

Top Greek state official resigns over collusion with fascist Golden Dawn

By John Vassilopoulos
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Greece's Cabinet Secretary Panayiotis Baltakos resigned last Wednesday, following leaked footage of a conversation between himself and MP Ilias Kasidiaris of the fascist Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgi) party.

The taped conversation took place shortly after leading Golden Dawn MPs were taken into custody, as part of the government's clampdown on the neo-Nazi party last October. This followed the murder of rapper Pavlos Fyssas by a Golden Dawn supporter.

Having been in New Democracy (ND) Prime Minister Antonis Samaras' inner circle for many years, Baltakos was seen as the "Number 2" man in the government, co-ordinating its policies.

According to a report in *iefimerida.gr*, "The well-known and established lawyer Panayiotis Baltakos has followed Antonis Samaras since 1992. He was the man who maintained excellent relations with [former ND Prime Minister] Kostas Karamanlis and close friendly relations with the prime minister, thus succeeding in maintaining contact between the two factions within New Democracy."

The leak was timed to coincide with a parliamentary vote last week to lift parliamentary immunity on five Golden Dawn deputies, including Kasidiaris, who initially revealed the existence of the video in parliament, before it was sent to the media. While the leak succeeded in disrupting parliamentary proceedings, it failed to stall them. Ultimately the vote took place, with immunity being lifted for the five.

The revelations have created a political firestorm, amid claims by Golden Dawn that it has further incriminating footage of Baltakos. Asked to comment in a radio interview to Real FM on Thursday, Baltakos conceded, "There were other conversations that took place prior to Fyssas' murder and possibly one or two afterwards."

The scandal has caused disquiet in ND's ranks. According to an article in Friday's *I Efimerida Ton Syntakton*, "The fear of possible unforeseen political developments that could even lead to a spectacular collapse of the government and by extension to early elections is now the chief feeling within the liberal wing of ND."

In the footage, Baltakos is seen briefing Kasidiaris on the government's clampdown on Golden Dawn. The transcript reads:

Kasidiaris: When I was released [from custody], what happened to Samaras, can you tell me that?

Baltakos: He was in America then.

Kasidiaris: Yes he was in America, but I learnt that he went ballistic.

Baltakos: Shock and awe! It was f***ing mayhem... He called [Justice Minister] Athanasiou and [Public Order Minister Nikos] Dendias and said: "You tricked me, you cheated me, what's all this, I've been humiliated." Because the previous day he'd made a statement at the American Zionist Conference that "It's all over, they're in cuffs, goodbye." And the next day you guys were released.

Baltakos was referring to Samaras' speech at the American Jewish Committee during a six-day visit to the US last October amid the clampdown against Golden Dawn. At that time, he declared: "There is no room for the neo-Nazis in any part of the democratic world, and there is no tolerance for the neo-Nazis, or for any kind of extremism, undermining democratic institutions."

Two days later Golden Dawn MPs Kasidiaris, Michos and Panayiotaros were released on bail.

Kasidiaris goes on to ask why there was subsequent backtracking in the following days, when the authorities took into custody Golden Dawn leader

Nikos Michaloliakos and senior Golden Dawn MP Christos Pappas. Baltakos replies that following Samaras' outburst, Dendias and Athanasiou instructed the authorities to take a tougher stance against the party.

Baltakos then tells Kasidiaris that Samaras was frustrated because Golden Dawn was preventing ND from overtaking SYRIZA in the polls.

Kasidiaris: And he'll put us in jail just because we take votes from him?

Baltakos: The faggot [referring to Samaras]. It's unbelievable.

Contrary to the anti-establishment image the neo-Nazi party seeks to convey, the video is proof that Golden Dawn has access to and support within the highest echelons of the state apparatus.

As for Baltakos, the fact that he is engaged in a friendly discussion of an ongoing criminal case with one of the suspects reveals the complete erosion of democratic norms and due process in Greece. At one point Baltakos even asserts that "there are no incriminating facts" against Golden Dawn, despite ample evidence to the contrary.

In an interview Baltakos gave to Real FM after his resignation, he justified his talks with Golden Dawn on the grounds that "we couldn't leave 500,000 Greek [voters] trapped in Golden Dawn and do nothing... I talked to Golden Dawn members. I told them some of what they wanted to hear in order to maintain contact."

Notwithstanding the expletives Baltakos hurled at Samaras in the footage, he covered for the prime minister by denying in the Real FM interview that Samaras was aware that such meetings were taking place.

This cannot be accepted at face value. The meeting took place in Baltakos' office within Greece's parliamentary building. Moreover, Baltakos has openly made overtures towards Golden Dawn in the past in what the press described at the time as ND's "flirt" with the far-right party. In June 2013, after junior partner Democratic Left (DIMAR) left the coalition, Baltakos told journalists that an ND-GD coalition was "an undesirable but not impossible scenario."

Baltakos' right-wing and fascistic views have never been a secret. Only two weeks ago in an interview with Vima FM he declared, "Of course I am an anti-communist. That's how I was born, that's how I

grew up and that's how I will die."

In December 2012 the National Human Rights Committee sent a letter of complaint to Samaras after a meeting with Baltakos, stating: "[Baltakos] declared that, as a representative of the government and of ND he is not interested in the Committee's work or in human rights or in the country's related international obligations."

That such a man was until last week the prime minister's chief aide confirms the undemocratic character of the Greek government, which relies on authoritarian forms of rule to implement the austerity policies dictated by the European Union-led troika.

The revelations have also highlighted the absence of any political force in Greece capable of dealing with the rise of fascism. The response of SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) to the leaks was to call for an emergency debate in parliament in which "the prime minister is obliged to provide an explanation, but also the leader of PASOK, who has knowingly propped up a government with eclectic relations with the parastate of the far-right."

Such a debate, given SYRIZA's longstanding support for the EU, would completely avoid the central issue: the imposition by ND and PASOK of EU austerity programmes that has allowed Golden Dawn to posture as an opponent of big business—the hook on which it hangs its filthy anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic propaganda.

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