Greek Identity Cards

A case study on the relation between religion and the Greek state
Greek Church and the Constitution

- Article 3 of the Greek constitution states that “the prevailing religion of Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ.”
- The same article includes a number of rules pertaining to the organization and self-administration of the church, which is actually a legal entity incorporated under state law.
- See the text of the Greek constitution here:
  - http://www.hri.org/docs/syntagma/
Greek Church and the Constitution

- Greece is not the only European country that has an official religion, established church or state church.
- Established Church=Church officially endorsed by the state.
- Since the Elizabethan Settlement of Elizabeth I, in 1559, the Church of England has remained the archetype of a formally established church whose supreme governor is now, and since then has always been, the Crown.
The Norwegian constitution specifies the Evangelical Lutheran Church as “the official religion of the State,”
The Danish constitution of 1953, article 4, names the Lutheran church as the “national religion”
The recent Swedish Instrument of Government (1975) contains detailed provisions for the government and administration of the Swedish Church
Greek Church and the Constitution

“The prevailing religion of Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ.”

What does it mean?

Nothing more or less than acknowledging the fact that 98% of the Greeks declare themselves as Orthodox Christians.
Established Churches and the European Union

- Through numerous decisions issued over the past thirty years, the European Commission of Human Rights in Strasbourg has ruled that state churches are not in themselves incompatible with European norms, as long as citizens have the right to quit the official church without suffering any consequence therefrom, and to embrace another religion.
Established Churches and the European Union

- “U.S. Supreme Court on cases involving the American disestablishment clause and dealing with issues such as religious instruction in public schools, Bible reading, or school prayer would have been perceived as bizarre intellectual exercises not only in Greece but in most European countries.”

- *Nicos C. Alivizatos, A New Role for the Greek Church?*
Article 13 of the Greek constitution guarantees freedom of religious conscience and free expression of religious belief.

But religious freedom only of those religions that are deemed “known”.

What are the “known” and what are the “unknown” religions? What such a distinction can be made?
Article 13
1. Freedom of religious conscience is inviolable. The enjoyment of civil rights and liberties does not depend on the individual's religious beliefs.
2. All known religions shall be free and their rites of worship shall be performed unhindered and under the protection of the law. The practice of rites of worship is not allowed to offend public order or the good usages. Proselytism is prohibited.
3. The ministers of all known religions shall be subject to the same supervision by the State and to the same obligations toward it as those of the prevailing religion.
4. No person shall be exempt from discharging his obligations to the State or may refuse to comply with the laws by reason of his religious convictions.
5. No oath shall be imposed or administered except as specified by law and in the form determined by law.
Religious Minorities in Greece

- Religious minorities officially recognized:
  - The **Muslim** minority of Thrace (North Eastern Greece)
  - The **Jewish** minority
  - Other
  - The **Catholic Church** has a few thousand adherents mainly in the Cyclades islands.
  - Small **Protestant** and **Evangelical** denominations, whose adherents are mostly in Athens.
Religious Minorities in Greece

- The Jehovah’s Witnesses, who actually seem to be the fourth if not the third largest religious minority in Greece, were—and to some extent continue to be—considered an “unknown” religion by several governmental agencies, in spite of numerous rulings stating the contrary issued in recent years by the country’s Supreme Administrative Court, the Council of State.
Religious Minorities in Greece

- Since Jehovah’s Witnesses were deemed to belong to an “unknown” religion, their weddings were not officially recognized under article 1371 of the Greek Civil Code until recently; consequently, their children were deemed illegitimate.
Until very recently, Greece has been the only European Union country lacking an alternative social service program for conscientious objectors who refuse conscription.

As a result, until June 1997, when alternative social service was enacted for conscientious objectors for the first time (by law 1510/ 1997), more than 100 persons per year were being sentenced by court-martial for insubordination because they refused to wear the uniform.
The system of the Greek Identity cards was established in 1945.

All Greek citizens over the age of 14 are required to apply for an identity card at their local police station.

At the same time reference to religion was instituted according to the law N.87/1945.

As well as reference to national status
ΔΙΟΙΚΗΣΙΣ ΚΟΡΩΦΥΛΑΚΗΣ ΧΑΝΙΩΝ

ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΑΥΤΟΤΗΤΟΣ

Επώνυμο: Κασιάδης
Όνομα: Κασιάτος
"Όνομα απ' αυτόν: Δάδικος
"Όνομα ΢ώρου: Ελένη
Δήμος Κοσσάτων: Φρέ
Επάγγελμα: Αλιεία
Έτος γεννήσεως: 1883
"Επώνυμο: Γρέγορος
Όνομα: Μιχάλης
Τόκος διοικητής: Χανιά

'Εν Χανιά της 26 Φεβρουαρίου 1941
Ο Διοικητής του Εργασίματος
Κατιδάλη

Ονόματος: Μιχαήλ

Επώνυμων: Μιχαήλ Μαριά, συζύγου Κατιδάλη

Ν. Μητρώος: Αθήνα

Το γένος: Μουρμοπούλου

Έτος γέν.: 1908

Τόπος γέν.: "Ηράκλειο"

"Εκάγγελο

Τόπος κατ.: Χαλκί

Διαστύνων: Ιωάννης Χατζεντζης

Υπηρκότης: Θεοκριτούτσα

Αριθ. Μαρτυρίας: 291

"Εν Χαλκί: 31.8.1945

Ο Διαγωνής

Υπογραφή Κατιδάλη: Σ. Ματσάρας
In the year 2000, a dispute started in Greece over the content of government identity cards. Prime Minister Costas Simitis announced on July 17 that the cards would no longer contain the individual's religion, occupation, spouse's name, or thumbprint. However, blood type and a description in Latin characters would be added. The latter will facilitate travel throughout the European Union.
Removal of Religious reference

- Since European legislation on E.U. identity cards does not request information on religious affiliation, the Greek government introduced new legislation to comply with European norms.
- According to Simitis "religious beliefs and sensitive data" about citizens' private lives are not necessary for the cards.
Identity Crisis

"Greece is experiencing a profound identity crisis as it wrestles with what it means to be Greek, fundamental ties between church and state, and how Greek traditions fit in with the rest of Europe."

Anthee Carassava, "Greeks debate privacy rights vs. religious identity," Christian Science Monitor

Ταυτότητα= Identity/Identity Card
Tautotita
Identity Crisis

- Archbishop Christodoulos, of the Church of Greece, led a campaign to oppose the removal of religion from the ID cards stating that an identity card is not a mere administrative document, but also “a proof of my personality”.
- According to the representatives of the Greek Church, Greek Orthodox religion and the Greek language have been the fundamental pillars of Greece’s modern identity.
Identity Crisis

- Tautotita = Identity

- The same word also means Identity Card
- Ius Soli
- Ius Sanguinis
- Renan versus Anthony Smith
“...the average Greek’s religious attitude, I would call it low spirituality if not indifference, rather than fundamentalism. Although they consider Orthodoxy to be an integral part of “Greekness,” Greeks simply do not care much about religious matters, save Easter and some symbolic moments in their personal lives—namely, baptism, marriage, and death—which they like to celebrate or commemorate with relatives, neighbors, and friends.”

*Nicos C. Alivizatos, A New Role for the Greek Church?*
Identity Crisis

- On June 2000, the Church organized two rallies to oppose the government's action. One was held in mid-June in the northern city of Thessaloniki where 120,000 demonstrators gathered to protest government’s decision.

- “We are first and foremost Greek and Orthodox, and only secondarily Europeans."
The second rally was on June 21 with 500,000 protestors in Athens.

A homemaker and protestor, Vassiliki Karathanassi, commented: "We've got to fight for our right to be Christian Orthodox Greeks," she said, waving a plastic flag with one hand and flashing an icon of the Virgin Mary with the other. "It seems [that Prime Minister Costas] Simitis is capable of selling everything that Greece stands for, for the sake of appearing European."
The Church started a petition drive to demonstrate citizens' degree of opposition to the government's decision. On August 27, 2001, Archbishop Christodoulos released the tally: more than three million Greeks -- 27% of the population of 11 million -- had signed the petition. The Church demanded that the government conduct a national referendum to assess the public's opinion on the elimination of religion status from the ID cards. Archbishop Christodoulos said: "We call on the government to go forward and hold a free and peaceful referendum so the people can express their will."
Dimitris Reppas, a spokesperson for the Greek Government denied the request. "We are not concerned by the number of signatures. This discussion is at an end for us." He also felt that a referendum is not an appropriate mechanism when basic human rights are involved.

A poll was conducted in mid-2000 by Eleftherotypia, a daily newspaper in Athens. They found that 46% of respondents opposed the elimination of religious data on the ID cards; almost 40% favored it; 14% were undecided.
Identity Crisis

- The polarization was also reflected within the political and party systems: *New Democracy*, the largest opposition center-to-right party, supported almost unconditionally the Archbishop in what many journalists were quick to call his “holy war”—with many of its MPs attending the rallies and most of them, including its leader, Costas Karamanlis, signing the petition for a referendum.
The conditions for the calling of a referendum on the issue of identity cards have not been met, everybody is obliged to abide by the rules of the current Law and the signatures which were collected with a procedure that falls outside legally instituted procedures, cannot overturn the provisions of the Constitution.

President of the Republic, Constantine Stephanopoulos
1) Church is not above the Law
2) Greece has to follow the secular model of a “neutral” rule of Law
This view was coming from a conservatist politician
Politicization of the Greek Church

- The politicization of the Greek church
- Publications of Archbishop Christodoulou
- “Nation and Orthodoxy: The Unbreakable Bond”
- “The Volcano of Islamism—the Lava that ‘Burns’ the Balkans”
“They accuse us that we speak politically, that our discourse is political. We reply, *yes our discourse is political*, only in the ancient Greek sense of the term; it was never associated with party politics”

- Political from Polis=City
- Political means to care for public affairs
- Statement made by Archbishop Christodoulos
Politicization of the Greek Church

- The Church of Greece has been invested from its creation as an independent institution with a political role.
- “The aims of the nation-state determined the position and the function of the Church in Greek society.”
- Antonis Manitakis
The attitudes that shaped the reactions of Greek society to the events in Kosovo and Bosnia cannot be understood if one fails to take into account the developments in one of the major institutional strongholds of anti–Western ideology: namely, the Orthodox Church of Greece. While the politicization of religion in Turkey has commanded considerable attention internationally, little attention has been paid to corresponding developments in the Orthodox Church. Yet the politicization of the Greek Orthodox Church may be considered one of the most important recent developments in the country.

Unholy Alliance: Greece and Milosevic’s Serbia by Takis Michas. College Station, Texas, Texas A&M University Press, 2002,
Politization of the Greek Church

- “The state has ceased to be the obvious guarantor of national identity.”
- “The salvation of Hellenism can only be the task and accomplishment of the Church”

Archbishop Christodoulos
“Contrary to once widespread expectations that religion would gradually disappear as a political force in modernizing societies, religious communities have been getting stronger in most nations over the last two decades or so”

Church and the State

“It is occurring in countries with different religious traditions and at different levels of their economic development, so it cannot be explained as a feature of economic underdevelopment”

Church and the State

- Religion and State in USA
- The constitutional separation between Church and state is a founding principle of the United States of America
- This separation in the U.S. constitution was initially conceived and eventually functioned to protect the religious domain from state intervention.
Church and the State

“Dedicated to correcting this divagation from the Way, to realigning America with the Christian agenda they interpret as inherent in the nation’s founding, groups such as the Christian Coalition have been busy amassing power at national, state, and local levels.”

Ian, Marcia 1999 “Introduction: America the ‘Secular,’” unpublished manuscript.
Church and the State

“Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, told Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson (on the latter’s television show), that ‘God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve’. They agreed that the attack was God’s punishment for American toleration of pagans, abortionists, feminists and gays: ‘I point the finger in their face,’ said Falwell. ‘You helped this happen’”

In a speech delivered in May 1998, shortly after he was elected head of the Church of Greece, Archbishop Christodoulous used against those seeking the separation of church and state a very strong if not insulting expression. He called such people *graeculi* (graikæloi), which, in the modern Greek meaning of the word, refers to those who are servile toward everything foreign, who do not deserve Greek identity, and who therefore incarnate national decay.
Church and the State

- Owing to almost daily public appearances and statements covering topics ranging from foreign policy and European integration to cloning and premarital sex, Archbishop Christodoulous has become a point of reference in all aspects of public debate.
The Church has acted throughout the course of modern Greek history as both a secular political institution and as an ideological mechanism, and these two elements have been gradually converted to the values of Greek nationalism as the Church itself has assumed the role of a national religion.

Nikos Chrysoloras, Unorthodox Politics—The Most Religious Political Culture in Europe