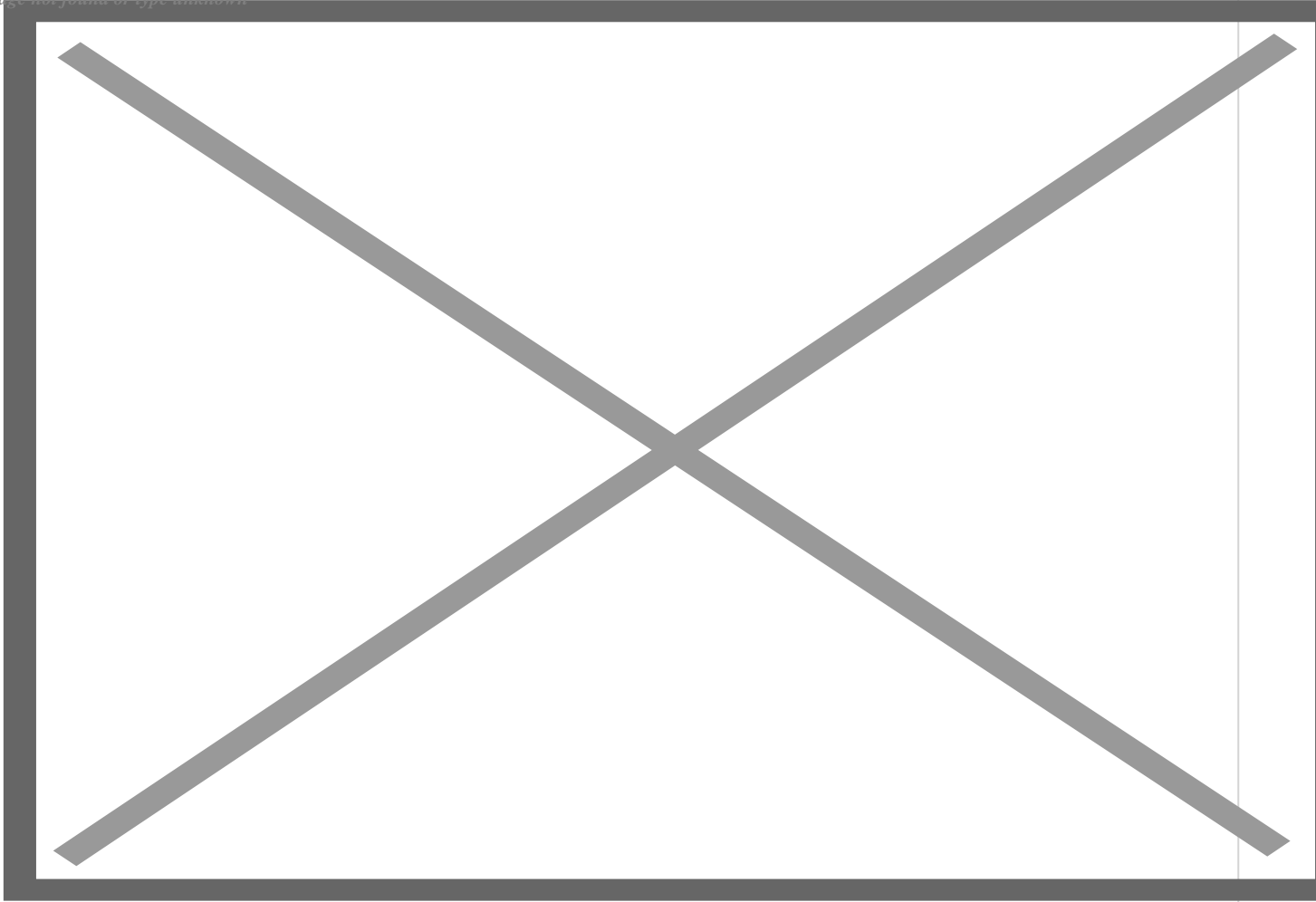


European Parliament strips neo-Nazi Greek MEP of immunity

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The ballot on Lajos' immunity was held following a request from Greek authorities [File: Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP]

Athens, April 27 (RHC)-- European Union legislators have voted to lift the immunity of Greek MEP Ioannis Lajos, a former leader of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party who has been sentenced to jail in his homeland.

Legislators overwhelmingly approved the move, with 658 in favour and only 25 opposed in a secret ballot held on Monday, the European Parliament said on Tuesday. The vote paves the way for Belgian

authorities to extradite Lagos to Greece.

The ballot was held following a request from Greek authorities after Lagos was handed a 13-year jail term, along with other leaders of the far-right Golden Dawn party, in October for charges including running a criminal organisation.

The ruling could not be enforced in the case of Lagos, who had immunity because he was elected to the European Parliament in 2019. Lagos, 48, has been living in the Belgian capital, Brussels, since being convicted.

The marathon trial of the Golden Dawn chiefs, including founder Nikos Michaloliakos, was seen as one of the most important political events in Greece's modern history. The jail terms capped a stunning downfall for the leaders of a party that was the country's third most popular in 2015.

The crackdown gathered pace after the murder of 34-year-old anti-fascist rapper, Pavlos Fyssas, who was stabbed to death by a Golden Dawn supporter in front of a cafe in the western Athens suburb of Keratsini in September 2013.

Michaloliakos and the other convicted Golden Dawn members are already in jail, except for Christos Pappas, who was widely acknowledged as the organisation's second-in-command. Pappas disappeared following the court ruling last October and is now officially a fugitive.

Golden Dawn was founded as a neo-Nazi group in the 1980s. It saw a surge in popularity during the 2010-2018 financial crisis, gaining parliamentary representation between 2012 and 2019.

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