

THE SITUATION OF TRADE UNIONS IN GREECE

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1. POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The New Democracy party government, led by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, is still riding high in the opinion polls, leading the main opposition party SYRIZA by 12 to 15 percentage points. The government has been able to capitalise on its successful management of the Covid-19 pandemic in spring last year, although the picture began to change somewhat from the autumn. It did not prove possible to prevent the spread of the pandemic and the national health system revealed its chronic weaknesses. In the meantime, government measures have become inconsistent and confusing, while the economic recession has deepened, with private sector employees once again facing unemployment or underemployment. SYRIZA managed to secure 31 per cent of the vote in 2019 elections but has not yet recovered from this defeat. The social democratic party KINAL (formerly PASOK) backed government decisions in the first phase of the pandemic, but more recent disappointing developments both with Covid-19 and on the economic front have shifted the leadership's line. Despite his populist rhetoric Kyriakos Velopoulos, leader of the nationalist party Elliniki Lysi (Greek Solution), differs considerably from the far-right mobilisation and violent activism of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (GD). The party thankfully failed to surpass the 3 per cent electoral threshold, and in October 2020, in front of the supreme court of Greece (Areios Pagos), its leading members were found guilty of managing a criminal organisation.

Under Kyriakos Mitsotakis, a politician identified with liberal centrism, the party of New Democracy has attracted many centrist voters (mostly from PASOK). Mitsotakis has also tried to consolidate such moves towards the political centre ground, appointing progressive politicians and former PASOK ministers to his cabinet. Nonetheless, this shift has started to fade with the advent of multiple challenges: migration, Turkish aggression, the health crisis and the economic crisis. The law-and-order agenda has once again come to the fore, migration policy has been toughened up, the media landscape is now further dominated by pro-government framing and the persistent transparency problem has been exacerbated. In a context of uncertainty and rising complaints against health-care system inadequacies, labour market deregulation, and low levels of accountability and democratic sensitivity, the government's responses signal a return to conservative politics.

Mitsotakis' key policies can be summarised as follows: economic growth achieved through resort to the EU Recovery and Resilience Fund and additional funding from REACT-EU, along with rising levels of foreign investment, structural reforms, tax and duty cuts, modernisation of the state and cutting of red tape through digitalisation, and improvement of internal security. The National Recovery Plan can hardly be considered path-breaking, however, as there is little about social justice and climate change. Moreover, the government has made no effort to engage the social partners and to broaden the legitimacy of the reforms.

On the other hand, government decisions seem more and more contingent upon the party's right-wing hardliners. Most notably, the police crackdown on squatters and the repeal of the so-called 'university asylum' law, which had prevented the police from gaining access to university campuses, have given Mitsotakis high approval ratings across party lines. Only a few months after the Greek parliament repealed the academic asylum rule, the government passed legislation that allows the establishment of special police on university campuses as part of education reforms.

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Mitsotakis' efforts to appease internal right-wing currents within the party were also apparent in the management of refugee flows in 2019. The government has been criticised by human rights organisations for the country's 'new tactic' of migrant expulsion from deep inside its land borders. Serious questions have also been raised against the country's intensification of the crackdown on migration on the occasion of the crisis at the Greek-Turkish border in February 2020. The hardening of the government's responses echoes the prevailing policies and practices within, at and outside the EU's borders, also known as 'Fortress Europe'. The overcrowding and the inhuman conditions at the Moria refugee camp on Lesbos provide the most acute evidence of the failure of both the hardening government positions and the EU's migration policy. In this vein, the introduction of tougher asylum laws in the autumn of 2019 has been regarded as a domestic policy signal.

Nonetheless, another serious challenge is now looming with the management of the Covid-19 pandemic and its health, social and economic implications. Greece has performed comparatively well in contrast to some other EU countries, as already mentioned, but the situation is still uncertain and volatile.

SYRIZA and KINAL have been trying to reposition themselves and to grow into their joint opposition role. SYRIZA's leader Tsipras is firmly in charge, with no challengers. He has long wanted to give his radical left party a social democratic profile and establish it as a broad centre-left 'progressive alliance'. There is internal resistance to this, however. The party is currently embarking on a process of reflection, with policy developments promised at its next conference.

KINAL is looking on at these developments with open distrust. The party, led by Fofi Gennimata, is currently polling at only 5 to 6 per cent, and fighting for survival. So far, it has been unable to enhance its profile as an independent progressive force. It is therefore pursuing a policy of keeping an equal distance from New Democracy and SYRIZA. Instead of focusing on changes in terms of policy and personnel, resources are being wasted on internal power struggles and young people are no longer inspired to vote for it. It is difficult to say whether the next party conference will bring about a fresh start. At the same time, Nikos Androulakis, Andreas Loverdos, Gerassimos Geroulanos and Charis Kastanidis have already expressed aspirations concerning the party leadership.

Reflecting upon PASOK's internal conflicts over the past 12 years, perhaps it would be wise for the party to undertake a critical discussion on its position towards the 'Keynesian' and pro-welfare legacies of the 1980s.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION

After many years of crisis, Greece's economy had started growing again (by 1.87 per cent in 2019), before coming to a sudden halt because of the pandemic. According to the European Commission's macroeconomic forecast, the Greek economy is expected to record a recession of 10 per cent in 2020. Both the Greek government and international bodies expect a substantial growth rate in 2021: 4.8 per cent according to the

government's forecast published in November 2020, 5.1 per cent according to the IMF's baseline scenario and 3.5% according to the European Commission's interim forecast of February 2021. Government debt has fallen from 184 per cent of GDP (2018) to 176 per cent of GDP (2019), although it is expected to increase to around 196 per cent of GDP in 2020, before declining again to around 183 per cent in 2021. This figure remains concerning. The fate of the economy in the foreseeable future will depend on whether the government manages to tackle the Covid-19 crisis. Mitsotakis has therefore been trying to gain the trust of the international community. At the end of January 2020, he enthusiastically tweeted 'Greece is coming back', following the rating agency Fitch's decision to upgrade Greece's credit rating from BB- to BB. The global and European pressures for austerity-driven policies have now been relaxed, and the government could benefit from this momentum.

It should be noted that the government has already implemented employment and tax measures to cushion the financial impact on companies: tax relief for enterprises, freelancers, personal businesses, financing schemes, employment and social security measures. These include facilitation of favourable regulations in the payment of social security contributions from employers and freelancers, temporary suspension of employment agreements against a state indemnity of 800 euros (€) and full insurance coverage, participation of freelancers/scientists in the teletraining programme of the Ministry of Employment and the extension of the Easter allowance payment deadline.

Workers have seen some benefits thanks to the gradual reduction of the basic tax rate and social security contributions, and the abolition of the solidarity tax. Plans were initially being discussed to increase the minimum wage from €650 to €703, but the government has had second thoughts because of the Covid-19 crisis. To make Greece a more attractive location for foreign investment, the Hellenic parliament passed the Greek Investment Incentives Law in October 2019. Privatisation projects that failed to move forward under the SYRIZA government are finally due to be concluded.

Despite these potentially positive signals, the unemployment rate of 15.6 per cent (2020) remains the highest in Europe, with the number of unemployed women significantly higher than that of men (19.4 per cent of women compared with 12.5 per cent of men). Greece also has Europe's highest level of youth unemployment, at 32.2 per cent (2020). Nevertheless, most newly created jobs are part-time roles or seasonal jobs.

Poverty, social inequality and poor social cohesion remain salient features of Greek society. According to EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, about one-third (30 per cent) of the population were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2019 (almost 10 percentage points above the EU27 average).

The Covid-19 situation has already impacted upon Greece's priorities. The most visible example is digital transformation: several public sector services have been digitalised quickly and efficiently. The provision of digitalised services, such as medi-

cal prescriptions, residence cards and so on, was made available in the first phase of the pandemic. Distance learning and teleworking became prevalent in both academic institutions and schools.

Digitalisation has made progress in the private sector as well. Before the pandemic, seven out of 10 Greek companies had only 25 per cent of their workforce in remote work. After the outbreak of Covid-19, 6 out of 10 companies have more than 50 per cent of their employees working remotely.

2. POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR TRADE UNIONS

Until recently, Greek trade unions were assessed in terms of their role during the crisis. The rescinding of collective agreements in their entirety and the increased general flexibility of labour relations as part of the bailout plans weakened the trade unions considerably.

Having exited the memoranda of understanding, it was to be expected that the trade unions would once again play a more active role. This is by no means the case, however. The most visible actions taken by the three largest trade unions – namely ADEDY (Civil Servants' Confederation), GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers) and PAME (All-Workers Militant Front) – have been to call general strikes. Disillusionment with trade unions originating from the crisis years, combined with acceptance of the need for a culture of dialogue and compromise in Greek politics, have resulted in an increasing reluctance among workers to participate in strikes.

The spread of Covid-19 and the ban on mass gatherings further complicated relations between the unions and their members. The standstill has augmented workers' sense of powerlessness and isolation in many economic sectors. On the other hand, the government and the mass media tend to disregard any grassroots initiative as morally irresponsible and/or illegal.

Major unions such as POEDIN (Federation of Hospital Workers), OENGE (Federation of Hospital Doctors), EKA (the Centre of Athens Labour Unions) and PAME called for action in November 2020 in pursuit of demands that the government support the health care system with new hires and requisition of private sector facilities, equipment and staff, as needed in response to the pandemic. In mid-November PAME called for action against the government's insufficient support of public transport (a key factor in the spread of the virus). A few days later, ADEDY and PAME called a general strike in protest against the Ministry of Labour's draft law that includes regulations on working hours, overtime, industrial action and trade unionism. The transport unions also joined forces with PAME and ADEDY, including the Athens city bus and underground railway employees' union (SELMA), the urban rail system union (STASY Union), the marine engineers' union (PEMEN), as well as the sailors' (PENEN) and ship's cooks' unions (PEEMAGEN). The seafarers' representatives accused the shipowners of imposing intolerable working conditions. The participation

of postal workers was also impressive. Overall, the strike mobilised thousands of workers nationwide, and was partially subjected to state coercion (some unionists were fined for violating Covid-19-related restrictions). It also revealed the division between left-wing unionists and the block of socialists-conservatives who have fiercely resisted GSEE's industrial action during the pandemic. GSEE's basic contribution to the ongoing battle against labour market deregulation in the context of the Covid-19 crisis has been to launch a platform called the 'Anti-Covid-19 Group for Information and Support for Workers'. The aim is to ensure that the public receive adequate information and to report violations of workers' rights.

The weaknesses and lack of unity in the trade union movement have been evident since the beginning of the pandemic, as shown, for example, by the de facto cancellation of the annual GSEE conference twice in mid-March 2019. Finally, on 25 February 2020, the third conference took place with a police presence, and even PAME protests outside the conference centre. In the GSEE council election, the PASKE faction, closely aligned with KINAL, won again, with 17 seats, while the DAKE faction, closely linked to New Democracy, came second, with 11 seats, and PAME came third, with 10 seats. The trade union activists aligned with SYRIZA are divided into two factions, both of which performed poorly in the election (5 and 3 seats, respectively). The government was represented at the conference by Vice-President Panagiotis Pikrammenos; KINAL president Fofi Gennimata gave the welcome address. The fact that both were in attendance is regarded as a positive sign for a fresh start in terms of dialogue between the social partners.

The two largest confederations – GSEE and ADEDY – have failed to make internal changes, losing both the initiative and credibility. Hardly anyone nowadays believes that their personal situation would be improved by joining one of these trade unions, and the level of organisation is, accordingly, fairly low. Recently, there have been discussions on whether workers in precarious employment should be able to join a trade union. Workers in informal employment, whose numbers have increased sharply in recent years, could potentially become trade union members. Opinions within the trade unions differ on this, however. Certain organisations, such as the Centre of Athens Labour Unions, EKA, believe that such workers have great potential to help renew the trade union movement. This is also true for the left-wing factions of GSEE (both those aligned with SYRIZA and leftist parties, and the one aligned with KKE). On the other hand, there is a view, particularly among union leaders, that accepting workers in precarious employment would call into question the status of existing trade union members.

3. TRADE UNIONS IN GREECE – FACTS AND DATES

DEVELOPMENT SINCE THE 1970s

Trade unions were officially inactive during the military dictatorship (1967–1974), although many unionists participated actively in the struggles for the restoration of democracy. Fur-

thermore, union activities were subject to stringent controls by the state in the first few years after democracy had been restored. The law on trade unions updated in 1982, which laid the groundwork for proportional representation, marked the beginning of a very active period – by Greek standards – for trade unions, who were involved in policy-making and social dialogue. However, close links between the (governing) parties and trade unions was already evident at that time, subsequently resulting in a system of ‘give and take’. The argument that clientelism was to some extent augmented with the enlargement of the public sector in the 1970s and 1980s is now commonly shared and has been empirically tested. On the other hand, another fact can hardly be disputed: the enlargement of the Greek public sector was also an outcome of the new roles and responsibilities that the Greek state assumed within a more complex and interconnected international environment in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Suffice to say that, even at its peak, average employment in the Greek public sector was close to the EU15 average.

Full collective bargaining freedom was established in the 1990s. The following years saw the introduction of flexible employment contracts for the first time, creating a new category of workers characterised by both flexibility and vulnerability. These workers, facing precarious working conditions, were not unionised, initially. Since the early 2000s, however, there have been notable efforts to unionise them in various sectors, including telecommunications, hospitality, industrial cleaning and courier services.

The loss of power suffered by trade unions started in 2010, with the onset of Greece’s bailout plans and implementation of austerity measures imposed on the country, as well as the massive increase in unemployment.

THE TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

Greece’s official trade union confederations are GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers) and ADEDY (Civil Servants’ Confederation). A trade union federation of regional relevance is EKA, the Centre of Athens Labour Unions. One of the most important and powerful sectoral trade unions is GENOP-DEI, the General Federation of Employees of the Public Power Corporation (DEI).

GSEE primarily represents workers in the private sector, but also public sector workers on temporary contracts, as well as workers in public companies under private law. ADEDY is the confederation for workers in the public sector, workers employed by legal entities under public law, and local government workers. GSEE and ADEDY bring together many sectoral trade unions and regional federations.

PAME (All-Workers Militant Front) is the trade union organisation of the Communist Party of Greece. It was formed in 1999 and is opposed to capitalism, the European Union and the government. It sees itself as an independent trade union movement, but nevertheless participates in GSEE and ADEDY elections. PAME represents both private and public production sectors. It has neither a managing committee nor a presi-

dent, but is instead run by an executive committee. PAME is a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). While GSEE and ADEDY often take industrial action together, PAME always organises its own demonstrations and industrial action, making regular attempts to sabotage both trade union confederations. PAME’s mobilisation capacities remain effective today, especially in comparison with GSEE, whose potential to mobilise its members has been substantially undermined in recent years.

EKA, the Centre of Athens Labour Unions, is a regional trade union confederation that is also the largest second-level confederation in Greece, with around 110,000 members. EKA is a member of GSEE and ECTUN (European Capitals Trade Union Network) and is extremely active, in terms of both mobilisation of its members and the research-based initiatives of its institute.

GENOP-DEI is one of Greece’s most important sectoral trade unions. It has significant influence owing to the high (though declining) number of employees working for the Public Power Corporation (DEI) and its key role in the planned phase-out of public financial support for coal-mining. GENOP-DEI’s position regarding decarbonisation is that it cannot not be fully attained within the next two years, insofar as Greece’s renewable energy sources are currently insufficient. However, it has lost popular support because of financial scandals and questionable lending practices.

There are some small unions in the private sector that keep their distance from official trade union structures (GSEE). They might fall into the category of ‘social movement unionism’. Typical examples of social movement unions are the Book and Paper Union (BOPU) and the so-called Assembly of Workers on Motorbikes (SVEOD). Their broader influence remains marginal, however.

In terms of trade union structure, Greek law makes provision for three different levels:

- a) **First-level** trade unions: these unions are legally autonomous and their activities are generally limited to a particular region or business. They may be part of a national sectoral trade union or regional trade union confederation (second-level).
- b) **Second-level** trade unions: these are either national industrial or occupational confederations (sectoral trade unions such as GENOP-DEI) or regional organisations, such as the Centre of Athens Labour Unions (EKA).
- c) **Third-level** trade unions: national trade union confederations, such as GSEE and ADEDY, made up of second-level trade unions.

The links between trade unions and political parties have traditionally been very strong in Greece. The parties have direct representation in the unions, namely in the form of political factions standing for election under a different name. The number of votes for a particular faction will then decide the number of seats on the managing committee of the trade union. The faction with the most seats, or a coalition made up of

several factions, subsequently appoints the president of the trade union confederation. The close links between political parties and trade unions are another reason behind the lack of public trust in unions. Trade unions have fallen into disrepute as a result of numerous scandals, abuse of power and the pursuit of personal interests, but also a growing anti-union hostility orchestrated by power elites and governments. Finally, one should also consider the anti-union and individualistic culture that is being cultivated within the workplaces in Greece. Amidst the Covid-19 crisis, and within a period of two months (November-December 2020) GSEE received 450 complaints from employees experiencing employers' foul play. In most

WORKING CONTEXT OF TRADE UNIONS

Trade union freedom is laid down in Article 23 of the Greek Constitution: 'The State shall adopt due measures safeguarding the freedom to unionise and the unhindered exercise of related rights against any infringement thereon within the limits of the law.' The establishment, objectives, financial autonomy and election process for trade unions are defined by the Greek Law on the democratisation of the Union movement and the guaranteeing of workers' movement freedoms. This Law also safeguards the right to strike and specifies the requirements for exercising these rights (Article 20). The law on strikes was reformed in 2018, forcing the trade unions out on-

Table 1
Largest trade union confederations in Greece

Confederation (in local language and/or abbreviation – English name and/or abbreviation in brackets)	President / Vice President	Members (only those who voted in their union's last election)	International memberships (English name – abbreviation)
Γενική Συνομοσπονδία Εργατών Ελλάδος, ΓΣΕΕ GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers)	President: Ioannis Panagopoulos General Secretary: Nikos Kioutsoukis	333,000 (2020)	ITUC, ETUC
Ανώτατη Διοίκηση Δημοσίων Υπαλλήλων, ΑΔΕΔΥ ADEDY (Civil Servants' Confederation)	President: Ioannis Paidas General Secretary: Dimitris Bratis	264,375 (2019)	ETUC, PSI, EPSU

Table 2
Largest trade associations and individual trade unions in Greece

Trade association / trade union (in local language and/or abbreviation – English name and/or abbreviation in brackets)	Confederation (abbreviation)	President / Vice President	Members	International memberships (English name – abbreviation)
Ομοσπονδία Λειτουργών Μέσης Εκπαίδευσης, ΟΛΜΕ OLME (Federation of Secondary School Teachers of Greece)	ADEDY	President: Theodoros Tsouchlas Deputy President: Theodoros Malagaris	41,000	ETUC, EI
Γενική Ομοσπονδία Προσωπικού ΔΕΗ, ΓΕΝΟΠ ΔΕΗ GENOP DEI (General Federation of Employees of the National Electric Power Corporation)	GSEE	President: Georgios Adamidis General Secretary: Antonios Karras	15,500 (2019)	EPSU
Ομοσπονδία Συλλόγων Υπηρεσίας Πολιτικής Αεροπορίας, ΟΣΥΠΑ OSYPA (Greek Federation of Civil Aviation Authorities)	ADEDY	President: Konstantinos Triantafyllou General Secretary: Kostas Minas	N/A	ETF, ITF

cases companies are accused of blackmailing their staff by forcing them to work even though they are on furlough. Similar complaints have been published by PAME, while then Labour and Social Security Minister Yiannis Vrotsis has issued warnings against companies that violate labour regulations and has promised new institutional and legal initiatives.

First- and second-level trade unions do not usually disclose their membership figures, and it is impossible to find information on membership figures in the public domain. Plans are now in place to introduce an electronic register in which membership figures will be reported.

to the streets. This was one of the measures agreed with creditors as part of the economic adjustment programmes. The reforms made changes to the quorum required for a strike ballot in first-level trade unions, increasing the number of registered members from one-fifth to half. As has been the case to date, strikes are agreed on the basis of a majority vote.

A new law governing demonstrations was passed in July 2020. This legislation was aimed at preventing the centre of Athens and other cities from repeatedly grinding to a halt as a result of small-scale demonstrations. Each demonstration now requires an organiser/coordinator responsible for keeping the peace

and acting as a contact person for the police. The new law stipulates that the organiser is responsible for any damage resulting from a given demonstration. However, organisers are exempt from this responsibility if they have announced the demonstration in a timely manner and can prove that they took all necessary measures to ensure it ran smoothly. A police-appointed 'police intermediary' will act as the contact person between the local police forces and the organiser of the demonstration.

CORE ACTIVITIES OF TRADE UNIONS

Over the course of the crisis, trade unions have seen a massive decline in terms of clout. Their position in the dialogue between the various social partners has weakened. In terms of their core activities, they have also been marginalised. The ebbing of the protest movement, especially after SYRIZA assumed power, had its own impact on trade union demobilisation. But the main reasons for their marginalisation lie rather in the unions' own dysfunctioning and their institutional marginalisation in the context of austerity policies. Collective bargaining took place at a sectoral level until 2010. The outcome of these negotiations was declared to be universally applicable. Given that the Greek economy is overwhelmingly made up of small and micro-businesses that do not belong to any confederation, this universal applicability was a general policy to ensure that the pay scale was not undermined. Collective bargaining was also possible at the company level, provided it did not fall below what had been agreed in any industry-level bargaining (favourability principle). Overall, approximately 90 per cent of all workers were covered by collective agreements. The collective agreement system and free collective bargaining were effectively eliminated during the course of the austerity regime. The trade union monopoly on negotiations was broken up by the decision to allow non-union employee representatives to be involved in concluding company-wide collective agreements. The principle of universal applicability was suspended, the retroactive effect of collective agreements was reduced from six to three months, and their period of validity was limited to three years. The National General Collective Agreement was effectively suspended in 2012. As a result, the minimum wage was unilaterally set by the government. The damage inflicted on collective bargaining after the implementation of the above-mentioned measures is reflected in the drastic decline of collective bargaining coverage, which, according to OECD data, fell from 100 per cent in 2010 to only 25.5 per cent in 2016.

In August 2018 the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs took initial steps to restore collective bargaining autonomy and began gradually to reintroduce universally applicable sectoral agreements. A law was passed by the conservative government in autumn 2019, effectively abolishing the favourability principle. This stipulated that regional sectoral collective agreements could in future be less favourable than national industry-level bargaining. Under certain circumstances, companies would also be entitled to deviate from the provisions of the respective sectoral agreement, such as when facing financial bottlenecks. Trade unions responded with demonstrations and strikes, with the opposition party SYRIZA accusing the government of returning to the days of austerity.

The government took the decision to set the minimum wage in 2012, reducing it from €750.00 to €586.08 (for workers over 25 years of age) and/or €510.95 (for workers under 25 years of age). Even after Greece's exit from the bailout, the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs continued to set the minimum wage by law, following consultation with the various social partners. On 1 February 2019, the minimum wage was increased to €650.00 and the lower minimum wage for under-25s was eliminated. The criteria for setting the minimum wage include productivity, competitiveness and the general economic situation in Greece.

The GSEE is involved in the tripartite social dialogue within the framework of various national institutions, such as the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), the Unified Social Security Fund (EFKA) and the Economic and Social Council of Greece (OKE). This relatively new body was modelled on the European Economic and Social Committee. It is made up of representatives of the various social partners, political parties and civil society and acts in an advisory capacity in advance of the drafting of relevant laws. However, it is very difficult to say whether and to what extent trade union representation has a meaningful influence on social policy decisions.

In terms of social mobilisation, the unions that took some initiatives during the Covid-19 crisis are mainly those affiliated with PAME, with the agenda revolving around workers' safety in the workplace, employment protection and strengthening of the public health system.

THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF TRADE UNIONS

Over the past ten years, Greek trade unions have suffered huge losses in terms of their influence, credibility, trust and agenda-setting power. Their political impact is currently extremely low. The fact that there has traditionally been no social dialogue embedded in the various institutions has contributed significantly to weakening their position.

Trade unions are generally regarded as unreliable, ineffective, organised on clientelist lines and dependent on political parties. In a survey conducted in 2013, 95.2 per cent of respondents said that trade unions had done nothing or very little to prevent social austerity policies from being implemented. Two years earlier, relatively early on in the crisis, just 7 per cent of respondents said they trusted trade union leaders.

For decades, Greek trade unions have been too closely tied to political parties and state-owned enterprises in their struggle to gain privileges. During the crisis, both creditors and society alike accused them of being complicit in the escalation of the social and labour market crisis. Nor were they helped much by the decision of SYRIZA, which was in power until July 2019, not to recognise unions as a negotiating partner. It is worth noting that former Prime Minister Tsipras never once met with Ioannis Panagopoulos, the GSEE President.

Given this rather gloomy picture, it is fair to say there are significant political and social challenges to overcome. It is a question of winning back trust, making changes in terms of

personnel, overcoming party dependencies, developing innovative tools to articulate members' interests, recruiting new members and improving the level of representation of women and young people. Trade unions need to rediscover their position as a relevant player both in the policy-making process and at the grassroots level. In addition to making changes in terms of personnel (for example, GSEE President Panagopoulos has been in office since 2006 and was re-elected in 2020, although he was eligible for retirement from 2010), there is also the matter of overcoming the divisions within the trade union movement. Another crucial issue that has remained unresolved for decades is the huge and widening representation gaps inside the union organisations. Of the 45 members of GSEE's administrative board, only two are women. There are also few unionists with migrant background. There is much room for improvement in internal democracy. The fact that GSEE cancelled two conferences in 2019 reflects a structural lack of democratic ethos, and a limited participatory culture, exacerbated by established bureaucratic elites who are unwilling to open up to new entrants, but also by narrow-minded militants who are unable to commit themselves to basic principles of union revitalisation, such as democratic participation and coalition-building.

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