

The Face of Austerity: Photoshopping Away Police Torture in Greece

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Greek police may vainly try to Photoshop away the torture of four alleged bank robbers, but they cannot gloss over the radicalization of Greek youth.

The story is as follows.

On February 1st 2013, an attempted robbery of two banks takes place in a small village of the Western Macedonia region, called Velvento. The bounty was around 180.000 euros and the police managed to arrest the robbers after a short chase. The news would have passed unnoticed, if the heavily armed robbers were not very young middle and upper-middle class boys, whom the police associates with the armed urban-guerilla group 'Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire'.

Twenty four hours later, the police make public the photos of the bank-robbers, and the whole country is appalled by what it sees: the faces of four [badly beaten](#) 20-25 year olds, which have also been — badly — photoshopped in a vain attempt to hide the cuts and bruises, and the hands (?) that are holding the youngsters' heads in order for them to be photographed.



The police rush through an announcement to justify themselves, claiming that only the minimum amount of violence necessary was used due to resistance during the arrest, while the Minister of Public Order Mr Dendias (the man who [threatened to sue](#) *The Guardian* for having published a report on the torture of 15 anti-fascist activists by the Greek police, the same man who [launched a war](#) against Greece's squats) said that the pictures were photoshopped in order for the faces of the arrested to be more recognisable (!), claiming that no torture had taken place.

The youngsters themselves — through their families and lawyers — claim that they did not resist their arrest and that they were badly beaten up/tortured while in detention; while there is evidence (videos and pictures from the moment of the arrest) that proves that they were not beaten during the arrest, but whatever happened, it did so afterwards. Some alternative Greek media, together with some international ones, as well as Amnesty International, strongly questioned the official explanations, while the latter also [commented](#) that "the Greek authorities cannot just photoshop their problems away".



Under heavy public criticism, the Minister had to promise that a torture investigation would take place and the results are still expected. The bank robbers are now in detention, yet they describe their actions as political, and consider themselves anarchist ‘prisoners of war’, [shouting](#) during their transfer to the Prosecutor’s office “*zito i anarhia koufales!*” — “long live anarchy assholes!”. What is also worth noticing is that one of the four arrested anarchists is the friend of [Alexandros Grigoropoulos](#) — the 15-year-old boy who was assassinated by police in Exarchia in 2008 — and happened to be by his side on that very moment, which surely played a big role in shaping his view of state power and police brutality.

The story is indicative of the radicalization of a young generation of Greeks, and of Greek society as a whole, under the structural conditions imposed by austerity. But it is also indicative of the way the state has chosen to deal with the voices of opposition in the country, be they legal or illegal: with repression, human rights abuses, and public humiliation.



Let’s not forget that a few months ago, the same government, the same Minister of Public Order, and the same police force, tortured — as it [was proven](#) — 15 antifascist activists for having organized an AntiFa moto-parade. And it is the same state officials who launched an attack against the country’s squats, for no obvious reason other than silencing any oppositional voices around.

It is by now obvious that the Greek state, in order to defend the extremely unpopular and unsuccessful austerity measures it has been imposing for a couple of years now, has chosen the road of repression. It is not something new: we have seen such practices in the past too — in Chile, in Argentina, and elsewhere. The difference is that in those cases we were talking about military dictatorships, while in the Greek case we are talking about a democratically-elected government, which is even more scary and unacceptable. At the same time, it is also obvious that this strategy of the state is resulting in the further radicalization of the Greek youth.



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