



Classical Liberal Think Tanks in Greece, 1974–2024

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[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

In the contemporary Greek context, the term *liberalism* predominantly retains its original political meaning, emphasizing key principles such as individual liberty, free markets, and limited governmental intervention. Thus, the use of *liberalism* in this paper denotes political outlooks with salient classical liberal, as opposed to modern social liberal, characteristics.

Similarly, the term *conservative* in this article is used in a sense more akin to European interpretations rather than the American context. In Europe, conservatism often implies adherence to existing structures, which frequently have corporatist and mercantilist traits. This can be in partial contrast to the American understanding of conservatism, which might refer to preserving the Madisonian liberalism embodied in the U.S. Constitution.

Liberalism appears to be one of the most prominent ideologies in Greece currently. According to a survey conducted by Kappa Research (2020) for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, one out of every two Greeks holds a positive view of liberalism;³ however, this has not always been the case.

Although liberal ideas can be identified in Greece at least since the establish-

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3. Nationwide survey in October 2020, with a sample of 1214 individuals. The standard error of the survey was ± 3 percent. Question: “Does each of the following mean something positive or negative to you?” ([link](#)).

ment of the modern state in 1821,⁴ the development and implementation of liberal and democratic institutions faced significant challenges and disruptions, at least until 1974. For example, in a period of only 20 years, between 1929 and 1949, Greece experienced intense political conflict, oppressive dictatorships, Nazi occupation, and a devastating civil war (Hatzis 2012, 21–22). The restoration of democracy in 1974, following a seven-year military dictatorship, enabled Greece to align with western liberal democracies. This shift initiated the Third Hellenic Republic (1974–present), a time marked by significant progress and prosperity, though not without fragility. Given this backdrop, an intriguing question arises: How has liberal sentiment evolved and grown in Greece over the past 50 years?

This article examines the rise and development of liberal think tanks in Greece starting from 1974, marking the first time such institutions were established in the country. Again, by *classical liberalism* or *liberalism* in this context we refer to the ideas that champion the principles of liberal democracy, individual and civil rights, and economic freedom, particularly in the form of a free-market economy characterized by deregulation and liberalization. As indicated above, in Greece, unlike in North America, liberalism does not typically imply support for a welfare state, a regulatory state, a nanny state, or a nudge state, although these interpretations can occasionally be relevant.

Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that until 1991, in the light of the ideological clash globally between the liberal democracies of the Western world and the collectivist or socialist regimes of the Eastern Bloc, some Greek liberal think tanks placed more emphasis on advocating for the institutions of liberal democracy, in opposition to “democratic socialism,” rather than focusing on free markets and individual liberty. This distinction is key to understanding the varied priorities of these think tanks during different periods of their existence.

Our analysis concentrates on think tanks as the main vehicle for disseminating and popularizing ideas, as well as influencing policy-making agendas. Thus, our treatment is confined both in that it says little about matters prior to 1974 and, after 1974, discusses political parties, thinkers, books, journals, etc., only in so far as they inform the think-tank story.

The mid-1970s saw the proliferation of political think tanks not only in Greece but across Western countries. This trend was driven by two main factors: first, the rise of the “new right” think tanks, which aimed to challenge the prevailing Keynesian economic models and establishment leftism (Arin 2014, 36–38, 69–74); second, the growing importance of the European Economic Community (today’s EU) and the subsequent ideological debates and competition concerning its future policies and direction (Boucher et al. 2004).

4. For more regarding the classical liberal components of the Greek War of Independence, see Hatzis 2021.

In our study, we catalog the liberal think tanks in Greece, identifying their key players, affiliations, partnerships, projects, and their wider impact on the political landscape. To better understand the evolution of Greek liberalism since 1974, we suggest dividing this timeline into three distinct periods: 1974–1991, 1991–2007, and 2007–2024. Each of these intervals represents significant phases in the development and influence of liberal thought and policy within the country, reflecting the changing dynamics of Greek politics and society over the past fifty years.

Some background

Following World War II, Greece endured a brutal civil war from 1946 to 1949. In the aftermath, the country was governed by a paternalistic democratic regime notably deficient in the rule of law (Hatzis 2012). From 1949 to 1974 the Greek Communist Party (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας, or KKE) was outlawed. Although proper elections were held, the period from 1961 to 1964 was marked by political instability. In the 1961 elections, the then-prime center-right Prime minister, Constantinos Karamanlis, was accused by his political adversaries of electoral intimidation and fraud. These allegations precipitated a period known as the “Unyielding Struggle” (Ανένδοτος Αγώνας), a time of intense political conflict and turmoil. The main opposition party during this period was led by the center-left former Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou (Clogg 1988, 43–44). Although Papandreou was elected prime minister in 1963 and re-elected in 1964, a significant dispute with King Constantine II led to his resignation in 1965. The dispute centered around the *Aspida* case,⁵ a supposed conspiracy in which Papandreou’s son, Andreas Papandreou, was allegedly involved.

Following Papandreou’s resignation, Greece experienced a period of heightened political instability. From 1965 to 1967, the country saw the formation of four consecutive governments, none of which was the result of elections. This persistent instability and governmental turmoil set the stage for the military coup in April 1967. This coup led to a seven-year period of dictatorship, which eventually concluded in the summer of 1974.

During the 1950–1974 period, ideas and policies in favor of increased state intervention gained traction across the Greek political spectrum, in accordance with the broader global trend. According to George Bitros and Anastasios Karayannis (2015, 190–191), the government implemented policies focused on infrastructure projects such as road improvements to lower production costs in

5. “A reputed conspiracy of left-wing officers within the Greek armed forces” (Anschuetz 1965).

industrial and agricultural sectors and to boost employment. The policies were also aimed at attracting foreign investments and establishing regional and central development programs. Governmental decision-making was centralized in political leadership rather than bureaucratic entities.

Monetary policy during this time was geared toward stabilizing the currency's value, fostering economic development through controlled interest rates, and regulating capital flow from the financial sector, which was subject to state control. Fiscal policy looked to generate budget surpluses (primarily by addressing tax evasion), to finance infrastructure investments, and to reduce production costs for the private sector.

Therefore, following 18 years of a democratic but relatively illiberal regime and a subsequent seven-year military dictatorship, along with an economic shift toward state intervention and control, Greece in 1974 had an opportunity to reconstruct its political institutions and realign with the principles of liberal democracy. This transition became known as *Metapolitefsi*, and its key figure was Constantinos Karamanlis. Karamanlis, as noted above, had previously served as prime minister in the 1960s, assumed the role again from July 1974 to May 1980, and later served as president of the Republic from 1980 to 1985 and again from 1990 to 1995. Upon his return to Greece in the summer of 1974 from his self-imposed exile in France, where he lived during the dictatorship, Karamanlis did not attempt to reinstate a political regime like that of the 1949–1967 period. Reviving his pre-1967 party, the National Radical Union (ERE, Greek: Ἐθνικὴ Ῥιζοσπαστικὴ Ἐνωσις), or a similar party model, did not align with Greeks' strong desire for change after enduring seven years of dictatorship. His actions most symbolic of this change were the legalization of the Greek Communist Party, which had been banned in the preceding political climate, and ending the monarchy in Greece by discouraging the return of King Constantine II to the throne (Clogg 1988, 61).

New Democracy

During that critical period of transition, Karamanlis recognized the need for trustworthy and experienced partners. To this end, he established a new political party, New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία, or ND). This party began as a coalition of well-known political figures from the pre-dictatorial center and right, alongside a group of younger politicians. This mix marked a shift from the pre-dictatorial right-wing political landscape. ND appeared to move away from the staunch anti-communism that characterized the pre-dictatorial right. The party adopted a more moderate approach in its dealings with political adversaries. This change in attitude was instrumental in opening the door to liberal elements within the party, both in

terms of ideology and organization (Loulis 1981, 18; Pappas and Dinas 2006, 479).

The gradual opening of ND to liberal ideas, initially under the leadership of Constantinos Karamanlis and later under Konstantinos Mitsotakis, presented a significant opportunity for Greek classical liberals to voice their opinions and exert influence on Greek politics. Especially under Mitsotakis, between 1984 and 1993, ND transitioned from a center-right party with moderate economic interventionist policies to a robust proponent of free-market economics and a reduced role for the government. This evolution of ND in embracing liberal principles occurred in three main phases.

The first phase began with the party's pre-congress in Halkidiki in 1976. This event was notable not only for the participation of ND members but also for the involvement of scholars from think tanks. These scholars endeavored to steer the party's orientation toward a market economy and to pivot ND's ideology in a new, liberal direction. This initiative came after three years of ideological ambiguity within ND, as it had distanced itself from the old, pre-1967 system of ideas but had not yet fully embraced a new set of principles (Katsoudas 1991, 221). Two years later, ND held its first official congress. Karamanlis's objective was to establish ND as a party of principles⁶ and at the same time to organize it in a manner akin to the Western center-right political parties (Chatzivasileiou 2010, 492).

The ideological reorientation of New Democracy involved the expression "Radical Liberalism" (Greek: Ριζοσπαστικός Φιλελευθερισμός), a term coined by Constantinos Karamanlis. It did not actually signify radicalism but aimed to qualify ND's specific ideological mix as a middle ground between "traditional liberalism and democratic socialism" (Katsoudas 1991, 226). On the other hand, Manolis Alexakis (2001, 125) describes ND's "Radical Liberalism" as "managerial empiricism." He suggests that the term was essentially devoid of substantive content, permitting the government to approach situations based on pragmatic considerations without being constrained by ideological boundaries. The phrase "radical liberalism" gradually faded from the party's rhetoric, particularly leading up to the 1981 elections, at which point the party suffered a defeat. By this time, the influence and appeal of liberal ideas within ND were seen as relatively weak.

The second phase in the liberal development of New Democracy began when Georgios Rallis succeeded Constantinos Karamanlis as prime minister. This phase continued with Evangelos Averoff's tenure as the party president starting in 1981. During this period, New Democracy's association with liberalism diminished, except for the brief period when Rallis was in leadership (Andrianopoulos

6. However, ND seemed to belong to the so-called 'cadre' parties during 1974–1981, until its transformation to a more 'mass' party, from 1981 to 1984, according to Duverger's typology (Duverger 1974).

2013, 40–44).

The rise of Rallis to the position of prime minister in 1980 marked a significant shift in Greece's economic policy. In his new role, Rallis explicitly stated that the effort for growth would be primarily driven by private initiative. This approach was encapsulated in the slogan "less state, more political and economic freedom." According to Yannis Loulis (1981, 24) this was the first time that profit was recognized as a legitimate motive in the economic process in Greece and that failed Keynesian recipes should be abandoned. While the Keynesian mixed economic model remained at the core of Greece's economic framework, there was a newfound interest in enhancing competitiveness, addressing structural issues in agriculture and industry, and developing the service sector (Chatzivasileiou 2010, 525). Nevertheless, following his defeat in the 1981 elections, Rallis resigned as ND president.

Rallis was succeeded by Evangelos Averoff, who led the party during its time in the opposition from 1981 to 1984.⁷ Averoff sought to reorient ND back to its traditional conservative roots, reminiscent of the Greek right's stance prior to 1967. This shift involved diminishing the ideological influence that liberal think tanks previously held over the party.

To reinforce this conservative direction and counterbalance the influence of the Center for Political Research and Education (KPEE), which was a primary advocate for liberal ideology within ND, Averoff established the Institute of Social Research and Studies (IKEM). The creation of IKEM was a strategic move to garner theoretical and political support for Averoff's more conservative viewpoints, thereby steering the party's ideological trajectory toward a more traditional conservative path (Papavlasopoulos 2004, 262). Under his leadership, the focus within ND shifted significantly from ideological matters to a much-needed reorganization of the party.

The third and arguably most significant period started when Konstantinos Mitsotakis became the party's president in 1984, and it continued until 1993 when he resigned following a loss in the general elections. During this period, from 1984 to 1993, ND endeavored to reinvent itself as a liberal party, aligning with the characteristics of the European center-right.

From 1985 onwards, especially leading up to 1990 when ND eventually gained power after several consecutive elections, the party's agenda increasingly leaned toward market-economy principles. Mitsotakis stated the pillars of his

7. As Papavlasopoulos (2004, 263) notes, speaking of the Averoff period: "We could briefly say that, in this new ideological-political and tactical folding of the conservative faction, nationalism absorbs the radicalism of the first post-dictatorial seven years and liberalism is adulterated by strong doses of authoritarianism and right-wing populism."

economic policy in the following words:

Privatization of the economy and strengthening of market rules. Liberalization of markets and healthy competition. Modernization of markets. (Mitsotakis 2013, 35)

From 1985 to 1989, the party's program shifted from moderate statist positions to a stronger emphasis on free enterprise, private initiative, and a more deregulated and liberalized market economy (Loulis 1995, 198). This period is particularly significant as it represents the most substantial effort by classical liberal think tanks to influence policymaking through a political party in power.

The ideological shift within ND presented an excellent opportunity for liberal think tanks to have an impact; this is why we consider this short introduction to the Greek political landscape crucial to comprehending the development of Greek classical liberal think tanks. In fact, several think tanks were born and died with the main aim of making ND more liberal. Consequently, many of the think tanks in our study were in constant interaction with ND, given its status as the main party of the Greek center-right. However, it's important to note that there was significant internal resistance within the party. This conservative opposition within ND posed a substantial challenge to the efforts of think tanks aiming to promote liberal policies.

Cataloging the classical liberal think tanks in Greece 1974–2022

In this section, we detail the principal features of the classical liberal think tanks that have been active in Greece since 1974. The information presented here is largely based on interviews conducted with key figures from each organization. These interviews were carried out in the summer of 2014 as part of a master's thesis by the first author of this article. The thesis, titled *The Liberal Think Tanks in Greece from 1974 to 2010*,⁸ was completed at the University of Athens and is written in Greek. The current paper serves as an English-language summary and expansion of the original thesis, extending the analysis up to the beginning of 2024.

For the master's thesis, six semi-structured interviews were conducted.

8. Saravakos (2014); the thesis committee consisted of Alexandros-Andreas Kyrtis (professor of sociology, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Athens), Aristides Hatzis (professor of philosophy of law and theory of institutions, Department of Philosophy and History of Science, University of Athens), and Yiannis Tsirbas (assistant professor of political science and methodology of social research, Department of Political Science and Public Administration).

Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns that emerged from the interviews (Braun and Clarke 2006, 86–95). The rest of the information was collected from websites and official documents. To classify a think tank as ‘liberal’ for the purposes of our study, a key criterion was that the organization explicitly stated in its mission statement or any other official document its commitment to promoting liberalism or liberal ideas within Greek society. In Table 1, we present nine liberal think tanks that have operated in Greece since 1974.⁹

TABLE 1. Classical liberal think tanks in Greece since 1974

Full name in English	Full name in Greek	Abbr.	Years founded and deactivated/suspended/ceased
Center for Political Research and Education	Κέντρο Πολιτικής Έρευνας και Επιδόρφωσης	KPEE / ΚΠΕΕ	1975–2001
Center of Political Studies	Κέντρο Πολιτικών Μελετών	KEMEP / ΚΕΜΕΠ	1975–1984
Movement for Multilateral Disarmament, Peace and Security	Κίνηση για τον Πολυμερή Αποπλισμό, την Ειρήνη και την Ασφάλεια	ΚΙΡΑΕΑ / ΚΙΠΑΕΑ	1984–1988
Adam Smith Club / Liberal Forum	Λέσχη Adam Smith / Φιλελεύθερο Φόρουμ	-	1985–1993
Society for Social and Economic Research	Εταιρεία Κοινωνικών και Οικονομικών Επιστημών	EKOME	1986–2001
Friedrich Naumann Foundation	Ίδρυμα Friedrich Naumann	FNF	1989–1993; 2012–present
The Center for Liberal Studies – Adamantios Korais	ΚΕΦiM - Αδαμάντιος Κοραΐς	ΚΕΦiM / ΚΕΦiM	2008–2010
Forum for Greece	Φόρουμ για την Ελλάδα	-	2010–2014
The Center for Liberal Studies – Markos Dragoumis	Κέντρο Φιλελεύθερων Μελετών	ΚΕΦiM / ΚΕΦiM	2011–present

We now proceed to discuss each of the nine, in order of its founding date. We give an English version of the full name but then usually revert to an acronym from the Greek name.

9. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation was the only classical liberal think tank that was re-established after it first ceased.

Center for Political Research and Education (KPEE, Greek: Κέντρο Πολιτικής Έρευνας και Επιμόρφωσης, Κ.Π.Ε.Ε)

The Center for Political Research and Education was established in December 1975 with the inspiration coming from George Rallis, who would later become prime minister of Greece from 1980 to 1981. Timoleon Louis, a notable classical liberal intellectual and member of ND, was the one who presented the idea of founding this kind of political institution to Rallis. Louis founded KPEE with the objective of steering ND toward liberalism, amid concerns that the party might follow a more conservative path. Initially, KPEE's main goal was to support the necessary institutional reforms for Greece's entry into the European Economic Community. Over time, it expanded its mission to actively promote liberalism in the public discourse. KPEE achieved this by organizing seminars and lectures on various subjects, including politics, economics, and international relations. Additionally, it published several books on similar themes, contributing to the intellectual discourse on liberalism in Greece.

Although initially KPEE tried to avoid aligning with a specific party, this proved challenging in practice since many of its members, including Louis himself, were active members of ND. In its statute, KPEE outlined the following main objectives:

1. Further dissemination of the basic values of a pluralistic, multiparty, democratic society.
2. Reinforcement of liberal values, private initiative, and the basic principles of a free market economy.
3. Continuous study and research on social, political, and economic issues.

Since the ND congress at Halkidiki in 1977, KPEE functioned as a policy-making partner for the party, attempting to guide ND toward a more distinctly liberal orientation, away from its initial ideological vagueness. KPEE also published a journal titled *Epikentra* (Greek: *Επίκεντρα*), which contributed notably to the intellectual discourse on liberal ideas.

KPEE's funding came from a variety of sources. In its formative years, up until Evangelos Averoff assumed the leadership of ND, KPEE received financial support from the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the think-tank branch of Germany's Christian Democratic Party. This support illustrates the international connections and support that KPEE leveraged in its efforts to influence policy and promote liberal ideals within Greece (Papandropoulos 2011, 66). In some collaborations for events held abroad, KPEE received support from various foreign think tanks,

usually its local partners.

KPEE expanded its activities and influence to encompass almost all the dimensions of think tanks.¹⁰ The ideological vagueness of ND and the traditional conservative roots of the Greek right spurred reactions from party members in the political center, who aimed to reshape the party's orientation. KPEE's influence became noticeable in 1979 at the party's First Congress. However, the extent of KPEE's impact on the proceedings and outcomes of that congress was not as significant as anticipated (Katsoudas 1991, 43–44).

Under the leadership of Yannis Loulis, KPEE played a pivotal role in orchestrating the ideological and strategic reorientation of ND, an effort that contributed to the party's electoral gains in 1985, which were indicative of the systematic and effective work undertaken by KPEE. ND remained an opposition party, however. In 1985, ND published *Declaration of Liberty*, a manifesto that clearly defined the party's ideological stance. This document emphasized a shift toward “less state, more market economy,” signifying ND's commitment to liberal economic principles (Alexakis 2001, 109–110).

From 1987 to 1990, KPEE was under the leadership of Dimitris Katsoudas. During this time, KPEE continued to exert significant influence on the ideological orientation of ND. Notably, Katsoudas played a crucial role in shaping the party's ideological stance. He was primarily responsible for the formulation of ND's key ideological texts from 1985 to 1991 (Katsoudas 1991, 43–44). The publication of the review *Epikentra*, initiated at the very start of KPEE's operations, stood out as the most notable activity of the think tank. Initially, its circulation was limited to select circles, maintaining a level of confidentiality. However, over time, it evolved to reach a broader audience with a wide array of substantial articles, ranging from ideological critiques spanning various perspectives to in-depth political and electoral analyses.

For several years, starting in 1984, KPEE organized training seminars targeted at young Greeks (Katsoudas 1991, 43–44). The primary objective of these seminars was to establish a foundation of liberal principles, moving away from entrenched old-party mentalities. To achieve this, KPEE conducted an extensive series of educational events: 170 one-day seminars, 18 two-day seminars, and 12 conferences and meetings (ibid., 42). From then on, KPEE embarked on what can be described as a marathon of seminars, a continuous effort that lasted until 1991.

Another focus of action was the organization of conferences and lectures to promote liberal ideas in the public discourse. KPEE organized an array of events

10. The main tasks of KPEE, according to the Boucher et al. (2004, 4) taxonomy, were: to popularize classical liberal ideas, to offer expertise to political parties, to influence policymaking, and to produce academic research.

addressing a variety of topics. These included seven events focused on the economy, twelve on ideology, seven on politics, five on international relations, two on education, and one each dedicated to the environment, the arts, and local government. Additionally, there were five lectures that centered around guest speakers and honored individuals (Katsoudas 1991, 48–50). Publishing books was another significant facet of KPEE's activities, although it demanded more time and resources. In total, eight books were published in this period, including four books on liberal ideology, two on economics, one on politics, and one on education (*ibid.*, 51).

The influence of KPEE began to wane in 1991, coinciding with a significant shift in the circumstances of its executive members. Many of these key individuals, who constituted the liberal core within ND, were appointed to administrative roles within the ND government, which was in power from 1990 to 1993. This transition to governmental positions, paradoxically, reduced their capacity to exert the same level of ideological influence from within the party.

The decline of KPEE's influence became more pronounced after 1994, especially under the conservative leadership of Miltiades Evert in ND. In this new phase of the party's leadership, the ideological priorities shifted, leading to a significant reduction in KPEE's impact on public opinion. Eventually, KPEE's presence and influence in the political and public spheres faded away.

Center of Political Studies (KEMEP, Greek: Κέντρο Πολιτικών Μελετών)

KEMEP, founded by Andreas Andrianopoulos in 1975, emerged just a few months after the collapse of the military dictatorship in Greece. This think tank was established based on the models of influential think tanks in the United Kingdom and the United States, aiming to replicate their success and impact. The primary funding for KEMEP came from businessmen who shared Andrianopoulos' perspective. KEMEP focused on promoting liberalism through two primary avenues. First, it organized seminars for the youth branch of New Democracy, ONNED, and, more significantly, its university branch, DAP-NDFK (Greek: ΔΑΠ-ΝΔΦΚ). Secondly, it extended its outreach beyond youth to general audiences by organizing lectures and events. This broader approach was complemented by the production of research reports and op-ed articles.

Between 1981 and 1985, KEMEP experienced a period of relative inactivity. It eventually ceased operations in 1986 due to lack of funding after Andrianopoulos took office as mayor of Piraeus. The establishment of another think tank in 1984, the Movement for Multilateral Disarmament, Peace, and Security (KIPAEA), also played a role in diminishing KEMEP's prominence. KIPAEA's emergence

provided an alternative platform for the discussion and promotion of similar ideas, making KEMEP's role in the ideological landscape less essential.

Movement for Multilateral Disarmament, Peace, and Security (KIPAEA, Greek: Κίνηση για τον Πολυμερή Αφοπλισμό, την Ειρήνη και την Ασφάλεια)

The Movement for Multilateral Disarmament, Peace, and Security (KIPAEA) was established in 1984, again by Andreas Andrianopoulos. Its primary objective was to promote anti-war sentiments from a liberal perspective. KIPAEA attracted several prominent ND members, including Kostas Karamanlis, the nephew of Konstantinos Karamanlis. Kostas Karamanlis took over the leadership of KIPAEA in 1986 after Andrianopoulos became mayor of Piraeus. Notably, Kostas Karamanlis would later serve as president of ND from 1997 to 2009 and as the prime minister of Greece from 2004 to 2009.

In 1988, Andrianopoulos published *This Is Liberalism*, a book that served as an ideological manifesto for the liberal movement. KIPAEA's funding primarily came from ND. This support was partly driven by the context of the period, as KIPAEA was established in response to the disarmament calls from the political left. While there was a consensus on disarmament involving major powers like the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A., KIPAEA distinguished itself by aligning with Western liberal democracies, in contrast to the socialist orientation favored by the left. This positioning helped KIPAEA gain traction and support within ND and the broader liberal community.

KIPAEA's most active period was from 1984 to 1988. It advocated peaceful initiatives and liberal ideas especially relevant in the context of the Cold War. It emphasized the classical liberal belief that freedom of choice is crucial for ensuring peace, security, and a high level of prosperity in a democratic society.

KIPAEA concentrated on organizing educational seminars across Greece, often in collaboration with the KPEE. The decline of KIPAEA began around 1986, coinciding with Andrianopoulos' taking office as the mayor of Piraeus. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the perceived retreat of leftism at the end of the Cold War also contributed to the reduction in KIPAEA's relevance and activities.

Adam Smith Club / Liberal Forum (Greek: Λέσχη Adam Smith / Φιλελεύθερο Φόρουμ)

The Adam Smith Club was established in 1985, initially as a loosely organized group of individuals who shared a common interest in liberalism. George Bitros, professor of economics at the Athens University of Economics, was instrumental

in its formation, connecting with various university student circles passionate about liberal ideas. The club's founding members included Bitros, Anastasios (Tasos) Avrantinis, Panagiotis (Panos) Evangelopoulos, Kostas Christidis, Athanasios Papandropoulos, Stavros Petrolekas, Panagiotis (Takis) Michas, Jason Zafolias, and Evangelos Psigas, with Bitros serving as president, Avrantinis as secretary, and Evangelopoulos as Treasurer.

The Adam Smith Club operated on democratic principles, allowing all members to propose ideas and engage in discussions about the club's activities. It officially registered as a nonprofit organization in 1989, with ambitions to evolve into a think tank that would influence New Democracy (ND). However, the club faced significant financial constraints, operating with minimal funding, and relying mostly on internal support without public or private aid. Despite its financial limitations, the Adam Smith Club occasionally cooperated with ND, mainly due to the absence of other political parties more closely aligned with its liberal stance. Nevertheless, the club did not take on the role of providing expertise to ND.

The Adam Smith Club focused its efforts on influencing people, particularly the younger generation, toward liberalism by connecting them with prominent intellectuals associated with the club. However, many of the targeted young people were put off by the club's self-identification as "neoliberal." Despite not having a formal affiliation with ND, many members of the Adam Smith Club maintained close contact with the party.

The club primarily advocated for economic liberalism and the principles of a free market, emphasizing these aspects over political and social issues. For example, when it addressed topics such as drug legalization, it approached them primarily from an economic perspective.

To disseminate and promote its ideas more broadly, the club turned to publishing articles in popular media outlets, aiming to garner public interest. It initially published a newspaper named *The Neoliberal*, with Michas serving as the manager and Papandropoulos, Psigas, Evangelopoulos, and Theodoros Benakis acting as editors. However, after releasing only three issues, the newspaper underwent a transformation into a bi-monthly review titled *Free Choice*.

Between 1987 and 1988, the Adam Smith Club began to experience a slowdown in its activities, leading to discussions about a change in its orientation. Club members recognized their potential for individually exerting influence within ND, especially since club members had many personal connections with politicians in the party. The club particularly targeted those close to Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, the father of later Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis (2019–). As a result of this strategic shift, a new entity called the Liberal Forum was established, aiming to provide expert services to ND. The first secretary-general of the Liberal Forum was Thodoris Vamvakaris, with Aristomenes Syngros and

Benakis serving as presidents at different times. Bitros described the scope of the Liberal Forum's work as follows:

A second direction was to take modern ideas on economics and economic policy from the economically successful countries. We tried to show the size of ideological change on this topic that we were able to achieve in the previous years. The result of the work of the team in the third direction was the "Liberal Contract." ... It was worked upon for months and we had arranged for discussions to take place, in order to decide upon it. A fourth direction was to offer a subscription service to any members of the parliament who wanted consultation. Last but not least, it was the excellent work that the members of our team did in order to introduce the ideas of the Liberal Forum to ND. (Saravakos 2014, 51)

The *Liberal Contract* that Bitros speaks about was a book by the scientific council of the Liberal Forum that articulated the ideological foundations of the Forum. Drawing inspiration from thinkers like Robert Nozick and Jan Narveson, the book's approach aligned closely with what is typically known as libertarianism, emphasizing individual liberty and minimal state intervention.

The dissolution of the Liberal Forum came in the wake of the third ND Congress in 1993. A defining moment at this congress was Miltiades Evert's statement that "New Democracy is not a neoliberal party." This declaration marked a clear ideological stance for ND, one that did not align with the views of the Liberal Forum, which was arguably the most radical classical liberal think tank that has operated in the Greek political scene.

Society for Social and Economic Research (EKOME, Greek: Εταιρεία Κοινωνικών και Οικονομικών Επιστημών)

EKOME, established in 1986 as a nonprofit organization, was founded by Sotiris Papatiriu, an investment consultant and economist. The core team of EKOME included Sotiris Papatiriu and, from 1991 onwards, his son Charalampos Papatiriu. They were joined by several collaborators such as Athanasios Diamantopoulos, Theodoros Palaskas, Marietta Gianakou,¹¹ and Athanasios Papandropoulos. EKOME was mainly funded by Papatiriu himself and, to a small extent, by funded research.

EKOME was created in response to what its members viewed as a regression

11. Minister for Health, Welfare and Social Security of Greece 1990–1991, Minister for National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece 2004–2007, and Member of the European Parliament 2009–2014.

in economic policy, particularly during the tenure of PASOK (the Panhellenic Socialist Movement), led by Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu. Notably, Papatotiriou was influenced by the economic reforms of Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain and the role that British think tanks played in facilitating these changes.¹²

At the time of EKOME's inception, the New Democratic Party (ND), despite having strong liberal elements, had a predominantly statist core. Conservative Miltiadis Evert, who later became the party's president, was known as the leader of the anti-liberal group.

EKOME's initial activities focused on translating key works of liberal thought, including those by Frederic Bastiat. Additionally, the organization developed several policy proposals, which were disseminated to various ministries, politicians, banks, and business leaders, aiming to influence economic and political discourse in Greece. In 1992, it published the book *Liberal Social Contract*. A summary of its main thesis follows:

The fundamental problem of the Greek economy is underproduction, the lack of international competitiveness and stagnation. The causes are:

1. The counter-productiveness of the oversized public sector.
2. The crowding out of private enterprise by the public sector.
3. The interventionism of the state. (Saravakos 2014, 54)

EKOME published research on international relationships, education, economics, classical liberal ideas, and politics. Despite its efforts and contributions, EKOME ceased operations in 2001. This closure reflected waning interest in liberal ideas within Greek society at the time.

Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF)

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation, a German think tank, established a branch in Greece in 1986. This move was part of a tradition among German political parties to associate with organizations in Germany which then set up affiliated foundations in foreign countries, particularly those undergoing periods of political transition. Greece, having emerged from a military dictatorship in 1974, presented a prime example of such a nation in transition.

FNF in Greece aimed to consolidate the country's liberal voices, recognizing the existing affiliations of political parties with other German think tanks: ND members were generally aligned with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (associated

12. The Institute of Economic Affairs was the leading example of how think tanks influence policies and spread the ideas of classical liberalism.

with Christian Democratic ideologies), while the socialist party tended to be closer to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

FNF's strategy involved engaging with the youth and building connections with existing Greek liberal think tanks such as KPEE. By providing these organizations with resources, FNF facilitated the co-organization of seminars and public discussions, fostering a collaborative environment among liberal entities.

Additionally, FNF distinguished itself from other think tanks by showing a keen interest in engaging with centrist political parties. It sought to address social and political issues with the same emphasis as economic ones. It published several books in Greek such as *Liberalism in Greece: Liberal Theory and Practice in Politics and Society in Greece* (Katsoudas 1991), and *Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism: The Basic Political Movements and Their Answer to the Important Problems of the Age* (Meinardus 1992).

In 1993, FNF ceased its operations in Greece as part of a broader plan to reallocate its resources and efforts to other countries, particularly those that were deemed to have a greater need for liberal support at the time. As said before, FNF came to Greece in 1986 to help promote much-needed reforms at the time. By 1993, with the collapse of the former Soviet regimes, FNF leaders felt that Greece was fully integrated into the Western world and the foundation's objectives in the country had largely been achieved.

In 2012, amidst the severe economic crisis, FNF returned to Greece, accompanied by other German organizations, to promote and advance liberal ideas and reforms particularly relevant in the context of the economic challenges Greece was facing. Since its reestablishment in Greece, FNF has concentrated its efforts on supporting the youth liberal movement. It has organized numerous seminars and public events, aiming to engage and educate the younger generation on liberal principles and policies.

Currently leading the FNF's operations in Greece and Cyprus is Alona Tatarova, the first woman to head a Greek liberal think tank. Under her leadership, FNF ([link](#)) continues to champion pluralist democracy, the rule of law, and an open market economy. The foundation is dedicated to preserving and promoting freedom of action, with a specific focus on strengthening European values in Greece.

Center for Liberal Studies (KEFiM, Greek: Κέντρο Φιλελεύθερων Μελετών)

The Center for Liberal Studies (KEFiM) currently stands as the most prominent and active classical liberal think tank in Greece. The first two authors of this article have had a long-standing association with KEFiM, reflecting their deep

involvement and commitment to the organization's mission and activities.

KEFiM was established in October 2011 by Gregory Vallianatos (President), Stratis Katakos (Vice-President) and Nikos Charalampous (General Secretary) as the official think tank of the Liberal Alliance (in Greek: Φιλελεύθερη Συμμαχία), a political party founded in April 2007.¹³ In its initial stages, KEFiM operated as a voluntary organization composed of individuals committed to classical liberal values. Its primary aim was to advocate for political and economic freedom in the Greek public sphere. Between 2011 and 2016, KEFiM engaged in various activities to promote these ideals. It published reports and translated influential books like Johan Norberg's *The Klein Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Polemics*, and *Why Liberty? and Peace, Love, Liberty*, both edited by Tom Palmer. Additionally, KEFiM organized public events on issues such as individual rights and economic freedom. Despite these efforts, KEFiM's impact during this early stage was limited.

In 2017, KEFiM distanced itself from the Liberal Alliance and restructured as an independent, nonpartisan think tank with a focus on advocating classical liberal ideas in the political discourse and policy making. Under the leadership of Alexander Skouras as President and Nicos Rompapas as Executive Director, KEFiM gained greater prominence following its rebranding. This was further enhanced by its international connections with institutions like the Atlas Network and the Smith Family Foundation.

KEFiM promotes classical liberal ideas through various initiatives. Annually, it hosts a liberal academy focusing on the theory and practice of liberal concepts for young people. It also organizes the Greek Economics Olympiad, a competition for high school students designed to combat economic illiteracy. In 2021, KEFiM, with the support of the John Templeton Foundation, presented an educational program, *Greece 2021: Bicentennial of the Liberal Revolution*, which highlighted the influence of classical liberalism on the founding of modern Greece during the 1821 War of Independence.¹⁴

In terms of policy impact, KEFiM published an initiative in 2019 titled *Greece 2021: Agenda for Freedom and Prosperity* ([link](#)). This publication proposed a set of reform policies deemed essential for steering the country toward prosperity and freedom following a decade of economic stagnation. The *Agenda* aimed “to serve

13. It should be noted that in 2008 KEFiM—Adamantios Korais was established as the think tank of the political party Liberal Alliance. Its three founders were Manolis Manoledakis, Stratis Katakos, and Dimitris Skalkos. The same people a couple of months before had also created their own party, the Liberal Alliance. The Center for Liberal Studies, or KEFiM—Markos Dragoumis (it was named for Markos Dragoumis, a prominent classical liberal intellectual, who was one of the most significant Greek champions of liberty of the 20th century), could be considered the successor of the Liberal Alliance. However, it was established in 2011 and is a separate legal entity.

14. For more regarding the impact of classical liberal ideas on the Greek Revolution, see Hatzis 2021.

as a roadmap for the implementation of those necessary reforms that will enhance prosperity and freedom in every area of public life in our country.”

KEFiM participates in international dialogue through the Atlas Network (U.S.A.) and the European Liberal Forum (Belgium). It also partners on various projects with mission-aligned organizations such as the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (Germany), Timbro (Sweden), Fraser Institute (Canada), Cato Institute (U.S.A.), the Tax Foundation (U.S.A.), the Foundation for Economic Education (U.S.A.), the EPICENTER network (Belgium), and the Institute of Economic Affairs (UK).

Forum for Greece (Greek: Φόρουμ για την Ελλάδα)

Forum for Greece was a short-lived think tank created in 2010 by Dora Bakoyannis, who had been an ND MP and minister.¹⁵ The primary purpose of this think tank was to disseminate liberal ideas and to support the promotion of Bakoyannis’s new political party, the Democratic Alliance (in Greek: Δημοκρατική Συμμαχία).

The Forum began with 53 members; notable among them in the academic field were Giorgos Arsenos, Theodoros Diasakos, Manos Karagiannis, Olga Kolokitha, Vasiliki Lalagianni, Christos Balfoutis, Alexandra Tragaki, Kostas Ifantis, and Asteris Houliaras. While Bakoyannis initially served as the president of the Forum for Greece, she later passed the leadership role to Andreas Andrianopoulos, allowing her to concentrate on the Democratic Alliance. Following this transition, Dimitris Katsoudas, who was formerly the director of KPEE, assumed the position of director for the Forum for Greece after 2013.

The think tank was active for two years, but its momentum waned after Bakoyannis rejoined New Democracy in 2012, leading to a shortage of funding. Forum for Greece did collaborate with the FNF and the European Liberal Forum for several events in Greece, Brussels, and Egypt. Since 2014 it has been inactive.

Other short-lived think tanks

Several other liberal think tanks, mostly short-lived, emerged during the period from 1994 to 2007. The Center for the Development of Ideas for Greece in the 21st Century (Greek: Κέντρο Ανάπτυξης Ιδεών για την Ελλάδα του 21ου Αιώνα,

15. Bakoyannis was former mayor of Athens (2003–2006), former minister of foreign affairs of Greece (2006–2009), and MP with the center-right party New Democracy. She was expelled by the party in 2010 and re-joined it in 2012. Bakoyannis has remained an MP with New Democracy until the time of writing.

1994–1999), known as E21, was founded by Stephanos Manos. E21 organized a series of significant conferences covering various topics, including the economy, the pension system, and education. Theodoros Skylakakis, who has been serving as Greece’s minister of environment and energy since July 2023,¹⁶ was the director of E21 and its accompanying magazine. The editorial committee of this publication included Vassilis Kavvalos, Dimitris Bourantonis, Andreas Sideris, Miranda Herbertstein, and Michalis Psalidopoulos. Additionally, notable figures like Tryphon Kolintzas and Alexandra Nikolopoulou were actively involved in E21’s initiatives.

Citizen’s Defense (Greek: Άμυνα του Πολίτη) was a think tank established in 1997 by Stelios Argyros, former president of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) and then an ND member of the European Parliament, along with Kostis Hatzidakis (who has been the minister for national economy and finance since July 2023), Despina Patsavos, Michaela Kyriakopoulou, Tasos Avrantinis, and others. Stelios Argyros was the president of Citizen’s Defence until its dissolution in 2001, with Avrantinis serving as vice president. The think tank’s primary goal was to address violations of citizens’ individual property rights and issues related to bureaucracy.

Freedom Network (Greek: Δίκτυο Ελευθερίας) was founded in Athens in May 2002 and actively conducted regular meetings for approximately three years, primarily at the Zofilia Hotel on Alexandra Avenue. These meetings, generously facilitated by Jason Zafolias, were complemented by open events featuring speakers such as George Alogoskoufis,¹⁷ Kyriakos Mitsotakis,¹⁸ and Dora Bakoyannis. The founders of Freedom Network included a group of notable individuals: Kostas Christidis, who served as the president, Thanasis Papandropoulos as vice president, Tasos Avrantinis as general secretary, and members such as George Bitros, Dimitris Dimitrakos,¹⁹ Spyros Hatiras, Stavros Petrolekas, Katerina Prapopoulou, Dionysis Katranitsas, Nikos Dimou, Dimitris Skalkos, Lefteris Panagiotidis, Vangelis Psygas, and Telemachos Maratos. The primary aim of Freedom Network was to promote and disseminate the principles of political, social, cultural, and economic freedom in every lawful way. In its pursuit of these goals, the network also ventured into publishing. One notable publication was a small book by Murray

16. Former deputy minister for fiscal policy of the Hellenic Republic in the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis from 2020 to 2023.

17. Professor of economics at the Athens University of Economics and Business since 1990 and member of the Hellenic Parliament from September 1996 till October 2009. He also served as Greece’s minister of economy and finance from March 2004 till January 2009.

18. Current prime minister of Greece since 2019.

19. Greek philosopher, currently professor emeritus of political philosophy in the Philosophy of Science Department of the University of Athens.

Rothbard titled *What Has Government Done to Our Money?* which was released by Elati Publications and featured a foreword by Iasonas Zafolias.

Several other groups and organizations emerged during the early years of the Greek crisis, specifically from 2011 to 2014. These included Aristides Hatzis' John Stuart Mill research group, the Open Society Group (in Greek: Όμιλος Ανοιχτή Κοινωνία) led by Dimitris Dimitrakos; Students for Liberty under the leadership of Nikos Kostopoulos; Epekeina Hora (in Greek: Επέκεινα Χώρα) led by Nikos Yannis; Women for Liberty led by Yuli Foka Kavalieraki; and Greek Liberties Monitor led by Michael Iakovides. These entities played a role in organizing lectures, presentations, and events, often in collaboration with foreign think tanks.

There is rather a scarcity of information regarding the activities and impact of these think tanks. The available information is primarily limited to documents establishing their legal entities. Apart from these documents, there is a lack of other sources such as books or conference papers that could document their influence and significance. These groups and organizations were marked by an informal mode of operation, without the formal structure of an institution with paid staff. Their activities over the years were sporadic, primarily fueled by initiatives from a loosely connected collective of individuals.

The era of flourishing ideas 1974–1993: A new hope

After outlining the key liberal think tanks that have been active over the past 50 years, we now divide these five decades into three distinct periods, whimsically but aptly named after the original three Star Wars films.

The majority of the liberal think tanks were established and operated in the first two decades following the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974. This development can be attributed to two primary factors: Firstly, for the first time, a major Greek political party—the New Democracy party, or ND—showed a willingness to experiment with new ideas and promote liberal ideas and policies in the country. Secondly, the global political climate was increasingly moving away from planned economies and rediscovering the value of free markets. The political agendas of leaders like Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States significantly altered the international political landscape. ND, in its quest for political transformation, took cues from these global trends, aligning itself with the shift toward market-oriented policies. However, this shift toward liberal and market-friendly policies was not without its challenges.

In the mid-1970s, when Greece was at the early stages of democratic

restoration, the prevailing economic model in Western economies was largely Keynesian, characterized by elitism and corporatism. During the 1970s, Greece's economy operated on a mixed model, heavily involving state intervention. Notably, from 1978 to 1991, about 80 percent of the banking sector in Greece was under the control of three state-owned banks (Halkos and Salamouris 2002, 8). This era was sometimes referred to as 'socialmania' (in Greek: σοσιαλμανία), a term that highlights the extensive state control over the economy, evident in the policies of both New Democracy's governments (1974–1981) and PASOK's governments (1981–1989).²⁰ It wasn't until Konstantinos Mitsotakis became the leader of New Democracy in 1984 that a major Greek political party, then in opposition, openly advocated for a free-market economy. This shift was pivotal in attracting the majority of liberal think tanks in Greece toward an affiliation with ND, as they sought to move the party in a free-market orientation. In 1989, out of the four liberal think tanks that were active in Greece, three had ties to ND: KPEE was directly linked, EKOME and the Liberal Forum were indirectly associated, while FNF maintained an open dialogue with ND and smaller centrist parties.

The 1990 election victory of ND marked a turning point for the first wave of liberal think tanks in Greece. With this change in government, many staff members from KPEE were appointed to positions in the public administration and the cabinet. However, the influence of the remaining liberal think tanks was somewhat constrained, as their access was limited to certain cabinet members who did not represent the majority. This was partly because ND, despite some liberal leanings, remained a moderately conservative party, often cautious about free-market economic policies that could potentially diminish the state's control over resources.

Aris Trantidis (2014, 230) highlights that the base of ND was resistant to policies that might significantly reduce the size of the state, fearing that such measures would limit political intervention and patronage. Despite this, the ND government from 1990 to 1993 did employ some strategies aligned with free-market economics. Notably, there were cuts in real wages and pensions in the public sector, which contributed to decreasing the budget deficit, as reported by the OECD (1993, 80).

Theodore Pelagidis (1997, 79) critically views the government's approach as a "wild monetarist" program, which he argues was not well-suited for Greece's industrial base. While the government achieved a reduction in both the budget deficit and the inflation rate, its policy of maintaining a hard currency was believed

20. The two oil crises of these periods and the subsequent economic recessions deteriorated the financial positions of private and public enterprises. As a result, in 1983, the Papandreou government introduced the Industrial Reconstruction Organization S.A. (IRO), a state organization that aimed to take control of the failed enterprises, trying to restore the financial viability of those companies via public funding (Halkos and Salamouris 2002, 14).

to have negatively affected production and failed to encourage investment.

In terms of deregulation and liberalization, the 1990–1993 government took several steps, including privatizing profitable firms, liquidating non-viable ones,²¹ abolishing rent control, removing government interference in wage bargaining in the private sector, and liberalizing the financial sector and shopping hours (Trantidis 2014).

However, these free-market-oriented reforms were accompanied by an increase in indirect taxes. Pelagidis (1997, 76) notes that total tax revenue as a percentage of GDP rose from 23.8 percent in 1988 to 27.2 percent in 1992, largely with the goal of reducing the substantial budget deficit inherited from previous administrations. Despite these efforts, the policies implemented by the ND government were often considered insufficient in addressing the broader structural challenges facing the Greek economy (OECD 1993, 82).

The challenges of implementing classical liberal policies in Greece during the early 1990s were illustrated by the government's decision to discreetly hire a few hundred ND members into the public sector just before the 1993 elections. This was an effort to secure political support, an effort that reflected the enduring tradition of clientelism in Greek politics (Trantidis 2014, 229). Andrianopoulos has stated that neoliberal principles such as reducing the public sector and lowering taxation were not effectively implemented in Greece during that period (*ibid.*, 222).

Greek liberal think tanks did have an influence on the economic policies of the governing ND, but this influence was moderated by several significant obstacles. The first major obstacle was that the base of ND largely favored interventionist policies, with only a few senior leaders within the party being advocates of free-market principles. The second obstacle was the government of Konstantinos Mitsotakis, which came to power in 1984 with a narrow majority of just two seats in parliament and experienced internal opposition, with members within the party openly criticizing the government's free-market policies (Trantidis 2014, 227).²² The third obstacle was that the Greek public in a large part felt they had benefited from the extensive government policies implemented during the previous PASOK administrations (1981–1989). Consequently, the new policies, perceived as 'austerity measures,' were not widely embraced.²³

In September 1993, the already slim parliamentary majority held by ND collapsed following the defection of two of its MPs. This loss of majority came at a

21. It is estimated that Mitsotakis' government closed or privatized 85 to 111 enterprises during 1990–1993 (Trantidis 2014, 231).

22. The critique focused on the government's "obsession" to reduce the deficit and its "hard drachma" policy (Trantidis 2014, 227).

23. The government's policies limited the opportunities for clientelist exchange by the party's prominent members, even though Mitsotakis was associated with patronage politics in his homeland, Crete.

time when Greece was experiencing a decline in industrial output, high unemployment rates, and generally poor economic performance outcomes²⁴ that were attributed to monetary policies implemented by Konstantinos Mitsotakis' government.

These economic challenges contributed to the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) gaining power in the October 1993 elections. Subsequently, Miltiades Evert, a conservative member of ND, assumed leadership of the party. The change in leadership from Mitsotakis to Evert marked a significant shift in the party's ideological direction, resulting in a diminished influence by liberal think tanks on ND's policies and ideas.

This transition also led to the departure of prominent free-market advocates within the party, such as Andrianopoulos and Manos, who left ND in the following years. The party, now under more conservative leadership, struggled to regain its footing in the political arena, failing to secure a parliamentary majority in subsequent elections for 11 consecutive years.

The anti-liberal empire strikes back: 1993–2007

The appointment of much of the KPEE staff to public administration roles following New Democracy's (ND) election to government in 1990 had a significant impact on the think tank. These appointments were made to assist the government in implementing its policies, but they left KPEE with a shortage of capable executives to continue its operations. Additionally, after 1993, funding for KPEE was substantially reduced, further hindering its activities.

ND, shifting its focus, was no longer inclined to allocate resources solely for the promotion of economic liberal ideas. This change was compounded by the withdrawal of international allies like FNF from Greece to focus on other regions in greater need of liberal efforts.

During this period, when classical liberal ideas were in retreat, Manos made a significant effort to revive economic liberalism in Greece. He founded a political party called the Liberals (Greek: *οι Φιλελεύθεροι*) in 1999. However, the party had difficulty gaining substantial political traction. In the 2000 elections, in an alliance with ND, the Liberals managed to elect only two MPs. By 2001, the party had ceased to exist.

The Third Way wave during the mid-1990s, exemplified by the political agendas of Tony Blair in the United Kingdom and Bill Clinton in the United States, had a notable influence on the political landscape in Greece. PASOK underwent an

24. According to World Bank indicators, Greek GDP slightly increased in 1992 by 0.7 percent and declined by 1.6 percent in 1993 ([link](#)).

ideological shift during this period, moving away from its earlier more frank leftism (Spourdalakis and Tassis 2006, 506). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Costas Simitis starting in 1996, PASOK demonstrated a shift toward more liberal economic policies. One of Simitis' primary objectives was to ensure that Greece met the criteria necessary for entry into the European Monetary Union (EMU). His efforts were successful, and in 2001 Greece became a member of the Eurozone. Both Andrianopoulos and Manos (free-market-oriented ministers under the 1990–1993 Mitsotakis administration) were offered positions on PASOK's electoral lists for the 2004 elections by the then-party leader George Papandreou. However, the term 'liberalism' was notably absent from PASOK's official rhetoric.

As for ND, following Kostas Karamanlis' election as party leader in 1997, succeeding the more conservative Evert, the party showed increased openness to moderate liberal economic policies. Under Karamanlis' leadership, ND positioned itself as representing the 'middle ground,' adopting a centrist strategy to appeal to a broader electorate. This approach was based on the recognition that Greek voters tended to be pragmatic, generally lacking strong ideological biases, and exhibiting limited trust in the state (Pappas and Dinas 2006, 484–485). In line with this understanding, ND's political program was intentionally de-ideologized. While the party refrained from explicitly aligning itself with liberalism or other specific ideological currents, it frequently used the slogan "the great liberal party." This rhetorical strategy was indicative of ND's efforts to maintain ideological flexibility to appeal to a wide range of voters.

The proliferation of small, short-lived liberal initiatives during this time reflects a broader trend: a lack of substantial public demand for classical liberal ideas, which in turn influenced the policies and orientations of political parties.

The re-emergence of classical liberalism 2007–2017: Return of the Jedi

Liberal Alliance, a small party established in 2007 on a platform rooted in both political and economic liberal principles, sought to occupy the political space perceived to exist between the center-left PASOK and the center-right ND.

In its founding declaration, the Liberal Alliance articulated a commitment to fundamental liberal tenets, recognizing life, liberty, private property, and the pursuit of happiness as its core principles.²⁵ However, its electoral appeal has been nonexistent. Its highest electoral result was approximately 1.8 percent of the vote in

25. Liberal Alliance, Founding Declaration ([link](#)).

May 2012, achieved in collaboration with Drasi, a political party founded by Manos. This was considerably below the 3 percent threshold required for parliamentary representation in Greece. The Liberal Alliance's lack of electoral success could partially be attributed to the two-party system. Despite ideological alignment with liberal principles to some extent, the electorate's fragmented support and the predominance of major parties like New Democracy and PASOK hindered the Alliance's traction. The electoral system, particularly the enhanced proportional representation law, further exacerbated this challenge. With a threshold of 3 percent of valid ballots required for representation, smaller parties struggle to secure seats. Moreover, the system's provision of bonus seats disproportionately benefits leading parties, incentivizing voters to align with established entities rather than smaller liberal factions. The combination of voter behavior, party dominance, and electoral rules underscores the formidable barriers that confronted the Liberal Alliance in achieving significant electoral gains. And the limited demand for liberal policies, coupled with dominant state interventionism, impedes the electoral success of any liberal party in Greece.

However, the Liberal Alliance's contribution to the Greek political landscape extended beyond electoral politics. It was instrumental in founding KEFiM–Adamantios Korais (later renamed KEFiM–Markos Dragoumis), the first classical liberal think tank in Greece since 1989. KEFiM aimed to create a platform for liberals from various political backgrounds to engage and collaborate, transcending party affiliations ([link](#)). In November 2008, KEFiM–Adamantios Korais became a member of the European Liberal Forum.

In 2009, two years after the establishment of Liberal Alliance, the political party named Drasi (Greek: Δράση) was founded in Greece by the experienced politician, former MP, and former minister Stephanos Manos. He called for a broad coalition of progressive, center-left, center-right, social democrat, liberal, modernizer, and pragmatist forces ([link](#)). However, like the Liberal Alliance, Drasi struggled to achieve significant electoral success and did not manage to elect any Members of Parliament or Members of the European Parliament. In 2019, Drasi suspended its operations and expressed support for ND.

Meanwhile, Dora Bakoyannis, the former MP and ND minister, established the Democratic Alliance party and its affiliated think tank, Forum for Greece, in 2010. This led to some high-level members of the Liberal Alliance joining the Democratic Alliance and staffing the Forum for Greece. However, the Democratic Alliance was short-lived and ceased to exist in 2012 after Bakoyannis rejoined ND.

The post-2010 period in Greece, characterized by the sovereign debt crisis and subsequent bailout programs, created a crucial need for reform-oriented ideas. However, the highly polarized political environment of the time did not favor the emergence of liberal political parties as a moderate force between the two dominant

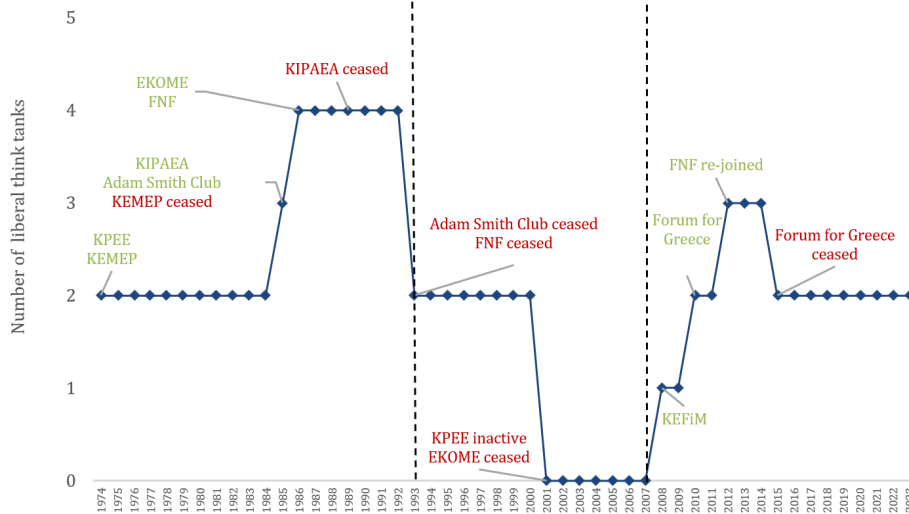
parties. Instead, the political landscape saw the entry of radical left and anti-liberal right parties into the Greek parliament.

However, amidst this backdrop, various liberal initiatives like Liberal Alliance, Drasi, Democratic Alliance, KEFiM, and Forum for Greece, despite their fragmented nature, succeeded in promoting classical liberal ideas to specific audiences. The groundwork laid by these organizations contributed to the rebranding and emergence of KEFiM–Markos Dragoumis in early 2017 as the most active classical liberal, non-partisan, and independent think tank in Greece.

Currently, KEFiM’s executive and academic board is composed of members who were part of previous liberal efforts, including Panagiotis Evangelopoulos, associate professor of economics (Adam Smith Club, Liberal Forum); Dimitrios Katsoudas, former Secretary General for European Affairs (KPEE, Forum for Greece); Tasos Avrantinis, lawyer (Adam Smith Club, Liberal Forum, Drasi); Nikos Charalampous, architect (Liberal Alliance, KEFiM–Adamantios Korais); Miranda Xafa, former member of the board of the IMF (Drasi); Harry Papsotiriou, professor of international relations (EKOME).

Since 2012, KEFiM and the FNF have been the only two active classical liberal think tanks in Greece. Figure 1 highlights the timeline of liberal think tanks in Greece from 1974 through 2023:²⁶ the initial proliferation of these institutions in the first period after 1974, their decline starting from 1993, and their resurgence from 2007 onwards.

Figure 1. Liberal think tanks in Greece, 1974–2023

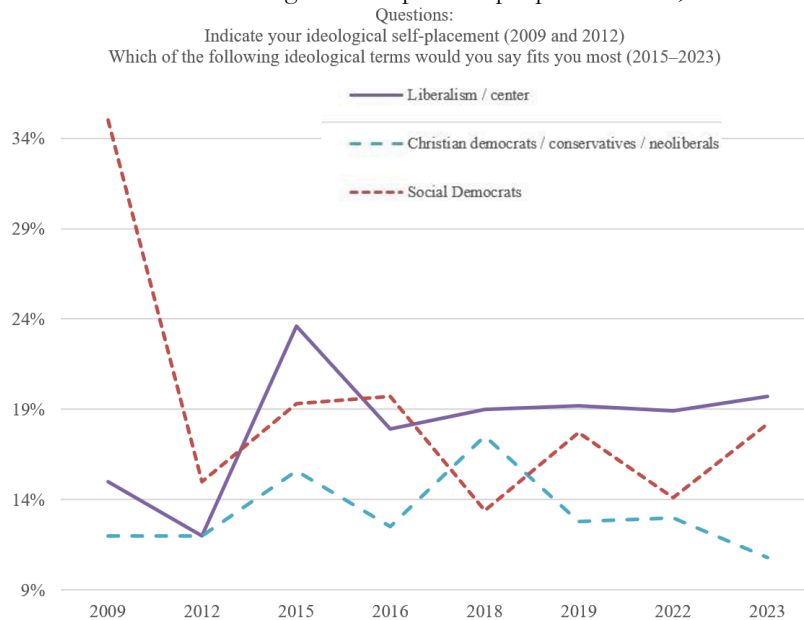


26. We mention only the ones that were documented as professionally organized or operating on a regular basis. Therefore, we omitted the short-lived think tanks with limited resources that we mentioned above.

Concluding remarks: The situation of classical liberalism in Greece

Since 2015, classical liberalism in Greece has experienced a remarkable increase in popularity. Survey data illustrate this trend: In 2009, only about 15 percent of the population self-identified as liberals.²⁷ This figure slightly decreased to 12 percent in 2012 (Public Issue 2012).²⁸ By 2016, the proportion of the population identifying as liberals rose to 18 percent. This upward trend continued, with surveys in 2019 and 2023 indicating that approximately 19–20 percent of the population self-identified as liberal (diaNeosis 2022; Eteron/Aboutpeople 2023).²⁹ The increasing percentage of the Greek population identifying as liberals, as indicated by recent surveys, does not necessarily equate to a comprehensive or accurate understanding, or even active support of specific liberal ideas and policies.

Figure 2. Self-identified ideological description of people in Greece, 2009–2023



27. Nationwide survey in November 2009, with a sample of 1331 individuals. The standard error of the survey was ± 3.2 percent. Question: “Ideological self-placement” ([link](#)).

28. Nationwide survey in September–November 2012, with a sample of 3036 individuals. The standard error of the survey was ± 3.2 percent. Question: “Ideological self-placement” ([link](#)).

29. Nationwide survey in April 2022, with a sample of 1255 individuals. The standard error of the survey was ± 2.8 percent. Question: “Which of the following ideological terms would you say fits you most?” ([link](#)).

Characteristically, Greek governments have faced challenges in effectively implementing liberal reforms, even though there have been some efforts, such as tax cuts before the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall tax burden remains significant. As measured by Tax Freedom Day, which represents the point in the year when citizens have theoretically earned enough income to cover their tax obligations, the burden is substantial. In 2022, Tax Freedom Day was expected to reach 181 days in 2022, only 2 days lower than in 2021 (Saravakos and Moutsatsou 2022). If state borrowing due to budget deficits is also accounted for, Tax Freedom Day extends to the 200th day of the year.

Moreover, in terms of economic freedom, Greece ranks relatively low on a global scale, occupying the 85th place among 165 economies all over the world in the 2022 Economic Freedom of the World Index (Gwartney et al. 2022). Notably, Greece ranks last among EU countries and is positioned at 153rd in the “Size of Government” component of the index.

Greece has shown signs of backsliding in terms of the institutional checks and balances that are fundamental to liberal democracy. There has been a trend toward a hyper-concentration of powers in the executive branch, as noted by Evie Papada et al. (2023).

Educating the public, clarifying misconceptions, and promoting a deeper understanding of what classical liberalism entails are major tasks facing today’s liberal think tanks in Greece. They are actively working, often collaboratively, to promote classical liberal ideas and influence policymaking in the country. Their projects and initiatives cover a range of areas that are central to classical liberalism. KEFiM focuses on issues such as economic literacy, regulatory quality, tax reduction, and the expansion of the liberal youth movement, while FNF’s projects in Greece concentrate on empowering the liberal youth movement, on civil and individual rights, and on economic freedom.

Together, KEFiM and FNF–Greece play a significant role in the Greek political and social landscape, striving to broaden the understanding and implementation of classical liberal ideas and policies in Greece in a time of ongoing economic and political challenges.

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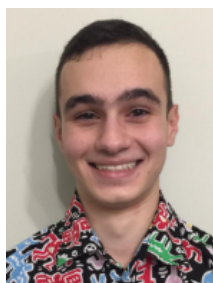
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