorist groups to operate unobstructed.

One would expect that after the improvement of their structures, especially for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, the authorities would be prepared if not to prevent any terrorist activities, at least to counter those (CRS 2004). To the contrary, the new ND administration that succeeded the PASOK administration in the 2004 national elections, in an attempt to fulfill its pre-election promises to its electors replaced all of the anti-terrorist squad officers to less experienced personnel. Furthermore, once again, the political world of the country underestimated the extent of the new terrorist attacks. They allowed new conspiracy theories to flourish.

First, it was the 'usual suspect', the US government through its agency, the CIA. It is a fact that the US agency has intervened in the internal affairs of numerous countries, even in Greece during the military junta. However, there is no apparent reason for the USA to cause chaos in the country at this point. The US interests in Greece never were actually jeopardized under any

administration; hence, by nurturing terrorism the US would only strengthen the anti-American sentiment of the Greek people. Later, the government insinuated, especially after the December riots, that the extremist behaviours were politically directed by the opposition in order to overthrow the government. Similarly, this argument is of no serious substance. On the one hand, at the time of the riots, the polls showed that the government was still ahead of the opposition. On the other hand, the opposition was in place to understand that such a practice would only jeopardize the country's international position; and in addition, it could not guarantee their victory in case of national elections.

Thirty years of terrorism in Greece have demonstrated that conspiracy theories are the current government's way to cover for its inadequacy and incapability to counter the phenomenon.

Consequently, in 2003 when the first group of the new generation emerged, amongst certain social strata of the Greek society lied resentment against the state mechanisms and the belief that violence could achieve a change. In addition, the Greek authorities were once again unprepared in front of this new development.

The December riots were triggered by the unjustified murder of the young student; however, they also expressed a public dissatisfaction over the past and current social, political and economic circumstances. The unemployment rates were high, the educational and health system were not at their best condition, economy was deteriorating and in the meantime, the New Democracy administration was amidst numerous scandals that implicated many of its MPs. Under these circumstances, the riots were a social reaction



to a certain deterioration of the country (Economist 2008, BBC 2008, Brabant 2008). Amidst this environment of social unrest, political extremists sought the opportunity to develop their campaign. And even though, 'anarchists' are not terrorists, they constitute excellent 'recruitment pools' for the potential or existing terrorist groups.

## CONCLUSION

Almost a century of international terrorism indicates that there are patterns in the development of the phenomenon that repeat throughout the years. Social, political and economic transformations have resulted in the emergence of numerous different terrorist groups that have aimed through violence to shape the current status quo based on their ideology. Nonetheless, as stated in previous chapters each armed organization constitutes a unique case and as such should be regarded.

Terrorism in Greece emerged in an environment of international and domestic sociopolitical transformations that influenced its evolution. In general, Greek terrorist groups are mainly left oriented. They denounce any form of state authority; hence they attack government and police targets, as well as US-related which they hold responsible for the deterioration, as they perceive it, of the country.

However, nearly thirty years of continuous terrorism in Greece indicate that although left ideology is the organizations' starting point, it does not define the whole existence of the group. An excellent proof of that is RO17N, the most known yet lethal Greek terrorist group. Even though it emerged as an ultra left extra parliamentary armed group, eventually ended as an organization of common criminals that without any solid ideological background would carry out lethal attacks for as it was proved, their personal economic profit or because they were under the delusion that in that way they were actually offering to the society. Similarly, the new generation it is adopting more of a nihilistic approach rather than an ultra left ideology.

To that extent, in order for the Greek authorities to best counter and eventually eradicate the phenomenon, it is imperative that they examine the deeper causes that lead to the eruption of extremist behaviours. The persistence of not only the authorities but also the society to conspiracy theories and the governments' pursuit of their political interest could only result in serious trouble domestically; while eventually it will jeopardize country's international position.

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