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## “Austerity Surveillance” in Greece under the Austerity Regime (2010–2014)

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### Abstract

In this article we have tried to analyze “austerity surveillance” (AS), its features, and its functions under the extreme austerity regime in Greece during 2010–2014, before the election of the leftist government. AS is a specific kind of coercive neoliberal surveillance, which in the name of fighting tax evasion and corruption is targeting the middle and lower economic strata and not the rich upper classes. It is based mainly on “coveillance,” i.e. citizen-informers’ grassing, public naming, and shaming. Functioning as a domination and disciplinary control mechanism of the entire population, it works within a post-democratic setting without accountability or democratic control. We provide empirical evidence of these features and functions, including some indicative personal testimonies of austerity surveillance subjects. After presenting some cases of electronic surveillance as an indispensable supplement to AS, we then briefly underline the negative personal, and socio-political impact of this surveillance. In conclusion, a tentative assessment is made of AS’ efficiency in the Greek case, comparing it with other types of past and present authoritarian surveillance in Greece and in other current surveillance societies, considering also the prospects for its abolition or its reproduction by the new leftist government.

### Keywords

austerity; coveillance; Greece; surveillance

### Issue

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## 1. Introduction

According to Greek mythology, *Argos Panoptes* was a hundred-eyed giant, a very effective watchman, used by Zeus’ wife, Hera, to watch Zeus’ lover, Nymph Io. Zeus sent Hermes to rescue his lover, and Hermes slew Argos with his sword. To commemorate her faithful watchman, Hera had the hundred eyes of Argos preserved forever, on the peacock’s tail, her sacred bird. *Panoptes* (“All-seeing”) signifies on the one hand the wakeful alertness of a watchman, who had so many eyes that only a few of them would sleep at a time, while there were always eyes still awake.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, *Argos Panoptes* signifies surveillance as a very ef-

fective, but also contested, control instrument, used by the powerful authorities. The questions of who is using *Panoptes* against whom, and for what reason, who trusts him and to whom he is faithful, and how one can get rid of him are eternal questions about surveillance, either in the case of spying enemies or allies, or simply of watching individuals, citizens, consumers, etc. *Panoptes’* myth is always appropriate when talking about surveillance in Greece, especially nowadays when Greek people struggle against the draconian austerity regime and its *Panoptes* surveillance.

Our analysis here refers to the austerity regime in Greece from 2010–2014, before the electoral victory of the leftist party SYRIZA on January 25, 2015 and the formation of Alexis Tsipras’ government.

Although we live in the “age of austerity” (Schaefer

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.theoi.com/Gigante/GiganteArgosPanoptes.html>

& Streeck, 2013) and most democratic states enforce austerity measures, these are particularly harsh in southern Europe, with Greece as the most extreme case. It seems that Greece has been chosen by the Troika, i.e. the IMF, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Commission (EC) as a laboratory for a new model of socioeconomic organization for the European over-indebted countries. This laboratory aims, under extreme austerity and surveillance, to create a disciplined society, totally passive and receptive to the neoliberal policies of market domination and social disintegration (Douzinas, 2013; Stavrakakis, 2014).

We have to remind one that Greece is the weakest member in the Eurozone debt crisis, which began to unravel in 2009. Worries that Greece would default on its debt forced the European Union (EU) to rescue the Greek economy with two bailouts, in 2010 and 2014, totaling €240 billion, under draconian memoranda for shrinking the public sector and enforcing severe constraints of social spending. Since the first bailout of Greece, an austerity regime has been established under the strict supervision of the Troika, enforcing a neoliberal austerity policy to save the Greek banks and pay off the lenders, but with detrimental results for the Greek population. According to data collected by Eurostat, the EU's statistics agency, about 30 percent of the Greek population now lives below the poverty line—with 15 percent living in conditions of extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup>

The argument that Greece has been a “debt colony,” shackled to its lenders, sounds more and more persuasive. It is a subservient state to a trust of Eurocrats, Euro-bankers, and neoliberal governmental elites in northern Europe, which collaborates with the Greek ruling elite to impose the neoliberal austerity doctrine, regardless of its apparent failure and detrimental impact on the Greek people (Kotzias, 2012; Stavrakakis, 2014; Tsimitakis, 2012). In order to impose strict austerity measures, the pro-austerity Greek governments under the Troika pressures have *de facto* given up national sovereignty and continuously used undemocratic methods, like legislative ordinances, that circumvent the Greek constitution (Chrysogonos, 2013).

This Greek austerity regime is organized according to the austerity memoranda, which have prescribed the rules, norms, and key austerity policies of governance, under the strict supervision of the Troika. The austerity governance was implemented by a coalition government of the traditional rival, post-dictatorial rul-

ing parties, i.e., the right-wing New Democracy party and the center-left “socialist” PASOK party, which are both responsible for Greek bankruptcy, due to their clientelist and corrupt politics.

The Greek austerity regime has been using a specific type of surveillance, which we call “austerity surveillance,” to create a coercive, insecure and disciplined society of informers; this type of surveillance and its impact we aim to analyze in this article. For our analysis we have to consider that Greece is a post-authoritarian surveillance society, which due to the post-civil war police state and military dictatorship (1949–1974) has resisted during the entire post-dictatorial period and before the financial crisis (1974–2009) any kind of new, electronic surveillance (Samatas, 2004). Based on pretty good constitutional and legislative protections of freedoms and privacy, post-dictatorial Greece had a good record of privacy and data protection, as was confirmed by the EPIC survey of 2006, discussed further below.

In this article we try first to define “austerity surveillance” (AS), describing its features and functions, which reflect the extreme austerity regime in Greece during 2010–2014; second, we provide empirical evidence of these features, and some indicative personal testimonies of austerity surveillance subjects; then, we present some cases of electronic surveillance, as an indispensable supplement to the AS; then, we briefly underline the impact of this surveillance, comparing it with other types of authoritarian surveillance in the Greek past as well as current coercive surveillance in advanced surveillance societies; finally, we conclude with a tentative assessment of the efficiency of AS in Greece and consider the prospects for the abolition or reproduction of the austerity surveillance by the new leftist government.

We have tried to substantiate our arguments about the features of this particular type of surveillance with lots of empirical data. Also, as we have done with our research on anticommunist surveillance in Greece, where we had used an in-depth conversational analysis (Samatas, 2005), we have similarly examined “austerity surveillance” through “exploratory discussions” with a number of selected individuals who have been victims of or have resisted the austerity regime, discussing and listening to their narrative “stories,” following a similar narrative methodology with the IRISS report (2014, p. 4).

## 2. The Features of “Austerity Surveillance” as a Basic Control Mechanism of the Greek Austerity Regime

Surveillance implies power and control, since it means monitoring people, gathering and analysing personal information in order to regulate or govern their behavior (Gilliom & Monahan, 2013, p. 2). State surveillance in a democratic setting can be an effective control mechanism provided that it is legitimate and

<sup>2</sup> About 1,000 more people lose their jobs every day, and long-term poverty is knocking at the door of a new class of low-paid workers. Greeks' purchasing power has fallen by half since 2010; also, while the public healthcare system is being destroyed and spending on public education has fallen to levels last seen in the 1980s, the cost of living in the country remains high. All these push the young educated Greeks to massively emigrate abroad (Tsimitakis, 2012).

accountable, having the citizens' acceptance and trust; because within a democratic setting there are rules of limitation and oversight of the watchers, protecting the watched (Haggerty & Samatas, 2010). However, in a draconian austerity regime such as the five-year austerity regime in Greece from 2010–2014, surveillance, as we'll see, is a coercive, neo-authoritarian mechanism that serves the ruling elite and the lenders' interests, actually punishing ordinary citizens and harming democracy.

In fact, "austerity surveillance" (AS) is a special kind of coercive surveillance, which has been used by the extreme austerity regime in Greece in the name of fighting tax evasion and corruption, while targeting the middle and lower economic strata—not the rich upper classes—is based mainly on "coveillance," i.e., citizen-informers' grassing, public naming, and shaming. It involves potential or actual coercion, stigmatization, and punishment as a domination and disciplinary control mechanism of the entire population; it functions in a neoliberal and post-democratic setting, namely without accountability and democratic control. "Austerity surveillance" is not just a financial or credit surveillance, collecting and processing data on financial behavior; it is a surveillance promoted by the austerity regime as a way of citizens' lives (Gilliom & Monahan, 2013, pp. 34–38), suspecting and targeting every one as untrustworthy, a potential cheater, a tax evader, and corrupted. AS is not an original type of monitoring, since its mechanics have been dictated by the Troika and are imported from countries such as the UK, with an embedded "coveillance" culture of neighborhood watch (NW) and "citizens watching citizens" (CWC) (Rowlands, 2013; Webster & Leleux, 2014).

### 2.1. *The Basic Features of Greek Austerity Surveillance*

Austerity surveillance, as it has been developed during the years of crisis in Greece, reflects all features of the Greek austerity regime; it is basically coercive, neoliberal, post-democratic, and class-oriented.

#### 2.1.1. AS Is Coercive, Causing Stigmatization and Punishment

Christian Fuchs (2012, p. 685) has underlined the coercive features of surveillance in the capitalist context, which resemble with the coercive character of AS in Greece:

[Surveillance] is the collection of data on individuals or groups to control and discipline their behaviour. It can be exercised through threats of targeting someone by violence...Surveillance operates with threats and fear; it is a form of psychological and structural violence that can turn into physical violence. Surveillance is a specific kind of information

gathering, storage, processing and assessment, and its use involves potential or actual harm, coercion, violence, asymmetric power relations, control, manipulation, domination and disciplinary power. It is an instrument and a means for trying to derive and accumulate benefits for certain groups or individuals at the expense of other groups or individuals.

AS implies actual violence, like arrest and imprisonment, and symbolic violence, such as public naming and shaming, as we analyze it further below. There have been numerous arrests and imprisonments of tax and loan debtors, after citizens' accusations and "snitching."

We can also use Lazzarato's (2012) analysis of the function of debt equally for the "debt or austerity surveillance" as "a technique of domination, as a technology of power, combining financial management with control over subjectivity."

#### 2.1.2. AS Is a Neoliberal Control Mechanism Especially Targeting Public Servants and Welfare Recipients

The Greek austerity regime, under the Troika's tutelage and direct supervision, has enforced a neoliberal policy of defaming everything relating to the state and public sector; neoliberalism is a market rationality that colonizes most spheres of public life, "pushing responsibility onto individuals for what used to be the purview of the state, effectively depoliticizing social problems and normalizing social inequalities...The convergence of surveillance and neoliberalism supports the production of insecurity subjects, of people who perceive the inherent dangerousness of others and take actions to minimize exposure to them, even when the danger is spurious" (Monahan, 2010, pp. 2, 11).

#### 2.1.3. AS Is Working Under a "Post-Democratic Setting"

Post-democratic is, according to Crouch (2004, p. 6):

one that continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell....Elections and electoral debate, which can still change governments, are transformed into a "tightly controlled spectacle," managed by professional experts and restricted to a set of issues selected by them, with most citizens reduced to a passive, apathetic role.

All these post-democratic features have characterized the five years (2010–2014) of the Greek austerity regime. In this setting, AS is actually antidemocratic because it is functioning without any democratic control and accountability, violating privacy, human rights, and constitutional freedoms.

#### 2.1.4. AS Is Class-Oriented, Against the Lower Social Strata, Protecting the Rich Dominant Classes

As we prove later, AS, like the austerity regime, is overtly class-discriminatory against the lower middle classes, the poor, and the needy, and conspicuously in favor of the elite and rich upper strata.

In brief, “austerity surveillance” in Greece is a coercive or neo-authoritarian type of surveillance, using stigmatization by naming and shaming, encouraging citizen informants, besides the advanced surveillance technologies. It is targeting every citizen as a “debtor,” owing his own share of debt, and as a potential tax evader, accountable and guilty before the austerity regime. With neoliberal fierceness, it firstly attacks the public sector servants and functionaries, all welfare recipients, and then private sector professionals. “At the end of the day, a ‘pound of flesh’ is demanded from all—with the normal exclusion of the politico-economic elite of the super-rich” (Stavrakakis, 2013).

### 3. The Basic Mechanics and Functions of the AS in Greece

The following are a wide and interesting range of examples, illustrating the aforementioned mechanics and functions of austerity surveillance in Greece.

#### 3.1. “Coveillance”: Grassing, Naming, and Shaming for the Austerity Regime by Citizen Informants

The austerity regime cultivates “coveillance,” a kind of horizontal surveillance by citizens who have the “duty to inform” on their fellow citizens; it is an “outsourcing” of state institutional control and surveillance responsibility to the Greek public, as it is practiced in several countries, especially in the UK.<sup>3</sup> So, for example, in Scotland, the “Made from Crime” initiative encourages people “to eye one another suspiciously,” and to monitor each other’s living arrangements: “How can he afford that flash car? How did she pay for all those designer clothes? How can they fund so many foreign holidays?” Citizens’ reports can be made by post, online, or by phoning, anonymously, with no evidential requirements or limit to the frequency and number of accused people.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In recent years, a plethora of UK government publicity campaigns have urged the public to report those who exhibit suspicious behavior in relation to a wide range of offenses, including terrorism, benefit fraud, social housing violations, bad driving, and even the improper use of rubbish bins” (Rowlands, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Indicative enough is the British government’s scheme in November 2009 that would pay £500 to the first 1,000 people whose telephone tip-offs led to a council house being repossessed (Rowlands, 2013).

#### 3.1.1. Hotlines

Similarly, we also have in Greece, under the austerity regime, anonymous tip-offs, which can be made by post, online, or by phoning the following hotlines:

- 1517, the most popular and busiest hotline, for accusations to the Greek Financial and Economic Crime Squad (SDOE);
- 11012 for the Economic Police, who receives 50 calls per day;
- 10190 for corruption cases to the International Transparency of Greece; it received 500 calls in 2013;
- 1142 for the Health line against smoking in public places and other health issues, which received 20,000 calls against smokers in the first days of its establishment in 2010, but it receives less and less calls because the antismoking campaign has failed and no sanctions are imposed.
- 2313-325.501 in Northern Greece for accusations on environmental pollution, receiving 40-50 calls per day in the wintertime, when people burn unsuitable materials in their fireplaces to keep warm.

Reports can be made anonymously and with no evidential requirements. There are many instances of people claiming to have endured financial hardship and lengthy legal battles due to spurious allegations made by vindictive neighbors, relatives, divorcees, rivals, etc.

According to journalist sources: the SDOE hotline 1517, which was established in 2008 for tax evasion, had received 4,000 telephone calls in 2008 and 4,500 in 2009, and since a 2010 media campaign there has been a significant increase, having received 18,500 accusations of all forms, and 19,500 in 2011, while in the following years of 2012–2014 these accusations have been doubled. It is estimated that starting in 2014, this hotline receives an average of 200 calls per day and close to 70,000 calls per year (Elafros, 2015; Margomenou, 2014). According to SDOE statistics, six out of ten calls are made by relatives; 20 percent are accusations against rivals in the same business, or come from employees who have been fired and who accuse their former employers of tax evasion. Indicative enough is the fact that the percentage of named accusations is increasing, allegedly by taxpayers accusing others of tax evasion. SDOE has admitted that it has successfully arrested some serious tax evaders thanks to informers.

Moreover, according to Law 3610/2007, “whoever has denounced a tax or customs offense to the authorities, and this denunciation has been confirmed and punished by the enforcement of a pecuniary fine, s/he is entitled an award equal to 1/10 percent of the collected fines.”

### 3.1.2. Public Naming and Shaming

Citizens' grassing reports on their relatives, neighbors, and fellow citizens is supplemented by public naming and shaming policies organized by the austerity regime authorities and the media, as an integral practice of austerity surveillance.

According to Lilian Mitrou (2012, pp. 247-248):

by "naming" we understand the disclosure, publication and dissemination of the identity of a person, who is convicted or suspected of crime or tax evasion....The [stigmatizing] publicity serves as a means to degrade, shame, reprimand, reproach, censure, control...the person identified as offender, raising sentiments of guilt and shame...."Shaming" is a social process of purposefully expressing disapproval and/or contempt...provoking embarrassment, discomfort, anger and fear.

Shaming through publicly naming suspects, accused, and convicted persons as tax evaders by the Greek media throughout the austerity years aims at public condemnation and hopes to create deterrence effects.

Greece had very good legislation on the protection of personal data, which has been gradually but seriously amended to facilitate organized crime prevention, antiterrorism, and austerity policies, including tax evasion. In 2007, there was an amendment of Law 2472/97 on the protection of personal data, allowing the publication of the names of persons involved in criminal charges or convictions. Yet, the naming and shaming policies that had been introduced into Greek legislation in 2008 became an obligation of tax authorities against tax evaders since 2011 (Mitrou, 2012).

### 3.1.3. Humiliation and Defamation: Tax Evaders Are Frequently Considered Equal to Sex Offenders and Pedophiles

The implementation of these naming and shaming policies by the Greek authorities and the media has actually put tax evaders on the same level as serious criminals, sex offenders, and pedophiles, assuming that their public naming will deter other tax offenders. In the Greek social context, especially in local communities, public naming and shaming are serious policies to implement punishment, because the offenders fear "the look in the eyes of his intimates, family, friends, and colleagues, who know about their behavior." The community participates in the punishment process by disgracing, degrading, and stigmatizing the offender, imposing restrictions to his freedom, chances, and choices (Mitrou, 2012, p. 251).

The most blatant public and online stigmatization, a privacy violation, forced DNA collection, and imprisonment, was in May 2012, when the Greek authorities

arrested 17 allegedly HIV-positive women who worked illegally as prostitutes, accusing them of intentionally causing serious bodily harm. The photographs of 12 of the women were published by TV channels and together with their names were posted on the Greek Police's website, causing an outcry of human rights advocates who said it was unclear whether the women were aware they had HIV.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.1.4. The Stigmatization Role of the Major Mass Media

The print and electronic mass media play a crucial role in the efficiency of surveillance (Monahan, 2010); especially in the naming and shaming process, they have overdone this during the austerity years in Greece, reproducing over and over the austerity regime's propaganda that most public servants and professionals are corrupted and are mainly responsible for the crisis. In very few cases when there is a celebrity arrest for tax evasion, this is presented in a very reviling way by the electronic media, advertising the "efficiency" of the austerity regime. Anchor men and women of the major TV channels have made a career as "tele-prosecutors," competing in the daily news programs to report in a very sensational way individual tax evasions cases, while they keep silence for huge tax evasion and offshore deposits of some of their colleagues and their bosses, the Greek "oligarchs," the media barons and owners of the TV channels, who are also contractors of public works, and/or ship-owners, etc. and have not bothered to pay their taxes (Kontoyiorgis, 2013).

### 3.2. Class Orientation and the Hypocrisy of the Greek Financial Big Brother

The Finance ministry, under the supervision of the Troika and the head of the European Commission's Task Force for Greece, Mr. Horst Reichenbach, was trying to track down tax evaders by cross-matching consumption data, unable though to identify those who have offshore accounts and money in Switzerland and in other tax-free paradises. Thus, the finance Big Brother is based on grassing and citizen informants, and exhausts its capacity to catch "small fishes."

There was also a proposed online publicity of income data of all Greek taxpayers, after the law 3842/2010, article 8 paragraph 20, that has permitted a total economic transparency, to enhance tax payments versus tax evasion, but this has not yet implemented, because the Greek Data Protection Authority (DPA) has prohibited the online posting of income data (Opinion 1/2011), suggesting less intrusive measures.

The fact that the Greek state with its financial surveillance is unable to arrest the enormous tax evaders

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/greece-prostitutes-hiv-arrests\\_n\\_1473864.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/greece-prostitutes-hiv-arrests_n_1473864.html)



of the economic elite is illustrated in several lists with names of those who have deposited large funds in Switzerland and other offshore accounts, avoiding the payment of taxes in Greece.

### 3.2.1. The “Lagarde List”

The odyssey of the notorious “Lagarde list” exemplifies the typically lax and hypocritical attitude of all Greek governments and especially of this austerity regime toward real, very rich tax offenders. This list is a spreadsheet containing over 2,000 names of possible Greek tax evaders with undeclared large deposits at Swiss HSBC bank’s Geneva branch, part of thousands of such customers’ names, allegedly stolen by Herve Falciani, a computer technician of the bank, who attempted to sell them to several governments. It is named after former French finance minister Christine Lagarde, who passed it on to the Greek government in October 2010 to help them tackle tax evasion. The list was hidden by Greek officials, and it became known two years later when it was published by investigative journalist Costas Vaxevas (2012). Former finance minister George Papaconstantinou was found guilty by the Special Court of tampering the spreadsheet and erasing names of his relatives on this list. Furthermore, the subsequent finance minister Evangelos Venizelos had forgotten the CD in his office for long time. To date, despite the public outcry, very few names on this list have been audited.<sup>6</sup>

There is also another list, from the Bank of Greece, of 54,000 people, who during the time of economic crisis took a total of €22 billion out of the country, and which seems will take many years to be investigated.

Another indicative example of hypocritical financial policy is the fact that on March 12, 2012, the pro-austerity government under the non-elected premiership of Eurobanker Loukas Papademos passed article 19 in an irrelevant law 4056/2012 about cattle breeding (!), abolishing a previous law 3399/2005 which established the information exchange between Greece and Anguilla, an offshore paradise, covering up huge tax evasion of several well-known Greek entrepreneurs (Akritidou, 2012, p. 28).

### 3.2.2. The “Tiresias” Black and White Lists

Let’s compare now the above lists of mostly wealthy tax evaders with the *Tiresias* black and white lists. “Tiresias SA” is a private interbank company, named after the mythological blind prophet Tiresias; it collects and holds information on the economic behavior of all businesses and bank customers in Greece.<sup>7</sup> Legalized

<sup>6</sup> See <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2015/02/09/86-names-missing-from-lagarde-list>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.tiresias.gr>

by Law 3746/2009, every bank customer is recorded and every payment delay of over 20 euros (!) is black-listed for at least 5 years, regardless if this payment has been finally made. Hence, thousands of firms and individuals are blacklisted, stigmatized, and excluded by the Greek banking system, even for very small amounts of unpaid bills. There is also a *Tiresias* “white list” for all those bank customers with good credit, or those who have only once delayed a payment, or for those who are considered precarious for the future. Direct access to the *Tiresias* black and white lists is possible for everyone who pays a small fee, and the service is called a “check.” *Tiresias*’ lists’ data are used by mushrooming private firms, which collect unpaid dues, exercising daily telephone bullying to debtors, pressing them to pay.<sup>8</sup>

Our comparison of the preferential treatment of the very wealthy tax evaders of the *Lagarde* list *vis a vis* the *Tiresias* black list, which names mostly petty entrepreneurs for bad credit, or thousands of defaulters who are unable to pay their commercial or house loans, elucidates the class discrimination of the Greek austerity regime and its expedient class-oriented surveillance.

### 3.3. Some Interesting Personal Testimonies

We now recount some personal testimonies from individuals experiencing austerity surveillance in Greece. As we have done with our research on anticommunist surveillance, where we had used in-depth conversational analysis (Samatas, 2004, 2005), we also analyze austerity surveillance here through “exploratory discussions” with a number of selected individuals who have either been watchers or watched, discussing and listening to their narrative “stories.” From our narrative interviews with AS subjects, we cite here some characteristic excerpts, like the IRISS (2014) methodology.

After a malicious anonymous accusation against our dentist, who is an active citizen in voluntary organizations in our town, the SDOE visited his office and his house and for three days, looking for any evidence, even through family relics, to substantiate the accused illegal wealth, which there was none of to be found. The dentist, who after that event suffered a heart attack, told us:

My grandfather had narrated to me notorious stories during the Nazi occupation of Greece when “Greek” collaborators having covered their face with hoods were regularly nailing and pointing out

<sup>8</sup> See more at <http://www.balkaneu.com/tiresias-information-system-purchase-information/#sthash.BIGoWA3p.dpuf>

In the UK the private company “HR Blacklist” collects and files data against activists, union members, etc., selling them to employers, who exclude them from the labor market (Akritidou, 2012).

persons to the German army to be executed based on real or false accusations of resistance. Nowadays, dishonorable “roufiano” (informers) are doing a similar task, out of envy and malice...

A relative of a merchant who committed suicide after his bank auction, eviction, and confiscation of his house has told us:

Listen to me good! He did not kill himself; the bank killed him! The f. bank gave him no chance to postpone payments of his loan, to pay later; they had started a fast track process to get his house and throw him and his family [of 3 kids] out of it. Do you wonder why I’m so glad every time those who are called “anarchists,” “hooded,” or you name them burn the bank’s ATM?

A woman collecting rubbish leftovers from an outdoor vegetable market:

I’m looking everywhere, even in rubbish bins, for some food or for something valuable to be sold; I’m ashamed to do this, but what else can I do? We all had a good household, but now we have become beggars.

This poor woman and the plethora of garbage pickers who flourish during this age of austerity are still lucky enough, because we don’t have yet in Greece the CCTV monitoring the rubbish bins as they do in many UK neighborhoods (Haggerty, 2012, p. 241).

An SDOE financial prosecutor has stated:

We don’t have enough personnel to check the skyrocketing number of phone calls snitching tax evasions. Most of these calls are made by relatives against relatives, wives against their former husbands, accusations about inheritance, agricultural land, even accusations when someone appeared with a new car in the neighborhood. In short, snitching is developing as a national sport during the crisis.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Austerity Surveillance in Greece Is Supplemented by a Variety of State Electronic Surveillance: Phone Taps, Communications Interceptions, Internet Tracking, etc.

Phone taps, lawful with due process and unlawful by state agencies and private surveillants, have been significantly increased all over the world (Landau, 2010; Marx, 2002), and especially in Greece during the financial crisis under the austerity regime. This is an indica-

<sup>9</sup> For similar statements, see [www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=709572](http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=709572)

tion of the insecurity of the austerity regime and the inability of the pertinent data and communications protection authorities to control the galaxy of private interceptions and the personal data market. Therefore, we consider phone taps a significant supplementary mechanism of the austerity surveillance.

According to the Hellenic Authority for Communication Security and Privacy (ADAE), in 2012 state authorities’ waivers of confidentiality for telephone conversations due to national security, that is without a due process to justify the reason, numbered 2,634, more than those waivers following the due process, which were 2,055. These figures show that within two years of the beginning of the crisis, the “lawful” telephone interceptions were ten times more.

According to ADAE, the Greek Police and the National Intelligence Service (EYP) had over 50,000 phones tapped in 2012. The mobile phone companies have reported security problems with their networks. Also, there are accusations by political parties that their headquarters’ phones are tapped (Karanicas, 2015; Lambropoulos, 2012).

Further, in 2013 the request for authorities’ waivers of confidentiality for telephone conversations, due to national security, were 4,141, double that of 2012, and more than all waivers during the pre-crisis period of 2005–2009, plus 2,700 phone taps for clearing serious crimes (see Table 1).<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1.** EYP’s waivers of telephone conversations’ privacy.

Year	For Serious Crimes	For National Security	Total
2005	144	55	199
2008	607	302	909
2010	2281	1169	3450
2011	1743	3472	5215
2012	2055	2634	4689
2013	2700	4141	6841

Source: This list is based on a combination of data from [www.adae.gr](http://www.adae.gr) and Efimeros (2014).

Social media are also targeted by the Greek Police and EYP; they have requested in the first six months of 2013 the personal data of 141 *Facebook* users; according to journalist sources, *Facebook* gave data for 66 of them.<sup>11</sup>

Another controversial case is the well-publicized “Cyber Crime Unit of the Greek Police,” which has successfully averted lots incidents of suicide, cyber bullying, and has arrested pedophiles. However, the problem with this unit is that to fulfill its goals it continuously tracks the entire cyberspace, and to act efficiently and on time it cannot follow legal due process; this is a fact not admitted to by the Greek police.

<sup>10</sup> [www.adae.gr](http://www.adae.gr) and Efimeros (2014).

<sup>11</sup> [www.in.gr](http://www.in.gr) (Aug. 28, 2013).

Moreover, the police surveillance has been intensive and coercive against citizens and activists, even toward school students and whole families participating in the anti-gold mining movement and protests, which have been taking place in the gold-mining area, Skouries, in northern Greece.

In addition, there is cell phone interception by the Greek authorities, as *Vodafone* has acknowledged. According to *The Guardian's* list, based on the Vodafone report, "Law Enforcement Disclosure Report," published June 6, 2014, Vodafone in Greece in 2013 received from Greek agencies a total of 8,602 metadata and content requests through the corporate telecom system, a proportionately very high amount of government surveillance (Garside, 2014).

### 5. The Greek Austerity Regime Is Under Surveillance by the Troika and Allies

The implementation of the austerity memoranda implied a direct Troika supervision of the state financial ministries; e.g. the secretariat of fiscal revenues is considered an informal fiefdom of the Troika. There is a direct intervention by the special Task Force under Mr. Reichenbach, having in most ministries about 400 representatives (Kotzias, 2013, pp. 332-342). As it was also confirmed by Mr. Fotis Kouvelis, the former president of the "Democratic Left," a party which was a member of the coalition government under the ND Antonis Samaras premiership, there are Greek informers within the state apparatus providing detailed data to the Troika's technocrats about all contentious issues. This Troika's inside information has given lenders an advantage in the negotiation with the Greek government.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to Troika's supervision, there is continuous surveillance of the Greek austerity regime by European and American allies.<sup>13</sup> According to the newspaper *Ta Nea* (Karanicas, 2014, pp. 1, 14-15), Greece is among the 196 countries that are currently being monitored by the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) since April 2010. Based on relevant documents of a dispute between a German lawyer and BND, a European parliament study, and a *Spiegel* magazine report, *Ta Nea* revealed that BND has been monitoring Greece through three telecommunication companies, OTEGlobe, Forthnet, and Cyprus' CYTA, which are currently cooperating with DE-CIX, the largest telecom provider in Germany (Karanicas, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.capital.gr/story/2281975>

<sup>13</sup> In June of 2013, Edward Snowden revealed documents showing how the American NSA is bugging its European allies, the EU headquarters, 38 embassies, and UN missions, including the Greek ones, using an extraordinary range of spying methods (MacAskill & Berger, 2013).

### 6. The Austerity Surveillance's Impact and Implications

#### 6.1. Detrimental Personal and Social Impact

A decent society and a democratic liberal state should respect and protect citizens from humiliation and stigmatization. Shaming hurts the ethical and psychological integrity of a person, contrary to the human rights and the values of a state of justice. In contrast to Greek culture, which celebrates a good neighborhood with open doors, community solidarity, social cohesion, and harbors disgust toward police informers due to Greece's authoritarian past, the Greek austerity authorities encourage the public to report anyone they perceive to be living beyond their means, or suspected of benefit fraud, illegal wealth, corruption, etc.

However, the austerity surveillance by the public exposure of personal economic data and the encouraging of one citizen watching and reporting on another, is a very controversial policy supported by the state, which may imply related crimes, like extortion, blackmail, robberies, etc. Further, when honest taxpayers are urged by the state to report suspected neighbors of offending their tax obligations, this state admits its institutional failure and inability to check tax evasion. Citizens' grassing is constructing a society of informers, with social cohesion seriously eroded and where the privacy rights and liberties of the people next door are infringed upon. Public naming and shaming of a person accused of or convicted for a crime is degrading and humiliating, injuring social dignity and reputation, threatening relationships, social status, employment, and life chances (Mitrou, 2012, pp. 253-254). The accused, the arrestees, and the suspects of tax evasion, who are not yet convicted, should not be deprived of their rights.

Furthermore, the online naming and shaming implies a perpetual online stigmatization, undermining the right to oblivion, i.e. the right to forget and to be forgotten. As Mitrou (2012, p. 255) points out, "due to the Internet's perfect and perpetual memory it is becoming harder and harder for people to escape their past." Moreover, the efficiency of shaming publicity, aimed to humiliate and stigmatize the offenders, seems to be questionable and undermines the reintegration of the offender into society as it is very unlikely that shaming would lead extreme offenders to change behavior, it punishes and ostracizes even minor offenders such as tax evaders, pushing them into a permanent underclass.

This community stigmatization is one of the most serious latent factors of the dramatic increase of suicides, especially in the Greek countryside. According to a research study, due to the austerity measures there was a 35.7 percent increase in total suicides in Greece during 2011-2013 (Branas et. al., 2015).



Regarding the efficiency of citizens' grassing in the UK, only one in every six calls received by the organization "Crimestoppers" has provided genuine information on benefit fraud, and there was a meagre overall success rate of 1.32 percent (Rowlands, 2013). There is not yet an estimate of the success rate of these grassing reports in Greece. We should report here that when we discussed the issue of the aforementioned hotlines with an informal focus group of various people around us, most ignored the existence of these hotlines; only two out of 12 of them, a lawyer and a public servant, knew their function, but no one knew the exact numbers of a single hotline.

### 6.2. Rapid Decline of the Best Privacy Protection Record

The constitutional, legislative, and institutional protection of privacy in Greece, as well as civil society's resistance against the Olympic CCTV cameras (Samatas, 2007, 2008), were reflected in the results of an international survey. In fact, Greece was recognized in 2006 as the highest privacy protection-ranking country (!) by the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) and Privacy International (PI) global study on "Privacy & Human Rights Report surveys developments in 47 countries" (2006). However, the phone-tapping during and long after the Athens 2004 Olympics (Samatas, 2010, 2014), and the easy mobile phone and internet interceptions by authorities and private intruders, have resulted in Greece's low record (1) in the category of "communication interceptions" in this survey. Unfortunately, Greece ever since, especially during this last period, under the draconian austerity regime against society and democracy, has definitely lost its "champion" position in privacy and data protection, joining countries with a high record in violations in these issues. Especially the Greek record concerning the serious issue of "personal data breaches" was and still is far worse, due to the illegal commerce of personal data, which is a very profitable business in Greece (Samatas, 2004, pp. 128-130).<sup>14</sup>

### 6.3. AS Has Reinforced the Mutual Mistrust between the Greek State and its Citizens

Every legitimate "institutional surveillance" (Lianos, 2003) presupposes trust in the state's public and private institutions. This institutional trust has never real-

<sup>14</sup> The Greek DPA has lately punished (DPA decision 100/2014) two marketing companies (PANNER and AddOne) that have illegally collected personal data of almost all Greek taxpayers, smuggled from the Secretariat of Information Systems of the Finance Ministry (Giannarou, Souliotis, & Hadzinikolaou, 2013). For such *data aggregator* companies, selling personal profiles in the USA, and considered "the little-known overlords of the surveillance society," see Gilliom and Monahan (2013, p.43).

ly existed in Greece, especially during the austerity regime, which in the name of security and its fight against tax evasion violates privacy and personal data of all Greek citizens.

In sharp contrast to other Europeans, there is an embedded mistrust and lack of institutional confidence that Greek citizens have expressed even before the crisis for any state and police surveillance as well as any kind of data collection by the state authorities, even 40 years after the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1974 (Samatas, 2004). For example, according to the findings of the *Flash Eurobarometer* survey on data protection in the 27 EU member states, conducted in January 2008: while, in the eyes of most EU citizens (72 percent), the fight against international terrorism is an acceptable reason to restrict data protection rights, Greeks express the highest suspicion about any provisions that would allow authorities to relax data protection laws, even if this served to combat terrorism.

Furthermore, according to the *Special Eurobarometer* (European Commission, 2011) exploring the "Attitudes on Data Protection and Electronic Identity in the European Union," Greek respondents appeared to have the lowest level of trust in most institutions and corporations and the highest levels of concerns in most examined categories. In particular, 83 percent of them stated that the government asks for more and more personal information, which was the highest figure among all countries, while 77 percent consider the disclosing of personal information a serious issue. Also, regarding concerns about tracking via mobile phone or mobile Internet, Greeks had once again the highest concern (65 percent). Further, more than half of the Greek respondents appeared to be concerned that their behavior is being recorded in a public space (54 percent).

This traditional mistrust of Greeks of their state institutions, and especially of state surveillance, due to the country's authoritarian past, is a key issue in understanding the lack of any legitimacy of austerity surveillance in Greece.<sup>15</sup>

### 6.4. The AS Acts without Democratic Control and Accountability

"Austerity surveillance," as a basic control mechanism, which together with many other draconian austerity mechanisms and policies make up the austerity regime, create a coercive and insecure surveillance society

<sup>15</sup> In fact, most Greek citizens have expressed mistrust before the crisis of almost all political, governmental, and judicial institutions, the police, the church, mass media, etc., except for the President of the Republic, the Fire Department, and the National Weather Forecast (*Public Issue* survey 2008 at [http://www.publicissue.gr/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/institutions\\_2.pdf](http://www.publicissue.gr/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/institutions_2.pdf)).

without democratic control and accountability. This regime, which in the Greek case was based on a coalition government of the right-wing New Democracy (ND) party and the center-left PASOK party, reflects a “post-political” era of professionalized “governance” beyond left and right, and favors all those who accept the austerity propaganda that everyone in the public sector—not the power elite—is corrupt and responsible for the crisis. The most favorable type of citizens are “snitches,” who eagerly consider it their duty to watch and snitch to the officials on others’ misbehavior, trying to gain personal advantage (Haggerty, 2012, p. 237).

We can correlate security with austerity policies and agree with Huysmans (2014), who argues that democracy becomes “at stake” as security and austerity policies threaten to hollow out human rights, compromise privacy, and outflank rights to question, challenge, and scrutinize.

### 6.5. “Sousveillance” and Resistance

#### 6.5.1. Sousveillance and Shaming against the Austerity Regime’s Elite

One very resilient reaction against the austerity regime is “sousveillance,” surveillance from below, conducted mainly by young users of social media against the pro-austerity government, MPs, journalists, Eurocrats, German leaders, etc. The electronic social media are full of such fierce, hateful defamation and mocking comments, frequently like a cyber bullying against all of the pro-austerity personas by anonymous or pseudonymous commentators. Even beyond the social media platforms, there has been frequent physical harassment of governmental ministers and MPs by indignant citizens in public spaces. However, the worst impact is an alarming increase of the far right, neo-fascist party of “Golden Dawn,” which came in third in the elections of January 2015.

The coercive austerity regime and its AS have caused a variety of everyday resistance efforts in Greece by private individuals, activists, NGO’s, opposition parties, etc. One extreme but explicit type of surveillance resistance is the following one.

#### 6.5.2. Vandalism of Police CCTV Cameras

According to official police data, through the end of November 2006, 180 CCTV cameras and/or their electronic operations boxes had been burned by radical groups (IOS, 2007). Police CCTV vandalism has continued, and by the end of 2013, 60 percent of all police CCTV cameras in the Athens metropolitan area were not working because they were vandalized, and there are no repair funds. Further, since the riots of 2008 up to the present, police and bank CCTV cameras are widely vandalized in the Athens metropolitan area. Al-

so, in January 2015, 27 police CCTV cameras in Athens were destroyed by sympathizers of prisoners accused of being terrorists. Therefore, the police often relies on footage from private CCTV cameras, which are mushrooming everywhere in Greece. Thus, we have an extensive surveillance “creep” (Lyon 2007, p. 52) of data to the police taken by the private CCTV cameras, which seems not to bother Greeks, as much as the police cameras do (Samatas, 2008, 2011).

## 7. Concluding Remarks: Assessment and Prospects

We have tried to elucidate here the features, functions, and impact of the “austerity surveillance” (AS) used by the extreme austerity regime in Greece. As we have sketched it, AS is a specific kind of coercive surveillance, based mainly on “coveillance,” i.e., citizen informers’ grassing, naming, and shaming, public stigmatization and punishment, as a domination and disciplinary control mechanism of the Greek population. It functions under the Troika’s supervision in a post-democratic and neoliberal setting, violating human rights and shredding social cohesion. Moreover, AS has a class orientation against the lower economic classes, while covering up the elite. Its neoliberal, antidemocratic, and unjust nature deprives AS of any legitimacy and citizens’ trust.

AS in current Greece is not an original type of surveillance; we observe some basic similarities of this type of AS with past anticommunist surveillance (Samatas, 2004); while the Greek anticommunist state and regime used an authoritarian repressive surveillance apparatus, targeting leftists, communists, sympathizers, and anti-regime opponents, and was far more repressive and exclusionary (Samatas, 2004), the austerity regime, and its AS, targets public employees, professional groups (e.g. medical doctors), and petty store owners as tax evaders, as well as the poor welfare recipients. AS also has similarities to antiterrorist surveillance in the USA (Goldstein, 2002; Lyon, 2003), and “marginalizing surveillance” of welfare recipients (Monahan, 2010, p. 10). In fact, as we have mentioned, several features of AS are imported from other advanced surveillance societies, such as that of the UK (Rowlands, 2013). All these surveillance types, including the totalitarian one like that of the Stasi in East Germany (Funder, 2003; Schmeidel, 2008), are cultivating and using citizens as spies.

We could agree that Greece is being used by the Troika as an austerity laboratory (Douzinas, 2013), using austerity surveillance to produce discipline and control for further potential use beyond the Greek case, in other over-indebted countries. However, the Greek austerity regime and its AS have failed; Greeks have rejected their victimization. The election victory of the anti-austerity government on January 25, 2015 and the “No” victory on the referendum of July 5,

2015, against the new austerity measures, illustrate that the austerity regime and austerity surveillance have failed to fulfill their basic mission to make Greek people fearful and disciplined, under an austerity straightjacket. Moreover, these draconian policies have contributed to their resistance and defiance, even if this puts Greece at risk of being kicked out of the Eurozone.

Although we do not have space to analyze them here, there are two basic reasons in our view that AS has failed like the anticommunist one has in the past. The first reason is the anti-surveillance culture in the country, due to the authoritarian past of Greece (Samatas, 2011); the second significant reason is the powerful Greek “bonding” social capital, that is, according to Daniel P. Aldrich (2012), the relationships a person has with family and friends, which make it also the strongest form of social capital. Therefore, we declare our disbelief of the efficiency of AS and on the magnitude of citizens’ snitching and their results, despite the regime’s propaganda.

Financial crimes and corruption (Lambropoulou, 2011) are real serious problems of the Greek state and society, rooted since the founding of the modern Greek state. Coercive austerity surveillance has not and cannot resolve these problems. Greece urgently needs an efficient state apparatus and a legitimate surveillance mechanism, trusted by citizens, one working with justice and accountability, respect for human and democratic rights, and without discrimination against the poor and needy.

Let’s finish by interpreting the aforementioned *Panoptes* myth in this time of austerity, considering the new Greek anti-austerity government, which came to power on January 25, 2015, and the prime minister Alexis Tsipras as the Hermes who had the mandate of the Greek people (Zeus) to kill *Panoptes* (austerity surveillance) in order to liberate Io (Greece), displeasing Hera (the Eurozone and/or Chancellor Angela Merkel). For the time being, Hermes (Tsipras) has been defeated and humiliated by the Eurozone. Despite this fact, the Greek people have given him a second chance, winning the elections of September 20, 2015. It seems he has two choices now: either to buy time, trying a more feasible project and even a more useful one by softening the austerity measures for the lower classes and taming *Panoptes* with democratic control, targeting the real rich “big fishes” of tax evasion; and then there is also the realist option for Hermes (Tsipras) to ignore his initial mandate to kill *Panoptes* (and austerity) and simply become a populist manager, reproducing a kind of softer “leftist” austerity *Panoptes* control mechanism, satisfying the lenders and deceiving the Greek people. We’ll see...

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