



First thoughts on the 20 September 2015 election in Greece

Edited by
Roman Gerodimos

GPSG Pamphlet No 5

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Editorial | Roman Gerodimos

When, back in 2012, we decided to introduce a GPSG Pamphlet Series so as to provide 'rapid response' analysis after each Greek election, we hadn't really given much thought to the likelihood of Greece going through five elections in three years. Maybe, if we had known the level of effort required and the frequency with which this pamphlet would have to be produced, we wouldn't have taken that step. But, as it turns out, I'm certainly glad we did as this series has become both a vibrant, pluralistic forum, and a useful tool for those who strive to understand the current political landscape in Greece.

Hence, only eight months after the election of January 25th, we once again issued an urgent general call for short commentaries from our members, affiliates and the broader academic community, as a first reaction to the election results. As with previous pamphlets, there was no editorial line: we did not solicit or commission contributions from specific colleagues; there were no restrictions on the theme, angle or content of the articles; and I am pleased to say that we managed to include all 34 submissions from 37 colleagues based across Europe and the United States; from the young voices of graduate students to authoritative analyses by leading scholars (although more gender balance would have been ideal and this is something that the GPSG is actively working on).

As I noted in January, despite, or perhaps precisely *because* of the contrasting approaches taken by contributors, the sheer volume and collective insight of the commentaries provides us *both* with a rounded understanding of the current state of Greek politics, *and* with an historical artefact – a narrative account of how many political and social scientists interpreted this election *at this point in time*. Even though we are all 'unreliable narrators', a few key themes and threads emerge from this collection, which are worth noting:

(i) whereas Syriza's success in January was based on a strong message of hope and change, its victory this time seems to be based upon a more muted, pragmatic, indeed unclear, assessment of what lies ahead for Greece

(ii) despite the big margin between Syriza and New Democracy, a rapidly declining voter turnout meant that both parties, but especially Syriza, actually lost hundreds of thousands of voters

(iii) despite the economic and political turmoil of the last eight months, including a controversial approach to negotiations with EU partners, closed banks, capital controls and a referendum whose legitimacy, purpose and ultimate impact have been questioned by some, Alexis Tsipras remains the dominant player in the political system

(iv) however, the tension, first established in January, between Syriza's pre-election pledges and the demands of the Greek debt programme remains; Mr Tsipras seems trapped between the expectations of his supporters, a programme of austerity that is both unpopular and unhelpful in terms of growth, and the demands of Eurozone partners who are running out of patience with Greece

(v) the re-election of Syriza and the formation of another coalition with far-right Independent Greeks following the government's U-turn on the bailout agreement challenges the relevance of all known socio-political cleavages, including 'left v. right' and even 'pro-Euro v. anti-Memorandum'; also, given that both governing parties have in recent years taken in their ranks politicians from the two established parties of the Greek political system (PASOK and New Democracy), the much-famed 'old v. new' [system] divide seems to be both a temporary explanation for the continuing popularity of Alexis Tsipras and at the same time an indication of a deep and widespread public disconnect with the values of the post-1974 system

(vi) finally, in a country of 11 million people, a neo-Nazi criminal organisation whose leaders are on trial for murder managed to retain its third place in parliament with a mere 379,581 votes; this particular fact underscores the fragmentation of the political system which has been benefitting anti-systemic voices.

On behalf of the GPSG, I would like to thank all the contributors for taking part in this collective project, as well as Patty and Auguste for their invaluable help with the copy editing and design. We hope that this publication will lead to a fruitful dialogue and welcome further contributions through our various outlets, publications and events.

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
He is the co-editor, with Dr Georgios Karyotis, of 'The Politics of Extreme Austerity: Greece in the Eurozone Crisis' (Palgrave Macmillan 2015).



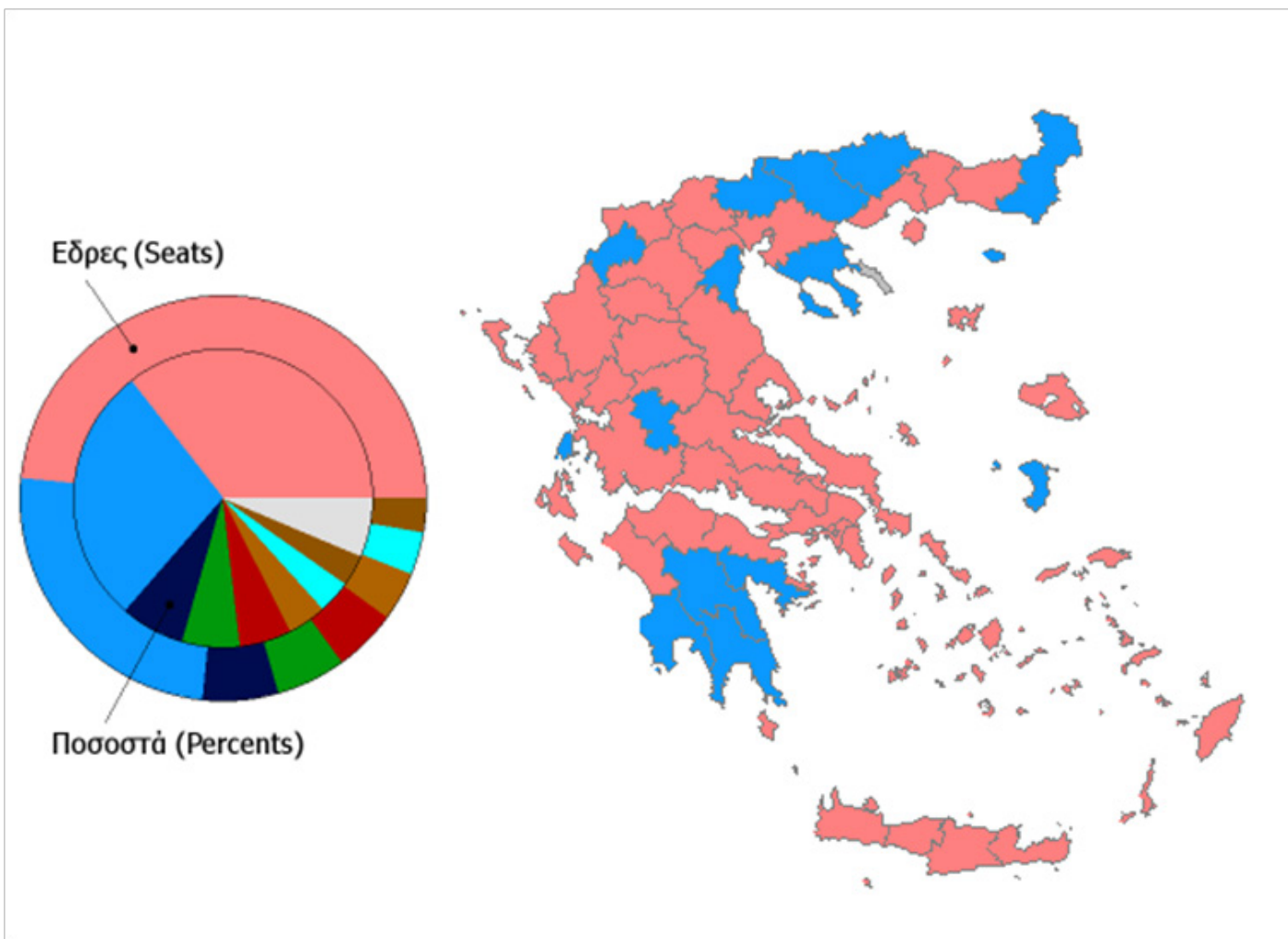
The Hellenic Parliament, on [Flickr](#)

Greek parliamentary elections, 20 September 2015

Abstention: **43.43%** | No Seats: **6.40%** |

Results Nationwide							
Parliamentary Sep.'15				Diff% Jan.'15	Parliamentary Jan.'15		
Party	%	Seats	Votes	Units	%	Seats	Votes
	35.46	145	1,925,904	-0.88	36.34	149	2,245,978
	28.10	75	1,526,205	+0.29	27.81	76	1,718,694
	6.99	18	379,581	+0.71	6.28	17	388,387
	6.28	17	341,390	-	-	-	-
	5.55	15	301,632	+0.08	5.47	15	338,188
	4.09	11	222,166	-1.96	6.05	17	373,924
	3.69	10	200,423	-1.06	4.75	13	293,683
	3.43	9	186,457	+1.64	1.79	-	110,923
	2.86	0	155,242	-	-	-	-
	0.85	0	46,096	+0.17	0.68	-	41,860
	2.69	0	146,754	-	-	-	-

Source: <http://ekloges2015b.dolnet.gr/?lang=en>



Source: <http://ekloges.ypes.gr>

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I

Part 1

Interpreting the Result: Old and New Cleavages in the
Greek Political System

A Calculated Turn to Pragmatism: Syriza's Victory in the September 2015 Elections

The election of 20th September 2015 in Greece resulted in victory for Syriza, who renewed its governing coalition with the right-wing Independent Greeks [ANEL] party (see **Table 1** for historical election results). The new government under the premiership of Alexis Tsipras returns to office with a strong mandate, which however is markedly different to the one it had received in the previous election eight months earlier.

Syriza had won in January 2015 with a promise to roll back austerity and emancipate the country from Memorandums and external demands on how it should be governed (see GPSG pamphlet no 4 at <http://www.gpsg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/GPSG-Pamphlet-4-January-2015.pdf>). To this end, it employed high-brinkmanship strategies in heated negotiations with its creditors, and successfully mobilised the Greek electorate to emphatically reject austerity in the Referendum of 5th July. A week later, in a sudden plot twist, the Greek government had reached agreement with the institutions for a third bailout of 86 billion Euros, conditional upon the implementation of just the type of austerity measures that Syriza had long campaigned against.

For many, Tsipras' last minute turn was welcomed with a sense of stoic acceptance that the Greek side had overplayed its hand and had to fold to prevent an involuntary exit from the Eurozone. For others, it represented a betrayal, a view shared by leading MPs within Syriza, who rejected the deal and eventually split to form a separate pro-Grexit party, Popular Unity [LAE]. Unable to govern without control of his party, Tsipras called snap elections at the earliest date possible, not allowing time to his political opponents to recoup and to the public to really feel the effects of the new austerity measures. This strategic timing, the sound campaign, the weak opposition and Tsipras' personal charisma were some of the contributing factors to his re-election.

Still, from an outsider's perspective it must be baffling that Syriza was able to retain its share of the popular vote (36.3% in January vs. 35.5% in September 2015), despite the economy collapsing under the weight of imposed capital controls. Syriza's ability to attribute the majority of the responsibility for the economic crisis to its predecessors and the responsibility for the failure in the negotiations to the creditors offer a tentative explanation for this. After all, the attribution of responsibility and ability to dominate political discourses at times of crisis have been shown to play a crucial conditioning effect in the relationship between economic evaluations and vote choice: only voters who blame the government for economic problems are likely to vote according to their economic evaluations (Karyotis and Rudig, 2015 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9248.12076/full>).

More puzzling is the question as to what happened to the radical, left-wing Syriza voters that had twice rejected austerity earlier in the year. How could they keep their support for a party that chose to moderate its anti-austerity positions and move towards the ideological centre? The answer is that the majority of Syriza voters were not that radical to begin with. Drawing on original survey evidence, we can compare the ideological self-placement and issue-positioning on austerity of voters in the June 2012 and the January 2015 elections with that of MPs from each party, as recorded in our July 2013 elite survey (see Karyotis, Rudig, Judge, 2014 at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13608746.2014.977478>).

The most striking of our results is that Syriza voters were markedly less ideologically radicalised than Syriza MPs (see **Figure 1**), as well as significantly less anti-austerity when the risk of leaving the Eurozone was added to the equation (see **Figure 2**). Hence, the shift of Syriza towards the centre prior to the September 2015 elections allowed it to come closer to its voters, escaping electoral punishment. Popular Unity, meanwhile, which split from Syriza insisting on a radical left-wing and anti-austerity

platform, failed to meet the 3% threshold to enter Parliament. The outcome of this election thus vindicates Tsipras' strategic choices and dominance of the political terrain in Greece. However, his ability to implement the bailout agreement he signed and to stir Greece away from the turbulent waters it has been in since 2010 has still to be tested and it will be his success in this area that will largely determine the fate of both party and country as a whole.

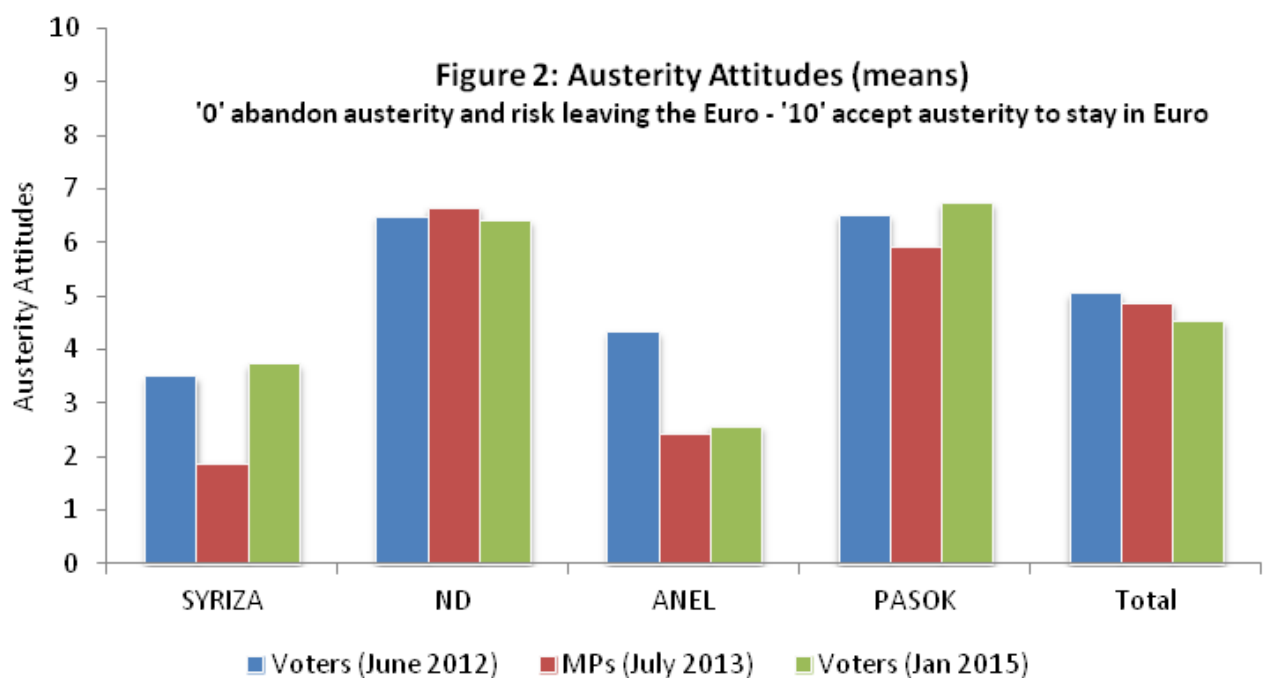
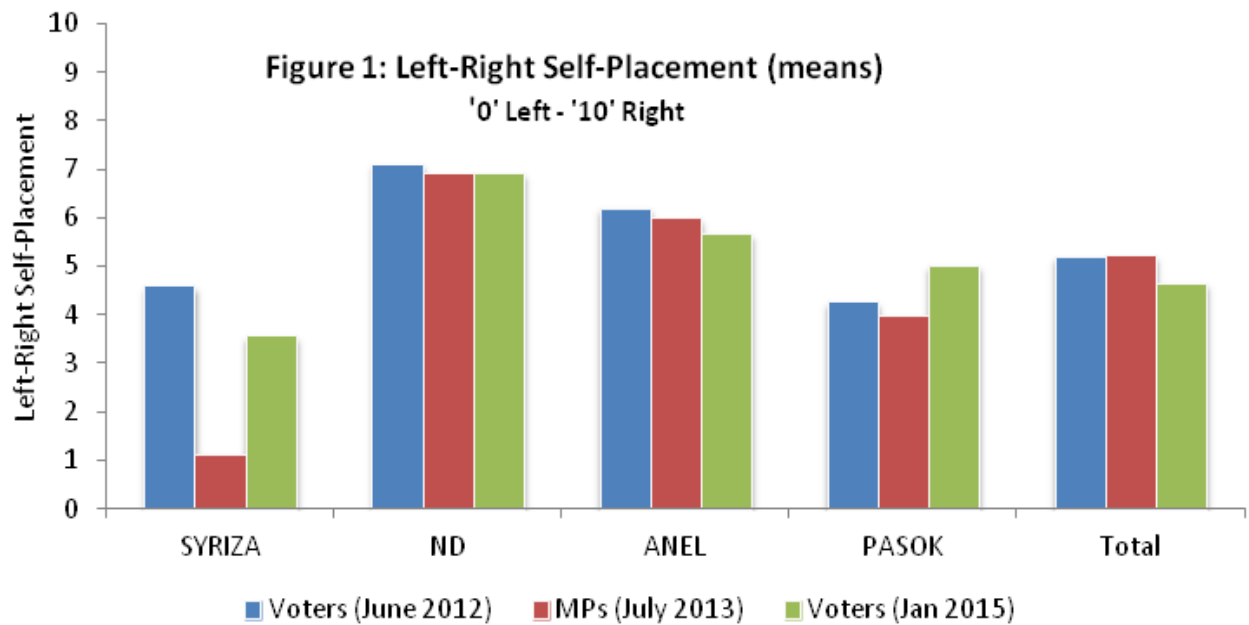
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He is co-editor (with Roman Gerodimos) of The Politics of Extreme Austerity: Greece in the Eurozone Crisis (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) available at <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/the-politics-of-extreme-austerity-georgios-karyotis/?isbn=9781137369222>

Table 1: Election Results in Greece, 2009-2015

Party	General Election Oct 2009	General Election May 2012	General Election June 2012	European Election May 2014	General Election Jan 2015	General Election Sept 2015
Syriza (radical left)	4.6	16.8	26.9	26.6	36.3	35.5
New Democracy (centre right)	33.5	18.9	29.7	22.7	27.8	29.1
Golden Dawn (extreme right)	0.3	7.0	6.9	9.4	6.3	7.0
The River (centre)	-	-	-	6.6	6.1	4.1
KKE (communist)	7.5	8.5	4.5	6.1	5.5	5.5
Independent Greeks (far right)	-	10.6	7.5	3.5	4.8	3.4
PASOK (centre left)	43.9	13.2	12.3	8.0	4.7	6.3
Centrist Union (centre)	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.7	1.8	3.4
LAOS (far right)	5.6	2.9	1.6	2.7	1.0	-
DIMAR (social democrats)	-	6.1	6.3	1.2	0.5	*included in PASOK ballot
Popular Unity (extreme left)	-	-	-	-	-	2.9



10+1 Lessons From the Greek Elections of September 2015: The Prevalence of Nationalist Populism

The outcome of the Greek election was surprising for pollsters but not for voters. What transcends from the way the new parliament and consequent government configuration looks like is that nationalist populism—the amazing new trend in Greek politics since January 2015—is here to stay. This piece is a personal understanding of the outcome in the form of take-home lessons after the fifth electoral contest since the start of the Greek crisis back in 2009.

1. Nationalist populism is the ‘new black’ of Greek political fashion.

The continued and predefined cooperation between Syriza and Independent Greeks has created a new political fashion in Greek politics in the form of nationalist populism: the electorate drafts of populism and blame-shifting strategies from the far left and the far right, all converging towards a plan to create a public discourse reflective of this new trend.

2. The pro- and anti-memorandum cleavage is a myth

When Syriza first started to muster electoral support, it created a new social cleavage by dividing society in those who supported the bailout agreement and those who were against the loss of fiscal sovereignty to the Troika institutions. With this particular platform, Syriza managed to win the elections of 2015 and the subsequent referendum. Yet, the coalition government, once joined by their firm placement on the anti-memorandum axis, ended up signing a third memorandum agreement despite the popular call against it. These elections proved that this cleavage was a construct that can no longer be supported.

3. Yet, the coalition makes sense.

This coalition is no longer an ideological creation. It is rather an expression of the amalgamated profile of the Greek voter fuelled by ambivalence in political direction and following a merged nationalist populist agenda. It is a smart coalition nonetheless, since it captures well competing elements of the psyche of the Greek voter: on the one hand, torn by economic crisis and a crisis of political values, and on the other, embracing an unwavering underdog culture that emerges as national pride. The common ground of this coalition is a social welfare protection agenda with nationalist and xenophobic references.

4. The party is now clean.

What emerged from the calling of a snap election was the fact that the real reason was hiding in the internal tear-up of Syriza. Plenty of internal voices were overtly against the new agreement and decided to go their own way. Following the election, the much-discussed Popular Unity [LAE] party emerging out of Syriza's internal factions failed to make the threshold to gain parliamentary representation. Hence, Tsipras emerged stronger than ever within his own party, fully mainstreaming its profile to appeal to a wider segment of Greek society.

5. Yet, low turnout signals disengagement and electoral fatigue.

For a country that observes mandatory voting, more than 4 out of 10 did not turn out to vote. These consecutive calls to the polls since January 2015 elections are perceived as an open manipulation of the popular mandate and democratic processes to buy out time until a dignified political exit. It is in the author's opinion that Tsipras never expected this success, yet the electorate don't give him the chance to make an easy escape.

6. The political stability of the Greek bailout programme is still fragile.

With a fragile majority of five MPs, the coalition is open to political scaremongering. The dissident voices within Syriza have not been completely silenced. Moreover, this time around the leading opposition parties may not be as willing to back the government for the tough austerity measures put forward, as the electoral stakes are too high for a number of targeted social groups (e.g. farmers).

7. Social democracy is practically in a comatose condition.

The new bipolar space developing between New Democracy and Syriza preserves Greek politics on the side of the extreme, where voters are pulled apart and cannot converge towards the centre. Despite PASOK picking up a few more votes and seats in the new parliament, the crisis stigma attached to it cannot allow it to recover. That leaves a number of voters politically homeless and in a state of limbo. This may also explain the low turnout.

8. Greek voters are not as radical as once thought.

Greek voters have fully acclimatized themselves in the new political space. Syriza is no longer an expression of the radical vote. Generally speaking, radicalism seems to slow down in Greece, otherwise the newly formed Popular Unity and its radical agenda would have made it to parliament.

9. Yet another new fraction of party emerged.

The otherwise old Centrist Union party is the new political formation to first enter the Greek parliament this time. Slightly a political farce, this party has been trying to get into parliament for the last 25 years. The leader is a well-known fringe political figure of highly populist rhetoric, often the subject of political satire.

10. Much ado about nothing; much of the same, and creating 'mini-me's.

The composition of the new parliament does not look massively different than nine months ago. However, its members are far more subdued or even disillusioned because the margin of deliberation for the type of policies that is to come under the new agreement is thinning down. Thus, the parliament has decreased its institutional role in Greek politics, as the executive is no longer afraid of a vote of 'no confidence.'

Bonus lesson: Greek politics seems perennial in terms of populism.

This new beast of nationalist populism is here to stay as a way of distracting the voters from the real issues and a desire to return to the status quo prior to the crisis.

* * *

Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos is Lecturer in European Politics, University of Surrey, and a member of the Advisory Committee of the GPSG

Is It the Economy (Again), Stupid?

Of the three main axes of political and electoral competition, the oldest one, the left-right axis, is the least important. Why is that? Greek citizens, who feel that they are over-taxed and under-served, believe they should pay fewer taxes and receive better quality public services. In other words, while they suffer the ills of both systems (socialist high taxes and liberalist low public services), they demand the systems' beneficial sides (socialist high quality services and liberalist low taxes). They ask for public universities, postgraduate studies free of charge, a vigorous health care system, and public infrastructures without suffering high taxes.

Since all parties promise such policies, the competition along the left-right axis is not important. While this appears to be an obvious contradiction, it is, in fact, not: being aware that such policies are impossible to realise, citizens do not ask for equal treatment for all, but only for beneficial treatment of themselves or their social class. Thus we end up with a clientelistic party system that favours the demands of some social groups, but not all, as they would be incapable to honour their promises to all sides after coming into power. And considering that left-wing parties received 53% of the votes (previously 53%) while the right-wing parties scored 47% (previously 47%), this kind of polarisation seems to have had no effect on the outcome of the election.

The competition along the liberal-authoritarian axis of social policies is of much greater significance, but, despite increased polarization, it does not affect the election outcome.. While most of the parties promise a liberal policy, they implement an authoritarian one. Every citizen respects the social and individual rights of the other, as long as it does not hurt them personally!

The data analysis of a sample of half a million citizens collected with the use of the VAA (Voting Advice Application) helpmevote.gr for the previous elections reveal the competition along the axis of governance as being more important. One pole of the axis expresses a peculiar egalitarian populism which asks for national isolationism. This is expressed by statements such as "it would be better if we had a national currency", "ordinary people are better than politicians", "the parties don't care about us", and "it is legal for us to do whatever is right for us".

The opposite pole of the axis expresses a European political spirit of cooperation. Without generally being in agreement with political parties' views, voters for Syriza, the Communist Party [KKE], the Golden Dawn, Independent Greeks [ANEL] and ANTARSYA concentrate on the pole of national isolationism, while voters from New Democracy, PASOK, The River [To Potami], Democratic Left [DIMAR] and KIDISO congregate on the European cooperation pole. This was indeed the main issue of the elections: a strange egalitarian national isolationism without ideological background, against an equally non-ideological pluralistic European approach. In this framework, people voted for the parties not because of their manifestos, which they do not trust, but because of their so-called 'hidden agenda'.

Since the electoral system is designed to support a one-party government, it is very difficult for a coalition government to emerge out of it; another reason is the multifarious (almost contradictory) nature of the ideologies that coexist inside each of the poles. The fragmented party system tries to find a balance between a rock and a hard place, as it consists of parties that in the best-case scenario show no inclination to cooperate, while in the worst-case scenario resort to blackmailing tactics.

In the 2012 elections, the 'European perspective' parties got some 53% of the votes, while the parties of egalitarian nationalism got 47%. Today (2015) the situation is reversed: they received 47% and 53% of the votes respectively. So is it the economy stupid? Definitely yes! But in line with 'votes for favours' the exchange model becomes one of 'selfish economics'.

* * *

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Syriza's Victory And the Main Divides of the Party System

The coalition government of Syriza and Independent Greeks [ANEL] in January 2015 showed that the left-right divide of the Greek party system has weakened further under the fierce conditions of the economic crisis. A new pro-/anti-austerity debate was born over which parties competed instead. However, with Syriza, the previously biggest anti-austerity movement in Greece, signing the third Memorandum in spite of the 'No' vote in the referendum, one wonders why they are still the biggest party and what the purpose is of remaining in a coalition with a right-wing party.

The answer is the powerful combination of features that Syriza developed during these years: representing the new, the 'forced-to-be' pro-austerity, and the pro-European.

The Old vs. the New

The main reason behind the success of Syriza is the effective use of the growing old/new political system divide in the Greek party system. A falling combined vote of PASOK and New Democracy along with a significant decline in popular trust in the national political institutions showed that the power of the old two-partism started decreasing before the crisis began. Syriza capitalised on the public discontent with the old political system and promoted further the division between the old and the new in Greek politics. It therefore tried to represent a new political power which was not associated with the scandals, the corruption and the elitism of the past.

The popular dissatisfaction with the old political system was that high that a U-turn by Syriza on the most salient issue of austerity was not enough to halt the party's performance. As Syriza's current coalition partner, Independent Greeks, is also a part of the new non-corrupted political system, Mr Tsipras stated that he could even co-operate with PASOK, as long as the latter let certain 'old-PASOK' members go. As a result, the main message of Syriza's pre-election campaign "Let's get rid of the old" is what Greek people wanted to hear the most.

Pro-austerity vs. Forced-to-be Pro-Austerity

The pro-/anti-austerity divide was particularly strong from the beginning of the crisis until the 2015 January election. Nevertheless, Syriza's re-election proved that this debate has taken an interesting turn. While in opposition, Syriza praised its anti-bailout profile, but when in office it turned into the government to sign the third bailout package. However, the difference with the previous government of New Democracy and PASOK, who favoured similar deals, is that Syriza 'did not fall without fighting'. Mr Tsipras presented the failed negotiations with the European actors as the ultimate struggle against the European elites, who blackmailed the country. After months of discussions with Europe, several impressive talks given by the former Minister of Economics, Yanis Varoufakis, and a controversial referendum, Syriza appeared themselves as left with no more weapons to fight. Independent Greeks also followed the same logic when signing the austerity deal.

Indeed, Syriza's approach to the European partners at least in the beginning of the negotiations seemed much different than its precedents, who seemed more willing to accept the austerity deals. Syriza argued that, in the end, they were forced to sign the Memorandum, and Greek people liked to hear that the new political power 'did not give up without a fight'.

The European Issue

The pro-/anti-European divide also played an interesting role in shaping party competition since Syriza started growing. Although it was relatively weakened from 2010 until 2012, Syriza's rise led other parties, and most importantly New Democracy, to present Syriza as an anti-European force which would put Greece's EU and Euro membership in danger. This pattern was particularly visible in New Democracy's pre-election campaign in January 2015, but also in the referendum. Syriza's main opponent developed a discourse of fear in case Syriza won the elections, and in case Greek voters opted against the bailout package in the referendum. In both instances, the European issue gained significant ground as parties rushed to position themselves among the pro-/anti-European and pro-/ anti-drachma arguments.

Nevertheless, once again Syriza followed what most Greek people supported. As a constantly pro-European power, Syriza ended any claims about leading the country out of the Euro by accepting the third Memorandum. In what can be considered as a particularly smart move, Syriza managed to sign a bailout agreement without losing its popular appeal. And this could only be achieved by a party that featured these three components: distancing itself from the old political system, presenting itself as a fighter against Europe, and yet remaining pro-European.

* * *

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An earlier version of this article appeared in the EUROPPE blog of the London School of Economics (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2015/09/24/greek-elections-how-syriza-managed-to-sign-a-bailout-agreement-yet-retain-its-support-base/>).

The Hellenic Parliament by Duncan Rawlinson



Abstention and Stockholm Syndrome Paradoxically Combined

As many journalists report, the two big winners of the September elections are Tsipras and abstention. However, while several factors can explain both why voters gave Tsipras a second chance and why a big part of the electorate decided to abstain, it might seem less obvious how these two victories could be combined. Results indicate that the party's supporters are likely to be divided between those who preferred abstaining from punishing Tsipras with a Popular Union [LAE] vote and those who remained faithful to Tsipras' discourse of "hope".

Abstention: the non-punitive electoral behaviour

If we look at the abstention rate of last Sunday's elections, the figures speak for themselves: about 45% of voters abstained from the electoral process. The voter turnout has steadily kept getting lower over the last years. Nearly 55% of the electorate participated in the September elections, compared to 63.62% who took part in the January 2015 elections (65.12% and 62.49% in the double elections of 2012). Going back to the pre-electoral context, two main factors could possibly account for the high abstention rate: the post-referendum disillusionment and the similarity of the pre-electoral campaigns across parties.

First, the victory of the "No to austerity" vote was in practice meaningless as No turned into a Yes in a matter of hours. It basically demonstrated that a democratic process can and will be bypassed if it does not serve the overall interests of the dominant political and economic discourse of the European leadership. This can be seen a severe blow to democracy as it unfortunately reinforced the belief in many citizens that there is no point in voting in a country with very limited decision-making powers. Consequently, when snap elections were announced, Syriza supporters were still recovering from the post-referendum shock and were tempted to turn their backs on the party by sticking to their original anti-austerity demands. Therefore, it is safe to argue that a vast majority of the Greek electorate was already viewing September elections with cynicism and contempt.

Second, what made voters equally indecisive was that all pre-electoral programmes were drafted in the shadow of the third memorandum's upcoming implementation which left parties with very limited room for maneuver. Even if differences on education or immigration issues could still be decrypted from their campaigning messages, most parties were arguing along similar lines on economic and financial issues: they were simply trying to make the memorandum's future implementation look softer.

Stockholm syndrome: the traumatic-bonding electoral behaviour

The famous pre-electoral campaign slogan in January 2015 was "Hope is coming" and, subsequently, "Hope begins today". So far, "hope" never came. According to the dictionary definition, the Stockholm syndrome is "*the psychological tendency of a hostage to bond with, identify with, or sympathise with his or her captor*". Therefore, after being traumatised, Syriza voters might have developed this kind of sympathy with their captor. After all, optimism is inherent to human nature and the party's supporters might still feel the need to keep faith in the idea of "hope". But this is something different. And it can be, more accurately, interpreted as the victory of "the need for hope" instead of the victory of "hope" per se.

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The Repetition of a Foretold Political Crisis

Without a doubt, the elections of 20 September 2015 brought some changes to the political landscape of the Greek parliament, and as a result, to Greek society. Briefly:

1. Consolidation of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PaSoK) in parliament, with 6.28%.
2. Consolidation of Golden Dawn in the third place with 6.99%.
3. An electoral dynamic of political parties that had never had any solid traditional electoral base, which entered the parliament for the first time, such as the Union of Centrists, with 3.43%.
4. A direct rejection by the voters to the transition from the Euro to drachma as a national currency. Indeed, the radical party of Popular Unity, which seceded from the Syriza just before the elections and evangelises the adoption of drachma as a national currency, in an economic-social framework of centrally planned economy and mass nationalisations, gained only 2.86% and did not take a seat in parliament.
5. However, the primary qualitative characteristic of the result of the current election is the increased percentage of abstention, which reached the historic record of 43.4%, which does not leave any room for optimism and complacency in the Greek political system, which wiggles between old-fashioned party tactics and innovative experimentations.
6. Finally, another major characteristic of the results is that they came to formally confirm the socio-political tendency of neo-Mithridatism emerging in Greek society, which reflects its gradual compromise with the politics of medium-term austerity measures. Indeed, the results of the elections of September 20th are marked by Syriza's clear victory with 35.46%, a 6.3% difference to the second centre-right New Democracy (ND). The electorate mandated Syriza and assigned his government the responsibility to implement the 3rd MoU, which passed from the Greek parliament two months ago with a wide majority of votes, proposed by the previous Syriza- Independent Greeks (ANEL) government. The government that emerged from the elections is not a new one. It is a close-knit continuation of the seven-month coalition government of Syriza-ANEL, which suffered the political shock of having to implement a policy in which it never truly believed.

Certainly, on a governmental level, Syriza's political recipe is repeated with the coalition with the right-wing, conservative, ex-anti-Memorandum party of ANEL, which cumulatively reaches 155 seats, (145 and 10), in order to form a government in parliament, while their previous seven-month coalition government had gained 162 seats (149 and 13).

On a political level, Syriza-ANEL's previous government was the one which passed the fierce anti-social program of the 3rd MoU, while its current one is under the obligation to implement it. Given the recent political experience, 155 seats are not adequate for a stable and effective government, particularly considering the difficult decisions that it is called to ratify.

Consequently, the new government, *inter alia*, will repeat the same tactic of addressing the Greek parliament, asking once again for the support of the other pro-memorandum political parties in order to sanction the implementation laws of the third the 3rd MoU towards liberalisation, as Syriza's parliamentary team is not adequate due to the strong internal ideological obsessions and political differences.

More specifically, while the previous government resorted to elections due to the ideological and political conflicts with a number of its radical left components, with Left Platform as a spearhead, the current

one is expected to be shaken by the group of the '53' radicals, triggering a severe governmental and political crisis. The aforementioned group consists of former and current members of Syriza's Central Committee, Parliamentary and Euro-Parliamentary teams, and had communicated to the Prime Minister Tsipras its complete and direct opposition to the ratification of the implementation laws of the 3rd MoU. Their power in the Greek parliament comes to 10 seats and is remarkably represented in the government with three of its members, including the Minister of Finance, Euklides Tsakalotos, who has to lead the revisionist policy and promote a programme of further financial cutbacks for the Greeks.

Consequently, the key question for the longevity of the current government is whether it will be able to contain the loss rate more successfully than the previous one, a task that, given its marginal majority of 155 seats, is initially considered unlikely, thus leading to the possibility of a new round of elections, *grosso modo*, in the same manner as the ones of 20th September. Indeed, if the government coalition is not reinforced with the addition of a third party-partner, this should not just be considered likely, but certain. Otherwise, Syriza's inherent centrifugal tendency is about to become, once again, the primary focus of political distress, and possibly political crisis, which may eventually lead to an irreversible loss of the popular affirmation for the second time in a short period, jeopardising Greece's stay in the Euro-zone.

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II

Part 2

Alexis Tsipras and the Populist Paradigm

Tsipras Trounces His Opponents – But At What Cost?

In the latest episode of the seemingly never-ending Greek crisis, the election of September 20th marked another decisive victory for Syriza – and especially for its leader, Alexis Tsipras. His call to hold snap elections turned out to be a masterstroke of Machiavellian political ingenuity.

On the one hand, Tsipras managed a very efficient move to get rid of his internal opposition without even facing them in public. On the other hand, he saved face over his anti-austerity u-turn and now has legitimacy to implement three more years of harsh austerity to which he agreed before the elections. That means Tsipras's power is now more assured than ever, and his popularity clearly intact.

Still, one could argue that Tsipras' victory was rather pyrrhic. The elections show the highest abstention rate in Greece's modern history, with almost half of eligible voters not turning out. This shows the disappointment of many voters as well as their silent acceptance that there is no alternative to austerity and implies that almost half of the Greeks do not feel that any of the existing parties represents them.

Greece is still coming off a prolonged period of reform inertia and political instability. That turbulence can be traced back to Syriza's victory in the 2014 European elections, after which the Samaras government did little to implement much needed reforms for fear of unpopularity. Then the economy almost stalled after Syriza's win in January 2015, while the imposition of capital controls dramatically undermined economic stability and confidence both within and outside Greece on economic recovery.

But the worst is yet to come. The new government will have to implement a series of unpopular measures such as pension and labour market reforms, privatisations, liberalisation of professions and other structural reforms in healthcare and public administration that will alienate key parts of the Greek electorate.

Still, Tsipras has proven to be a remarkable political maverick. He is greatly skilled in electioneering, and his natural charisma keeps him very popular among Greeks (especially younger ones). It remains to be seen how his transformation from a hard-left radical to a pro-austerity premier will turn out, but so far, he has escaped punishment from the electorate despite reneging on almost all of his pre-2015 promises.

One may argue that Tsipras faces considerable danger to turn into an unpopular leader as soon as austerity hits Greek voters. As Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan*, "where men build on false grounds, the more they build, the greater is the ruin".

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Is Alexis Tsipras Still the Charismatic Leader of a Populist Party?

Syriza has just won the second national election in a row. Many had predicted its victory, but not to this extent. Syriza won with 35,5% of the votes, having a 7.4% margin from the second party, losing only 1%, 4 seats and 300,000 votes, after signing a new Memorandum of Understanding with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, having led the country to its first referendum in the last 40 years and having suffered a split which led to the formation of the Popular Unity party.

Many had attributed the January success of Syriza to the populist discourse and strategy that the party and its leader had adopted. But is this element still present in the current discourse of the party?

I will quote a couple of expressions from a speech of Alexis Tsipras in Keratsini during his campaign. Tsipras sets Syriza against the “restoration of the old system” while he noted that “each day that passes Greek people unite with Syriza”. The people, he said, will give Syriza a strong parliamentary majority in order to get rid of “the supporters of the lenders in our country, the representatives of the interests of the oligarchy and of corruption”. And then he continued: “We are not accountable to the oligarchy, we are accountable only to the big social majority, to the low and middle social strata, the poor, the unemployed”. Finally, Tsipras said, “once again we go into this battle alone against all of them. We will eliminate them or they will eliminate us”.

In my opinion, in these quotes we can find some crucial elements of populism as it is described by Ernesto Laclau and the Essex School in general, namely the centrality of the signifier of people, the construction of the popular subject, the construction of a chain of equivalence, the construction of an enemy and the division of the social space into two antagonistic camps.

Many scholars of populism also stress the importance of the leader. In the literature of populism we find references to charismatic leaders or leaders with an unmediated relationship with the people. This victory of Syriza is mainly attributed to Tsipras himself. In the main TV spot of Syriza, the message was “On Sunday we vote for the Prime Minister”. It is a rather personal win. This is something that is admitted by the Greek and European press but also by pollsters and even political adversaries of Tsipras. The so-called “Tsipras gamble” ended up with a big win for him. He took a strong mandate for his political and governmental strategy. Concerning the unmediated relationship with the people, it suffices to say that shortly before the elections he lost 25 MPs and approximately half of the central committee of the party. And yet Syriza won a resounding victory, with dissidents not reaching the necessary threshold to enter into parliament. Tsipras seems to speak directly to the people, surpassing the organisation and structures of the party, as a populist leader can do.

I believe that populism, in general, presents some differences before and after the assumption of power, especially in the case of Eurozone members where the economic policy is at large predetermined, which poses great challenges to a populist party. But Syriza and Tsipras are still presenting strong populist elements so we can still speak about populism in power.

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The Consolidation of Neoliberal Populism

After having observed three elections in seven months, there are at least two significant new developments within the Greek political system to note. First, a parliamentary manifestation of Latin American presidential-style neoliberalism and neo-populist synergy has made its way to the Eastern Mediterranean. Second, it is clear that Alexis Tsipras is now the uncontested dominant actor in Greek politics and he has achieved and is busy consolidating that power by using the Latin American playbook. For instance, the 'mandate' achieved in Sunday's election was partly due to the de-politicisation and demobilisation of a large segment of the population, who stayed home rather than going to the polls in historic numbers.

Mr Tsipras is also consolidating power by creating a government composed of safe-bets reappointed to the bailout-linked ministries, and a combination of loyalist cronies and the anti-establishment fringe actors in the rest. He has rejected of any type of grand coalition of Eurocentric forces in favour of repeating the Syriza-ANEL alliance, with Mr Leventis' television democracy waiting in the wings, and enhanced his reliance on family members and friends; maneuvers that are all reminiscent of the tactics employed by Menem, Fujimore and Collor. Unfortunately, the absence of new and competent faces also speaks volumes about his lack of commitment to improving governance.

The similarities with Latin American presidential neo-populism of the 1990s are remarkable. The July referendum's result of a resounding "Oxi" [No] and subsequent reversal of policy to "Nai" [Yes], the cleansing of party lists of Lafazanis and Konstantopoulou, among others, deemed to have created problems for the administration, and the fact that this election was conducted through a closed-list has allowed Mr Tsipras to create a personalistic plebiscitarian system similar to those of Menem's Argentina, Fujimore's Peru, and Collor's Brazil. In much the same way that Latin American neoliberal populists of the 1990s relied on charismatic leaders and the depoliticisation of society to implement harsh neo-liberal economic reforms at high cost to the most economically vulnerable sectors of society, Tsipras is moving ahead with the newest Memorandum in Greece.

The fact that Syriza was re-elected with nearly the same percent of the vote and difference from its nearest contender, despite the complete reversal of policy versus party platform and its mistake-filled, turbulent tenure in government, is likely evidence that Tsipras has consolidated a stable enough core of support and eliminated enough opposition to continue on with the thorniest issues on the reform agenda, including pension reform.

The results of the latest election can best be understood when viewed as a result of a process that started with Papandreou's election in 2009. Successive Greek governments have sought a conduit to implement policies for which a majority of the electorate agrees are necessary, yet which have been difficult, if not completely unacceptable, for any political party to advocate.

Any number of polls conducted over the last few years have confirmed the fact that an overwhelming majority wants Greece to remain in the Euro, but reject austerity, so in a sort of electoral schizophrenia, the demonisation of European agreements has become the formula for electoral success.

The emergence of a parliamentary form of neoliberal populism with Tsipras not only has significance within the context of democratic theory, but importantly, his emergence allows the Eurozone-inspired economic reforms to be applied despite their bitter taste, and has destabilised his electoral opposition which, by pedigree, has to support his policies. Politics, as usual in Greece, has been suspended in favour of economic imperatives.

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Alexis Tsipras by Lorenzo Gaudenzi

It's Time For Tsipras To Govern

The U-turn of Tsipras' strategy after the latest Greek referendum was seen by many as a return to a reality of calculated pragmatism. Many put his decision for a snap election into the framework of a much needed new mandate. Although in contemporary representative democracy there is recognition of the necessity to use democratic procedures for the enhancement of stability and deliberation among people, the result of the latest election is not justifying these arguments. In fact, it seems as if this election was a massive intra-party clearance for Syriza and a liberation of Tsipras from various obstacles.

The new government will be once again based upon the Syriza-ANEL coalition, only this time with an even weaker parliamentary majority. The new assembly consists of MPs not directly voted in by the people, but elected by a closed list which based their ranking order upon several partisan preconditions, most importantly the notion that they already agree to the forthcoming policies they will have to legislate. MPs no longer possess the argument that voters preferred them over other candidates due to their personal stance towards the negotiation, the referendum, the memorandums etc. Therefore, it is not the quantitative loss (number of MPs) but the persona synthesis that will define the strength of the coalition.

Tsipras' decision to reconcile with Europe has been met with disappointment from many people who voted No in the referendum but even those frustrated citizens have not abandoned Syriza. Despite his U-turn, and with a wounded party, he managed to retain his position and gained immense justification power, while he got rid of old-school opponents inside and outside Syriza. Nevertheless, the Syriza result of 35% is not related to a radical 'leftisation' of the Greek society, and this is proven by the failure of Popular Unity [LAE] to reach the necessary 3%. With the radical part of Syriza gone, Tsipras can pursue a resilient partisan version more compatible to the voters' orientation.

Tsipras proved that he wants to keep governing Greece far more than being a respected established leftist leader. As a political figure, he gathers a vast amount of political investment fulfilling a leadership role for which he has been preparing for a long time. Most importantly, he knows he can 'penetrate' the masses in a fragmented political scenery with no other appealing leadership personalities.

The next few months will define if Syriza can sustain its appeal to the social masses during the harsh infliction of new measures. Tsipras has promised to embark on social restructuring in favour of an ever-growing base of low-income masses to counterbalance austerity. The success of this effort is questionable under the explosive pressures of refugee immigration, unemployment, banks in need of capitalisation, a sinking market and a stagnated business climate. It is time for Tsipras to actively pursue a more productive profile. It has been far too long that people have waited for him to demonstrate his governing rather than his political talents and abilities. With no internal obstacles and distractions, no excuses are justified, neither by the people nor by his counterparts in Europe.

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III

Part 3

Framing the Election, Maximising the Audience

Out With the 'Anti-Memorandum', In With the 'New'

Since Syriza's rise to power in January 2015, a new landscape has rapidly emerged in Greek politics. Greek political parties have had to reshape their messages on the road to these elections. The shifts in the parties' discourse in the September elections can be highlighted through an overview of the scheme we have suggested in our previous works on party and journalist discourse in the 'period of crisis', in which three sets of opposing identifications (comparable to Laclau and Mouffe's 'antagonisms' and to the classic Lipset and Rokkan's 'cleavages') were seen as providing an encompassing scheme for the ways through which Greek opinion leaders tried to direct their audiences toward one choice or another.

These were:

1. **Left vs Right** - already in wide circulation in Greek politics since mid-1940s.
2. **Modernisation vs Populism** - identifiable in Greek politics at least since the 1974 transition to democracy [*Metapolitefsi*], if not much earlier.
3. **Anti-Memorandum vs Pro-Memorandum** – merging as an effective slogan in the years of the crisis, partially substituting the populist reaction to the previous period of economic welfare, which is usually conceived as the 'modernisation period'.

The pre-electoral discourse of all parties seems to have moved through modifications of one or more identification sets. Syriza downplayed their earlier extensive use of the 'anti-Memorandum' frame in favour of their key electoral slogan "We are getting over with the old. We are earning the new" (replacing the original slogan of "[We] Only [Move] Forward"), whereas its brand as the 'first government of the Left' remained strongly present in the party's discourse just like before the elections.

As for Syriza's main opponent, New Democracy, and its new conciliatory leader, who accused Syriza as a neo-Memorandum party, their pre-electoral period began with an effort to present themselves as 'combining the old and the new', whereas their main pre-electoral slogan, "Greece Forward", was respectively combining the right-wing reference to 'Greece' with the new.

Popular Unity's [LAE] (Syriza's splinter faction) and Independent Greeks' [ANEL] (Syriza's right-wing populist ally) strong insistence on the 'anti-Memorandum' frame does not seem to have earned them a wide audience, whereas neo-Nazi Golden Dawn's mixture of 'anti-Memorandum' and simpler populism received some gains, as is the case with the Communist Party's [KKE] simple persisting 'pro-people' discourse.

In the case of centre-left parties, The River's [To Potami] turn to an old-fashioned modernisation discourse seems to have alienated its young voters, whereas PASOK's insistence on a similar line seems to have had limited gains if one considers the absence of Papandreou's rival KIDISO from these elections. Finally, increased support for the caricature party of Centrist Union [Enosi Kentroon], whose actual views most of its voters did probably not know, suggests a turn of the Greek protest vote towards milder expressions, possibly at a certain distance from clear-cut populism.

Consequently, a retreat of the force of the 'anti-Memorandum' identification in favour of a milder modernisation of the 'New' seems to have taken place in the voters' attitudes, whereas simpler populism has had limited gains out of the 'anti-Memorandum's' fall, and more conventional appeals to modernisation seem to have remained unattractive. Therefore, Greek society seems to have come to terms with the age of the Memorandum and to have started to engage with how to move on in this new

environment. As concerns traditional left-right politics and slogans, they seem to have retained their socio-political force in the background of the trends that are recorded at the level of discourse.

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Official account of the Greek Prime Minister on [Flickr](#)

Perception Matters

On January 25th 2015, Syriza pledged to abolish the Memorandum and received 36.4%, forming a coalition government with the anti-bailout right-wing party of Independent Greeks [ANEL]. On September 20th, SYRIZA pledged to implement the third Memorandum, that it had adopted a few weeks ago, and received 35.5% forming again a coalition government with the pro-bailout (this time) party of Independent Greeks. Why?

The main reason is the perception of Syriza's voters about the party. Although Tsipras pledged to end the Memorandum in January, it seems that only few of his voters actually believed him. It is indicative that Syriza lost only 320,000 voters compared to the previous elections, the majority of whom chose to abstain. A rather significant part of Syriza's electoral base considered Syriza, as opinion polls in January suggested, as a centre-left party able to ease the austerity terms of the bailout plan rather than a left-wing party willing to scrap it.

Despite the fact that the third memorandum is harsher than the previous two, the majority of the electorate seems to have perceived it differently, given that the new austerity package has not yet been implemented. Consequently, the public considered Tsipras as the best negotiator to resist more effectively the demands of the Troika, rejecting the view that the former ND-PASOK coalition would have achieved a better deal and negotiated more efficiently. Furthermore, as indicated by opinion polls published in July, the majority of Syriza supporters seem to hold the European partners accountable for the deterioration of the economy due to the capital controls and the closed banks, rather than Tsipras and his government.

In parallel, the honeymoon effect has facilitated the dominance of the party of the Radical Left. With only eight months since the previous election won by Syriza, its voters, having rejected the previous political establishment of New Democracy (ND) and PASOK, were not ready to get rid of it. Lastly, ND, despite the popularity of its new leader Evangelos Meimarakis, failed to alter the image of the 'hard-core' pro-Memorandum party trying to convince that it could implement the programme while protecting the weak.

As a result, Greek voters chose the party they considered as the most capable to combine the implementation of the memorandum while renegotiating its terms in order to defend the most vulnerable. It is notable that among the poorest regions of the country and in those where the No vote in the referendum was higher, Syriza enjoyed its highest electoral support.

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Framing the Question

In January 2015 Syriza won the elections based upon an anti-austerity campaign. After intense haggling, severe negotiations and a chaotic showdown with Greece's creditors, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras had to cave in to the latter's demands by accepting a new package consisting of budget cuts, tax hikes and privatisations of Greek state assets for an additional loan of 86 billion Euros. This loan was imperative for Greece's urgent need to reduce the damage caused by the havoc of the previous months in which banks were closed, to reopen the banks and to avert defaulting on its loans. Tsipras' U-turn, nevertheless, came at a high political price, since more than two dozens of Syriza's deputies abandoned him by claiming that he betrayed his anti-austerity principles. This evolution forced Tsipras to call for snap elections in order to consolidate his power within the party by getting the rebels off his back and reinforcing his position as the dominant player on Greece's fractured political scene. At the same time, the vast majority of Syriza's rebels formed their own party, named Popular Unity [LAE], and campaigned in the run-up to the election, urging a return to the drachma rather than an acceptance of new austerity measures.

Many believed that Tsipras' U-turn in signing a painful austerity deal with the country's creditors, a week after he had called a referendum to reject it, would cost him dear. Defying many experts' and pollsters' predictions of a tight race between his party and the right-wing main opposition party, New Democracy, Alexis Tsipras pulled off another gamble as he emerged victorious in the recent election. The voters renewed his mandate to lead the country, this time as a prime minister committed to supporting a bail-out rather than to fighting one. LAE did not even get into the parliament and the newly reformed Syriza, discharged from its radical elements, seems likely to encounter fewer objections to carrying out Greece's third bailout.

Given the severe character of the austerity measures provisioned in the third bailout agreement, how did Tsipras slam another electoral victory? Throughout his electoral campaign he sought to distract people's attention from the content of the bailout that he was forced to accept. Despite their disappointment on his U-turn, the majority of people saw in the person of Tsipras well-intended efforts to alter Greece's relationship with the creditors and to ease the pain of the austerity policies that had been pursued in the country during the last years. Rather than drawing attention to the painful measures that the programme entails, Tsipras pledged to crack down on Greece's homegrown domestic malignancies (in his words, to "get rid of the wickedness and the regime of corruption and intertwined interests").

In this context, he managed to successfully frame the stakes of these elections as the clash between the 'old establishment' – that led the country to the current impasse and that was politically embodied by PASOK and New Democracy – and the 'new', as represented by Syriza. Thus, the voters were called to terminate the 'restoration' of Greece's traditional parties which were blamed for bringing Greece onto the brink of bankruptcy. Adding to this, portraying himself detached from the vested interests and privileges of the 'past', he promised that austerity reforms would be implemented in a more just fashion by Syriza than by the main opposition. The result explains that this framing worked out unexpectedly well.

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Volatile Voters and Volatile Spectators: the New TV Context on Election Night

The election night of the 20th September 2015 confirms what Peter Kellner argued in The Guardian, that “normal people are less predictable than political junkies think”. We suggest that the most recent Greek elections highlight three important issues: (a) the volatility of the Greek electorate partly as a result of a gradually looser partisan consistency, (b) the inability of the current methodological tools used for polling to predict voting behavior and, (c) the crystallisation of a new context in the Greek TV domain based on a volatile television audience.

Once again (following the broadcasting of the January 2015 elections and the referendum results on the 5th of July 2015), the two ‘traditional’ big players in news broadcasting, MEGA channel and ANT1 were outscored by their rivals in terms of audience measurements during the presentation of the electoral results and the subsequent political discussions. Their longstanding primacy of audience share has now been taken over by two other equally well established private TV channels, ALPHA and STAR.

In all three recent elections, the two former dominant TV channels – placed on the top of TV ratings in both information and entertainment content for many years – did not manage to occupy any of the two first places, with the exception of MEGA on the night of the referendum, when it was placed second. In all other cases MEGA channel came third, while ANT1 – scoring even lower – came fourth in the January 2015 elections, and sixth (among a total of six channels) in the referendum and September 2015 elections’ night.

In this context, we witness the reshuffle of the Greek political realm to be replicated in the TV field, not only in terms of an existing undergoing ‘power restructure’ but also regarding the rationale of this restructure. The emerging players in news broadcasting are not newly established media, but already well established TV channels that surfaced due to the lack of trust that the audiences demonstrated towards the former TV ‘bipartisanism’ of MEGA and ANT1.

Hence the reform of TV news broadcasting in regards to the audiences is conducted in the same way as the political one: through the relocation of power between already established players and not with the emergence of truly new players which could bring the dawn of a genuinely new era in the Greek TV news broadcasting.

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IV

Part 4

Golden Dawn, Night and Fog

Golden Dawn Stabilises Its Electoral Power

After the announcement of the results of the last Greek national elections on the night of 20th September 2015, despite the fact that Syriza, and more specifically Alexis Tsipras, won surprisingly easily, much of the attention was focused on the electoral support for Golden Dawn. Golden Dawn is the third biggest party of Greece's party system in the third election in a row (European Parliament Elections 2014, National Elections of January 2015 and of September 2015).

It is very interesting that Golden Dawn in these elections literally did not make a political campaign, as: firstly, until January 2015, their leaders were in prison; secondly, the media in Greece have banned Golden Dawn members from their panels as members of other parties refuse to participate in a discussion with its representatives; thirdly, the trial of various Golden Dawn members for the murder of Pavlos Fyssas is now in process; and last but not least, Nikos Michaloliakos admitted that Golden Dawn takes the "political responsibility" for the murder of Pavlos Fyssas. The question therefore is: how has Golden Dawn managed to remain the third biggest party in Greece under these circumstances?

At the same time there were numerous reasons that could lead us to believe that Golden Dawn would increase their electoral support in these last elections, on the basis of the anti-systemic and protest voting:

- Firstly, we already know that Golden Dawn shares some of the electoral pool with Syriza because of their common anti-memorandum agenda in previous elections.
- Secondly, after the U-turn of the previous government with the participation of the far-left Syriza and the far-right Independent Greeks, Golden Dawn is the only party from the right side which remains anti-memorandum. It was to be expected that Golden Dawn would increase their votes in these elections, as people who are from the right side and against the memorandum had no alternative in order to express their disagreement, while there were also other voters who wanted to express their dissatisfaction.
- Finally, just few weeks before these elections, the immigration crisis in Europe, but more precisely in Greece, and more particularly on some islands such as Lesbos, Kos or Samos, was a means for Golden Dawn of targeting voters who are against immigration.

It is important to stress that despite the fact that Golden Dawn remained the third biggest party in the Greek political space, the most important conclusion that can be drawn from these elections is that Golden Dawn seems to have established a pool of voters (see Table 1).

The sample of national elections, though, does not allow us to make valid conclusions, as there are four national elections, but all of them took place within a time period of three years during a severe economic crisis and within an unstable political system. However, Golden Dawn did not manage to mobilise voters who were dissatisfied from the U-turn of the previous government - instead, they did not vote at all.

On the one hand, therefore, Golden Dawn did not manage to increase its vote share; on the other hand, the fact that Golden Dawn seems to have stabilised its electoral power is something that we should look at in the future.

Table 1: Golden Dawn Electoral Support in National Elections

	National Elections			
	May 2012	June 2012	January 2015	September 2015
Position	6th	5th	3rd	3rd
Vote share (%)	6.97	6.92	6.28	6.99
Votes	440,966	426,025	388,387	379,581
Number of seats	21	18	17	18

* * *

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Voting Booth by Spyros Papaspyropoulos

Fishing for Votes in the Aegean

The far-right Golden Dawn (GD) party has, once again, scored a substantive and symbolic victory in the September 2015 parliamentary elections. Despite significant obstacles (e.g. an ongoing criminal trial, continued mainstream media blackout, and absence from the nationally televised debate), the party has retained the highly coveted third place position while managing to increase its vote share (6.99% vs. 6.28% in January 2015) and to gain an extra seat in Parliament (18 vs. 17). Voter loyalty also seems to be robust. Public opinion data gathered just before the election show that up to 82% of those who voted for GD in January intended to renew their vote in September.

Reflecting upon these results, Cas Mudde – an expert on right-wing political extremism – has argued (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cas-mudde/the-greek-elections-all-s_b_8167282.html) that, while GD's electoral performance may be disturbing, there is cause for optimism. The gains have been objectively modest and the party has not been able to expand its support base beyond a loyal but relatively small core group. As such, fears of a Front National-style expansion of support for the extreme right are misplaced in the Greek context. Indeed, the sensationalised GD electoral 'explosion' did not materialise in the wake of the third bailout package. This is a welcome development for Greek democracy. However, it may be premature to claim that GD has hit a 'ceiling'.

The, unprecedented in recent memory, migrant crisis has yielded fertile new ground for the fundamentally xenophobic GD party. In early 2015, the bulk of migrant and refugee inflows into Europe began to shift from the central Mediterranean to the Aegean. Government statistics indicate that there have been more undocumented entries in January-August 2015 than the entire 2012-2014 period. The former government was objectively taken off guard by this influx. A series of policy missteps and public relations gaffes induced outrage among many residents and local government officials on the 'front line' tourist-dependent eastern Aegean islands.

In light of these developments, Golden Dawn implemented a strategy to regain its 'ownership' of the immigration issue, which it had lost during the New Democracy-led government, and to capitalise on the perceived government mishandling of the problem. Along with anti-austerity, anti-immigration became a central campaign message. During a stop on the island of Kos, party spokesperson Elias Kasidiaris told residents: "Elections are approaching. Kos has a choice. If [inhabitants] choose to vote Syriza it will turn into Pakistan. If they choose Golden Dawn, and Golden Dawn governs the land, then Kos will become Greece again. And that is our goal."

The election results suggest that the strategy of channeling residents' anger and fear into votes paid off. The party's greatest gains relative to January occurred in the island regions of Lesbos (8.34% vs. 4.61%), Samos (9.68% vs. 6.69%), and the Dodecanese (8.07% vs. 5.53%). A closer look at the results of hard-hit islands within the Dodecanese reveal even larger gains: Kos (10.15% vs. 5.87%), Leros (8.85% vs. 5.27%) and Simi (10.66% vs. 6.46%). The status quo on the immigration issue, combined with renewed economic austerity just over the horizon, will significantly benefit GD. Drastic migration policy adjustments at the Greek and European levels will be crucial in dampening this upward trend.

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Political Responsibility: How Much Does It Matter?

Let's start the story at the very beginning. On the 17th and 18th September 2013, Pavlos Fyssas, a musician and worker, was fatally stabbed by Georgios Roupakias, a member of Golden Dawn, in the region of Keratsini. Two years after the homicide, the leader of Golden Dawn Nikos Michaloliakos stated in public that "with reference to political responsibility for the murder of Fyssas, we assume responsibility".

In my opinion, this was the most awkward moment of the election campaign, and most notably. What does political responsibility mean in this context? Although an analysis of the long and very interesting academic discussion on political crime is not feasible here, political crime is a crime motivated by a particular ideological perspective (Helfgott, 2008: 323). And now, if we accept for the sake of the argument, the existence of such a perspective in Roupakias' action, what does this perspective exactly consist of?

That question can be answered by outlining the profile of the victim. Pavlos Fyssas was a rapper, notable for his political activism against fascism and violence and being in favour of the refugees, without participating in any political party; exactly the opposite of what Golden Dawn represents. In that sense, Roupakias' 'political motivation' was to kill a citizen who simply opposed his views. By assuming responsibility, Michaloliakos confirmed this ideological perspective as a way of acting – a *modus operandi* of Golden Dawn.

Beside the criminal sanctions related to homicide itself and the subsequent investigations for other criminal offenses, Michaloliakos' statement is a hit in the heart of democracy. His confession that the homicide of a person with a different opinion is acceptable in political terms betrays a serious aspect, if not the core, of Golden Dawn's ideology. From a political perspective, he explicitly confirmed that his party accepts the use of actions that constitute felonies against certain people or social categories of people.

How did the electorate react to such a cynical statement? Seven percent – even higher than the percentage of January 25, 2015 (6,28%), voted for Golden Dawn. By voting, the electorate expresses an opinion, a preference and most importantly transfers political power to representatives. Therefore, the 7% of the electorate, after being adequately informed, concluded that committing homicides, among others, is an acceptable form of politics, and hence a party that truly embraces those practices shall participate in the Parliament.

To summarize the above, the fact that the leader of Golden Dawn openly admitted having the political responsibility for the homicide, and his party emerged victorious from the electoral procedure leads to the conclusion that those confessing killing the ones who do not share our ideology shall not be politically exiled. An increasing percentage of society espouses a view that manifestly contravenes basic rights and liberties. Unfortunately, it seems like the fiercest methods of totalitarianism are gaining ground and even the relevant confessions do not stop their upward march.

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Explaining Golden Dawn's Continuing Presence

In January's elections, Golden Dawn managed to take a percentage of 6.28% and won 17 seats in the Greek Parliament, proving that they can mobilise powers among the electorate, besides the fact that three years had passed since the last national elections. A very interesting point of these elections is that Golden Dawn took part in them, with lots of its top members – among them leader Nikos Michaloliakos – having served time in jail. What the investigation found, after a series of incidents, about the criminal character of the organisation and their murderous attacks seemed to be too fresh yet.

At last, the trial of Golden Dawn leaders began on April 20th, but not without serious problems. Before its postponement for two weeks, the trial took place in an inappropriate venue; some of the accused took photographs of the photographers present, and the names of the prosecution witnesses were revealed to the public. From that day, for more than a month, as the website *Jail Golden Dawn* informs us, the trial had too many postponements, defensive behaviour from Golden Dawn's members and attempts to create an atmosphere of terror. As a result, the trial took up only 17 days in five months. The last time the trial was postponed was because of the election. In this election, Golden Dawn, despite having lots of organisational problems, managed again to take 6.99% and 18 seats.

This is an improved result, considering Golden Dawn achieved this while it was on a public trial with the stigma of murder and all political parties and most of society turned against it. The party moved very carefully and avoided 'creating any scenes' during this period, which proved of great importance, because at the same time it designed an anti-referendum speech and accused the other parties of corruption and the selling out of national interests.

Although only a few days have passed since the election and Golden Dawn's trial is going to continue, there are two important findings here: (a) despite the trial, it seems that Golden Dawn has kept its power (it lost only 9,000 votes), and more importantly, (b) the political parties of democratic leanings seem to be unable to decrease the extreme right's power, or to take advantage of the trial, as they spent their time with petty political fights.

Vassiliki Georgiadou recently wrote an article about the responsibility of voters, after Nikos Michaloliakos took 'political responsibility' for the murder of Greek singer Pavlos Fyssas two years earlier. As the election showed us, it seems that this responsibility had a very low impact on voters.

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V

Part 5

The Consequences of Syriza's Victory for Europe

Venceremos? Syriza and the European Left Live to Fight Another Day

Syriza managed to achieve another victory in the September 20th elections. In order to be able to reach this important electoral result, Syriza had to overcome two important obstacles. *In primis*, the party had to address the accusations of moderation and betrayal coming from the rest of the Greek radical left. *In secundis*, it had to deal with the important schism that took place inside it. This brief article argues that the electoral result has proven that the Left Platform's (LP) move to break out of the party was both premature and to an extent ideologically incoherent, while constituting a unique opportunity for other European Radical Left Parties (RLPs).

Following the arguably harsh deal reached by PM Tsipras with the country's European partners, Syriza's internal balance appeared to be almost lost. Indeed, the numerous breaks inside Syriza quickly gave birth to a novel political formation. Popular Unity (LAE) was created by prominent figures of the LP, the party's ever-present left fraction. Traces of this internal break can be found in the party's first unitary congress in 2013, when the LP initiated its critique to the majority's left Europeanism. This critique resurfaced in the intra-party debate immediately after Tsipras' strategic decision to accept the arguably harsh conditions imposed by the EU Summit. Following the motto "No sacrifice for the Euro", the LP heavily criticised Tsipras' decision. The schism inside Syriza appeared irremediable especially after the LP's decision to vote against the deal in the Greek parliament. Indeed, the LP's stance led to a significant weakening of the government's parliamentary support and paved the way for the snap elections.

Notwithstanding this important internal schism, Syriza continued to defend its long-established Europeanism. Regardless of the harsh European reality that Syriza faced, the party's stance towards the EU remained unchanged. The party continues, thus, to view the EU as the field of class struggle for the European peoples. As a result, if Syriza were to accept an alternative plan that saw the country exiting the EU, it would betray its core ideological pillar. Concurrently, the party's stance echoes the majoritarian tension inside Greek society. LAE's inability to achieve parliamentary representation could suggest that the split of LAE from pluralist Syriza was premature and to an extent ideologically unsubstantiated.

From a European perspective, Syriza's victory could create the necessary momentum for other European RLPs. The upcoming legislative elections in Spain, Portugal, and Ireland could significantly shift the balance of power inside the EU. The importance of Syriza's victory for the wider European left was again demonstrated by the presence of representatives of most European RLPs in Athens during the electoral campaign's final days. Indeed, during Syriza's central political rally in Athens, representatives of the Party of the European Left, Die Linke, and Podemos took the stage demonstrating their support to Syriza. The message conveyed by the party's European allies could be clearly summarised in Pierre Laurent's message. "Greece 20/9, Catalonia 27/9, France 6/12. Tic-tac tic-tac. The anti-austerity left will surprise you!" (https://twitter.com/plaurent_pcf/status/644924758715461632)

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Is the EU Ready for Greek Politics?

“United in diversity” is the motto of the European Union which first came into use in 2000. The financial crisis added another dimension to the term “diversity” by emphasising the fiscal differences between EU and especially Eurozone countries. The multilevel gap between North and South put the monetary union at risk, and the cyclone of the crisis is still rocking countries such as Italy, France, Portugal, Greece and Spain. New fierce words were added to the EU vocabulary: extreme austerity, fiscal discipline, crucial Eurogroup meetings, Troika, Greek statistics, solid monetary policies. Public perceptions of the EU changed. Notions such as prosperity, unification, integration and solidarity were tested, some of them suffering under political pressure and contrasting national interpretations.

Nowadays, as economics return to the background, politics seems to strike back at those who were thinking that everything is about norms, rules, regulations, rationalism, or just about some good financiers, bankers and accountants who, after serving in big firms, believed they could stabilise the European ideal and to make economically weak countries accept fiscal austerity and extreme measures as a new European dogma. But even this is about politics, isn't it? This was clear when many northern countries only reluctantly accepted Jean Claude Juncker's presidency. And now the EU and the Eurozone are facing the 'Greek Politics' factor, a deeply political issue that is changing the strict rules of the game of a fiscal one-dimensional utopia. Nothing seems rational in Greek politics anymore. A country in deep crisis, dangerously close to Grexit, delivered two national elections and one national referendum in seven months. As the European parliamentary proceedings showed, it is very difficult for the EU to understand what is really happening in Greece. This is not the first time and has happened before, in European parties too. Remember the period between 2011 and early 2012, when the EPP (European People's Party) couldn't relate to its own member, New Democracy (the Greek member party) and its leader?

The years after 2012 radicalised Greek voters. They didn't become left-wing, but rather totally unpredictable, and the process of politicization – especially of young people – was unconventional. Alexis Tsipras, the leader of Syriza, a leftist Greek party without many official allies among European parliamentary parties, won both national elections (25th of January and 20th of September). He won before and after signing a Memorandum with Troika. He won twice presenting an anti-Memorandum rhetoric, even after signing! He persuaded people that, under his government, things can be softer, more mild-mannered, in some cases reversible to the good old days. Is anyone surprised? This is completely normal. Who would vote for more measures? In light of this, Syriza's share of the vote, 35.46%, seems weak.

Tsipras and Syriza are not a “phenomenon”. They are the epitome of politics, of Greek politics. The case is now returning to the EU/EMU's field. Are they ready for a political management of the Greek situation and the economic crisis as a whole? Can they ‘afford’ Greece with its cons and its many pros without continual dilemmas that are making its political life venomous and maybe incomprehensible? Is Europe ready for a return to politics which takes into account so many other issues that have to be dealt with, such as the migration crisis, global instability and the arrival of a new form of American isolationism? In other words, is Europe capable of achieving things without being rhetorically ‘cynical’? In my view, this is exactly the potential case of Tsipras.

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The Challenge of Mistrust

During the past nine months, the Greek political system became very complicated. On January 25th, the result of the elections brought into power a left-wing party, Syriza, and a right-wing one, Independent Greeks [ANEL]. After a seven-month negotiation procedure (and one referendum) between Greece and its European partners, Syriza didn't achieve its pre-election goal, and after the July 12th agreement with EU partners the leftist party had been scattered. After this new Greek drama, Alexis Tsipras decided to legitimate his power again with new elections. The results of the elections of 20th September reveal three points of analysis.

Firstly, we should observe the relationship between social and political factors. The pre-election analysis and predictions were completely wrong. Why is that? The reasons are many but we should focus on the core of the cause-and-effect phenomenon. In Greece, there seems to be a wide gap between the messages that society emits and the way politicians (mis)perceive them. That misperception drives a wedge of mistrust between citizens and political system. Maybe John Locke's essence of 'trust' and its impact on the social contract has been damaged in a serious way in Greece. Besides, a lack of trust augments the impact of unpredictable factors.

The second point is that many of citizens who voted for Syriza in January – and they didn't support Syriza in the recent elections – chose to abstain so as to avoid voting against Syriza. Of course, the large percentage of abstention reveals again the lack of trust between citizens and politicians, and especially between citizens and the so-called old parties. The old parties and the old political system are staring at the monster they have created, like Frankenstein did in Mary Shelley's eponymous novel.

Finally, the third dimension of the recent elections has to do with the relationship between Greece and the EU, and on a wider level, the emerging of a new social and political status of the EU that has not only to do with the Eurozone's crisis. It is possible to observe an 'imitation game' in Spain or Portugal. Moreover, we cannot ignore the impact of Euroscepticism which is increasing for many reasons (migration and the refugees challenge, the ISIS threat in Europe, a possible British referendum concerning the British future in the EU, the re-emergence of radical right, etc).

To conclude, the result of the September 20th elections is going to shape the future of Greece in every aspect. The next three months are crucial for the new government and generally for the country. We will then have several indicators that could help us capture the big picture regarding Greece's future and that of the EU as a whole. A particularly decisive factor will be the outcome of the discussions regarding the reduction of the Greek debt.

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The Victory of Soft Euroscepticism

The state of Greece as a debt colony and a debt laboratory of the EU has been widely discussed in various strata of society; books, journals, articles, social media posts; everyday conversations have argued against the EU's intrusiveness, which by legislation and regulation has been imposing a 'silent coup', to use the words of Jürgen Roth, in Greece (and the rest of the countries in crisis). On the other hand, the explicitly pro-European forces, namely the majority of the political and economic elites of the country and the big media outlets, have been attempting to soften public discontent by presenting the necessity of external intervention as a result of the internal dysfunctions and inefficiency of Greek society.

Opinions vary as to whether this discourse has been internalised by the population; however, it can be estimated that this narrative along with the Eurocommunist allegiance of much of the Left and a generalised fear of the consequences of breaking with the Eurozone have contributed to an, at times enthusiastic and at times unwilling, adherence to the EU of significant segments of the people.

We thus have a seeming paradox where a large part of the population identifies the reality of their subjectification as EU pariahs, and simultaneously are reluctant to break with the Eurozone, let alone the EU, not only as the statistics show in favour of the common currency (more than 70% prefer to stay in the Eurozone at any cost), but also because the September 2015 general election has explicitly demonstrated so. With hard Euroscepticism confined to small parties, which did not make it into parliament - most notably Popular Unit [LAE] (consisting of former Syriza members), ultra-nationalist EPAM (United Popular Front) and anti-capitalist left Antarsya - and with abstention reaching an all-time high, the following conclusions can be made:

- a) Soft Euroscepticism, which is distrust of varying degrees towards EU institutions excluding questioning the Eurozone and the EU as a whole, prevailed in this election, managing to merge anti- and pro-Europeanist popular tendencies in a parliament that, unobstructed, will vote for the austerity measures demanded by the Troika.
- b) Abstention (although it is significantly less than reported due to the high number of double-registered and not-removed deceased citizens in the electoral registers) is a potential, although hard to estimate pool of hard Euroscepticism which remains disorganised, lacking a vehicle of expression, be it a party or movement that could challenge the pro-EU establishment.
- c) Consistently hard Eurosceptic and anti-European voices failed to convince, arguably because of an existential attachment of large parts of the population to the idea of Europeanisation, which, despite it being challenged daily by soft Euroscepticism and a nationalism of victimhood - a sort of nationalism whose followers see themselves as victims of foreign powers - is deeply rooted in the Greek psyche. As the famous saying of former PM and pro-European pioneer Konstantinos Karamanlis goes: "We belong to the West".

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VI

Part 6

And Now What? Greece at an Impasse

Resounding Victory, Huge Impasse

Syriza's resounding victory came after a painful and dramatic seven-month negotiation process with the creditors that ended last July with the signing of a new harsh austerity program. High abstention and deep polarisation favoured Syriza, posing the dilemma of choosing between the old corrupted political establishment in Greece and the new message that Tsipras' party aims to deliver: a young guy committed to combat corruption and tax evasion in Greece, capable of addressing the needs of a deeply confused society. The fact is that the true winners of Greek elections are the creditors that will now squeeze the Greek government to implement a bailout deal that is designed to fail.

With respect to the other parties, Golden Dawn conceded – again – a massive blow to the Greek political establishment, remaining the third political force in the country. The River [To Potami] failed to convince it had a reformist agenda, while Popular Unity [LAE] was squeezed by Syriza, unable to capitalise on the victory of the “No” camp at last July's referendum.

Syriza pledged to implement a parallel programme against austerity aimed to support and protect the most vulnerable parts of the society. But under such pressure and tight deadlines from its creditors, it is likely that the Greek government will end up failing to implement both programmes. In addition to that, Tsipras' major argument to convince voters was the renegotiation of the sovereign debt, expected to reach 300 billion Euros.

Nonetheless, even in this regard, things are not good for Greece and Syriza as creditors will first put forth the evaluation process of the bailout deal, therefore discussing Greek debt by 2017-18. Still, we should expect a nominal debt relief; not a debt haircut with real, positive impact on domestic economy. Greece is at a huge impasse.

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Constitution Square by Slayer



An Unclear Future

On the 5th of July 2015, the Greek people massively rejected, via a referendum, a new bailout agreement, proposed jointly by the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank (the so-called Troika), after five consecutive years of punishing austerity that destroyed the nation's economy, increasing dramatically the levels of poverty, homelessness and unemployment. The ruling left-wing anti-austerity party Syriza – which came into power on January 25th – was the main campaigner for the “No” camp. A few days after the referendum, however, its leader and Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, yielded to the demands of the Troika (Greece's lenders) for a new austerity agreement. Thus, the second Syriza victory, in the snap elections of September 20th, poses a new question: how can Tsipras, the front man of the No campaign, who on July 12th gave in to the demands of the Yes by accepting the third memorandum (claiming that there was no alternative apart from a “catastrophic Grexit”), still enjoy popular support?

The answer to the above is clear: the vote for Syriza was a sentimental vote; a great percentage of Syriza supporters still regard Tsipras as an authentic anti-austerity voice, who, nonetheless, was only forced to capitulate after being blackmailed by the powerful conservative pro-austerity ruling blocks of the European North. Therefore, Tsipras has won the sympathy of many progressive Greek voters, who, on one hand, disagree with the austerity policies of the Troika/Eurozone, but simultaneously fear a possible withdrawal from the common currency. Meanwhile, some left-wing hard Eurosceptic voters distanced themselves from Syriza, by which they felt betrayed, choosing the new anti-austerity party Popular Unity (LAE), formed by ex-Syriza MPs, claiming that Greece's only option for prosperity is to abandon the Euro. The number of votes, however, did not allow LAE to pass the 3% threshold required to join the parliament, due to a variety of reasons: ineffective campaigning, and, most likely, insufficient and uninspiring leadership.

In addition, the most characteristic of these elections is the high levels of abstention (by Greek standards). In total, over 40% did not turn up at the polling stations, and although electoral abstention cannot be easily interpreted, one can safely claim that a percentage of disappointed ex-voters of Syriza found themselves unrepresented. This also explains the high drops in the number of votes for all parties.

In the end, Greece's future seems undeniably grim and unclear. The continuation of ruthless austerity, the constant isolation, mockery and national humiliation by the European press may effectively mobilise the domestic Eurosceptic forces. Will the constant scapegoating gradually cultivate the necessity for the re-determination of the Greek national identity as something incompatible with the current Western imaginary, encouraging Greece to exit the European Union, which, as it has been shown, seems rather reluctant to treat Greece with dignity and respect? Obviously, Syriza, after the implementation of new hard austerity measures, will not pass the assessment of the electorate. Could this, however, signify a massive shift towards hard Euroscepticism? Such a Euroscepticism, however, may either incline towards tribalism and right-wing isolationism (represented by the neofascist Golden Dawn), but it could also obtain a democratic and civic face, rising from movements that propose democratic alternatives, movements that have to emerge and respond to the impassés of neoliberalism and parliamentary representation.

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Syriza Reloaded – And Then What?

The snap election that took place on the 20th of September in Greece signified the stabilisation of Syriza's hegemony in the Greek political system which was originally established on the 25th of January this year. This time it seems that the Greek voters gave Syriza a second chance to implement a 'parallel programme', although the 3rd bailout Memorandum signed by the incumbent Syriza-Independents Greeks government with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund troika sets very strict limits. At the same time, abstention from the election hit a high record indicating that voters did not go to the polls because they were not satisfied with government's policy, believing either that Syriza 'betrayed' its ideals or that there was not any issue able to motivate them. Moreover, many voters could not afford to pay a third trip to their constituencies after January's elections and July's referendum.

Syriza went to the election having driven out of the party and the government a big number of ministers, parliamentarians and members who disapproved both of the signing of the Memorandum and the prerequisite measures. A great number of these cadres and members decided to form a new party called 'Popular Unity' [LAE] in an effort to represent the people who voted "No" in the referendum on the 5th of July. Other Syriza party officials (e.g. the Central Committee secretary) and members who also disagreed with the signing of the Memorandum resigned after the arbitrary cancellation of the extraordinary conference scheduled by the Central Committee to take place in September in order to discuss the government and party's policy. With 2.86% of the votes, 'Popular Unity' did not pass the election threshold.

The conservative New Democracy, the official opposition party, went to the election campaigning for a great coalition government with Syriza in order to implement the austerity policies prescribed by the memorandum. Mr Vaggelis Meimarakis, the party's temporary leader, tried to run a low-key campaign and to portray himself as the guy next door in order to attract right-centre and politically moderate voters mainly coming from other minor centre and centre-left parties. He succeeded in keeping the party united and in gaining votes (28.1%) due to the failure of The River [To Potami] party to attain its ambitious goal to reach to 10% of the votes. Instead, Potami lost votes stopping at 4.09%.

Neo-Nazi 'Golden Dawn' also stabilised its presence at the far right end of the political spectrum, gaining 6.99% of the votes by taking advantage of both the refugee tide and the high levels of unemployment and poverty, projecting itself as the only anti-referendum political force. At the other end of the spectrum, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) gained 5.55% (5.47% in January) of the votes and ANTARSYA gained 0.85% (from 0.64%). 'Dimokratiki Synparataxi', the coalition between PASOK and Democratic Left with 6.28% of the votes, signifies a shy comeback of social democracy.

The newcomer in the Parliament is the Centrist Union (Enosi Kentroon). This is a sui generis party created by Vasilis Leventis who started his career in politics as a founding member of PASOK in 1974. A few years later, he formed his party and started broadcasting talk shows in marginal private TV stations using expletives and an animated style of speaking. His political views vary between conservatism and neoliberalism with a touch of paternalism and technocratism informing his policy proposals (e.g. he is in favour of the logic of memorandum policies).

Parties created during the previous pre-election period such KIDISO (Democrat Socialists' Movement led by ex-Prime Minister G. Papandreou) and TELEIA (Full Stop) did not participate in the election due to financial shortage.

Let's see now some details. Most parties across the political spectrum lost a great number of votes compared to the previous election as shown in the following table:

SYRIZA	-320,074	14.3%
ND	- 192,489	11.2%
GOLDEN DAWN	- 8,806	2.3%
THE RIVER	-151,758	40.6%
KKE	- 36,556	10.8%
INDEPENDENT GREEKS	- 93,260	31.8%

Young people hoping to find jobs through the NSRF (National Strategic Reference Framework) and those with a sense of radicalism voted for Syriza instead of voting for New Democracy which is blamed for continuing the memorandum policies since 2012, causing the migration of thousands of new scientists to other EU countries, searching for work and research schemes. It is worrying that Golden Dawn attracts young people from poor neighbourhoods who experience unemployment situations, lack of opportunities and visions for the future.

According to the exit polls, young voters cast their votes as shown in the following table:

SYRIZA	40.0%
ND	18.0%
GOLDEN DAWN	11.0%
CENTRIST UNION	5.5%
KKE	5.0%
THE RIVER	4.5%
INDEPENDENT GREEKS	4.5%
PASOK+DIMAR	2.5%
POPULAR UNITY	2.5%

As a preliminary conclusion we note that Syriza's second chance will not be a piece of cake. The split of the party organization has caused a trauma. The focus on the party's president and on his capacity as prime minister (see the last TV advertising spot) can be translated as a transition toward the making of a new type of 'cartel party' combined with a sense of presidential-style organisation. At the same time, a new round of aggressive austerity and neoliberal reforms will be enacted shortly and a new wave of protest will challenge the new government and its policies. And then what?

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Internalising the Crisis

The Greek elections on the 20th of September resulted in an easy victory for the previous Greek government of Syriza (35.5%), which will cooperate again with Independent Greeks [ANEL], while second place went to the New Democracy party (28.1%), with abstentions reaching a new peak in the country's history. Although the vote shares of the top two parties did not come as a surprise, the recent Greek elections are actually quite revealing.

First of all, Popular Unity [LAE], which emerged after some of the ruling party members shifted their position away from Syriza's agenda, scored a humiliating defeat. Not only did LAE have limited time at its disposal to promote its political agenda, it also seems that the party underestimated voters and believed that the No vote of the July 5th referendum would turn to their advantage. The party internalised and appropriated a general 'pro-Memorandum vs. anti-Memorandum' axis rhetoric, which backfired. Also, the arrogance of many of its members and failure to acknowledge past mistakes failed to convince the people, including the younger generation, whose votes were shared mostly between Syriza and the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn.

Second, what demands serious analysis is the party that took third place. By acquiring 7% of the vote, with a significant share of those coming from the youth, the Golden Dawn ended up third. What is even more striking is that not very long ago the leader of the party took the "political responsibility" for the murder of the anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas in 2013, although he claimed that the party bears no criminal responsibility for the killing. What is certain is that the percentage of votes won by Golden Dawn were not cast out of a sense of protest (if that was ever the case), and analyses of the vote demonstrate that it is the only party that lost so few votes compared to previous elections. As it turns out, Michaloliakos' statement was a strategic move that bore fruit and sent a message showing, among other things, that its death squads are willing to protect their political agenda at any cost, normalising violence as a means to reach its end.

Finally, although it's too early to fully grasp the outcome of the elections or how the new government will handle the crisis, some conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it seems there is another bipolar axis that is coming into being, one that will dominate the political scene in upcoming years as Syriza vs. New Democracy takes the place of PASOK vs. New Democracy. Secondly, Syriza won the January election with an anti-Memorandum agenda, while it won the recent election by capitulating to the Troika's austere demands. And thirdly, and most importantly, in relation to these elections – and Syriza is also to blame for that – is that the crisis has, for the first time, become internalised by (most of) the people and become part of accepted daily life.

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Bleak House: The Greek Parliament After the September 20th Elections

After the elections of January 2015, I wrote a piece entitled “Two Cheers for Hope” in the GPSG Pamphlet No 4. It is fair to say that my hopes were dashed. On 5th July 2015, I received the news of the proud Greek “No” to the Juncker-imposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) while in Santa Clara, Cuba, the city where Che Guevara solidified the liberation of that proud people. Despite my up-to-then disappointment with Tsipras’s administration, I (like many other Greeks) felt that Tsipras had it in him to resist. Sadly, I (like many other Greeks) were devastated by his U-turn and the decision to commit an already exhausted Greece to yet another MoU.

What are the conclusions that may be drawn from the latest elections? First, that Alexis Tsipras’s hegemonic role in Greece’s political landscape is now well and truly established. That he managed to win despite the disastrous seven-month negotiation with the EU, the closed banks and the subsequent capital controls, despite losing his most popular MPs and, most importantly, despite himself signing a third MoU contrary to everything that propelled him to the forefront of Greek politics, is a remarkable feat which, I am sure, political analysts will explore for many years to come.

It seems that the majority of the Greek electorate, exhausted by brutal cut-backs and subsequent electoral campaigns, desperately cling on to a political leader-cum-messiah, who, in their mind, is capable of bringing some sort of stability, while promising to end the ills of post-1974 Greece. Whether Tsipras will be up to the task remains to be seen, but I’m not keeping my hopes up.

Secondly, the unprecedentedly low turnout (56%) suggests that not only are the people of Greece tired of general elections and correlative electoral campaigns, but that their proud “No” of July 5th has not yet found an appropriate political conduit.

Thirdly, the anti-austerity block was dealt a severe blow, and Tsipras will have a lot to answer for in years to come; sadly, Popular Unity (LAE) did not succeed in working out a coherent alternative in the little time it had at its disposal. What will become of the Truth Committee on Public Debt? Will the committee for WWII Reparations reconvene? Will Nikos Pappas’s bill sort out the mess of the broadcast media sector? Will something be done about the nexus of intertwined interests (diaploki)? I, contrary to how I felt in January, am not hopeful.

Lastly, it ought to be underscored that those who lost the fewer votes are the Nazis of Golden Dawn. They are now entrenched as the third political power with some 380,000 votes, whilst Vasillis Leventis’s Centrist Union [Enosi Kentroon] and Theodorakis’s The River [To Potami] – a mish-mash of apolitical free-marketeers, neoliberal stooges and conceited loons – received 186,000 and 221,000 votes respectively. All this while Zoe Konstantopoulou, one of the few SYRIZA MPs who did exactly what she’d been tasked to do, and Manolis Glezos, the icon of the Greek Resistance, were not returned to Parliament.

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VII

Part 7

Looking Ahead

The Question of Change and Emergent Systemic Risks

After a four-week campaign, Syriza was the triumphant winner of the Greek election on 20th September and did so with a significant margin of more than seven percent over New Democracy (i.e. 145 seats in the 300 seat parliament). In fact, such a margin seems huge after everything that has happened in Greece during the last seven months – that is, the closure of banks, the imposition of capital controls, and Syriza's strategic U-turn in signing a painful austerity deal with the debt-ridden country's creditors. Once again, Syriza will share power with the small anti-austerity right-wing Independent Greeks party (ANEL). However, there are no guarantees that the Syriza/ANEL coalition (with a five-seat majority) would last, especially since Syriza is still struggling with its own dynamic internal divisions and loss of identity.

After all, it is generally accepted that Syriza proved too tough to die. Apparently, Greece's first government of the left has been considered as deserving of the loyalty of committed left-wingers and the trust of the electoral body (more than the 'traditional' parties who created the economic mess the country is in). Indeed, Syriza's leader PM Alexis Tsipras's central argument that "we need to get rid of the old system that keeps the country's political life hostage" worked out perfectly.

Nevertheless, Mr. Tsipras, who (surprisingly) swallowed the most intrusive EU reform programme in history and must now urgently meet Europe's pressing demands (involving significant pension reforms, tax rises, deregulation and a strong privatisation programme), has evidently shown not much enthusiasm for implementing major measures in a very tight time frame, while Greece's economy is hanging from a thread. But does Greece really want a permanent break from its past? Did the electorate vote for Tsipras to deliver or not to deliver the promised list of structural reforms? Actually, this lack of enthusiasm is in line with the middle strata's nostalgia for the status quo ante, that is, an antipathy toward change and an anticipation to regain lost privileges, perquisites and powers. Resistance to change is also reinforced by the multiple chronic inadequacies of Greece's public administration.

Moreover, the election outcome rang serious alarm bells. Interestingly, the third party, that is, the far right (neo-Nazi) Golden Dawn did much better than expected (exit polls traditionally have underestimated it) with a 7% share. In contrast, voter apathy, which intriguingly cuts across the whole political spectrum, is now at its highest levels ever in Greece, with about 45% of voters choosing to abstain from the process. It is rather obvious that the current socioeconomic crisis increasingly triggers frustration about the system, dissatisfaction and social turmoil, as well as populism and political extremism, xenophobia and violence, protectionism and nationalism.

This occurs as citizens desperately call for leadership and order, and seek to reduce their exposure to mass unemployment, staggering poverty, material deprivation, limited resources and exogenous shocks. Importantly, if we do not collectively get the emergent problems solved soon (mainly through fast structural reforms with the help of strong international coalitions), established democratic principles and cultural values, such as freedom, pluralism, diversity, tolerance and solidarity are in serious danger. As vulnerability to perturbations and the cascade effects have not been stopped yet, the resilience of the changing European society as a whole is at stake.

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A Semi-Legitimated Mandate to Implement a Tough Memorandum

After a period of an extensive but rather harmful negotiation for Greece, accompanied by economic and political instability, the debate between the two main competitors (Syriza – New Democracy) was mainly focused on demonstrating their abilities in implementing the memorandum. Thus, the obscure political distinction between them and the frustration over the agreement of implementing further austerity measures, led almost half of the electorate to abstain from the electoral procedure. Under these circumstances, the mandate to the peculiar coalition between radical-left SYRIZA and right-wing Independent Greeks [ANEL] can be characterized as semi-legitimated. On the other hand, the majority of voters have again expressed their frustration over old political parties but, having limited reliable choices, they trusted those who have negotiated with European partners and agreed to the implementation of the new memorandum as a prerequisite to remain in the Eurozone. At the same time, Alexis Tsipras managed to avoid the radical Eurosceptic in-party opposition which formed a distinct party named LAE (Public Unity) that did not manage to enter parliament due to its pro-drachma opinions. Thus, while these two parties that formed the coalition government six months ago were against the memorandum, they should now faithfully implement it in order to keep Greece in the Eurozone.

Unfortunately for the conservative party (ND), they were not able to convince more voters, apart from their concrete electoral core, as it is still largely connected with past ambiguous policies which led to the crisis. Therefore, the main challenge for them is to show a new political argument which will attract more voters from the middle social groups in the next elections. By comparison, the electoral collaboration between PASOK and Democratic Left managed to increase their percentage and create more expectations for the recreation of a significant social-democratic political movement. Furthermore, while the Communist Party (KKE) retained its power, the centrist The River [To Potami] lost a significant part of its January 2015 voters due to its unclear political agenda.

The most worrying result of these elections was the electoral power retention of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. It seems that despite the illegal actions against immigrants, minorities and left-wing supporters, a part of the electorate accept their extreme opinions. As it is generally accepted, the continuation of economic and political instability impels a part of the electorate to extreme choices. Therefore, in order to reduce extreme views, it is important for the new government to stabilise the economy, to create a basis for new investments that open job vacancies and to ease the memorandum's social consequences. However, its first period (January-August) was characterised by instability, incapacity to solve pressing problems and ambiguous policies in the public sector, creating low expectations for the new governmental period. Despite different considerations and expectations, it should be noted that a possible failure in implementing the necessary reforms will be dangerous for the country, both economically and socio-politically.

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Turning Anger Into Success

The September 2015 Greek elections – the third time in a year that the country went to the polls – was another display of the political system's inability to adequately handle the structural deficiencies of the domestic economy and to exit the severe crisis after six years of significant social cost. It was a broader effort, during the 2009-2015 period, that was characterised, unfortunately, by back-and-forth moves and strong political liquidity, as (a) the Greeks voted five times – since mid-2009 – for their government, which is translated on average into a national election every 15 months; (b) seven political leaders and/or high-level personalities moved into the Prime Minister's cabinet; and (c) ten politicians and/or academics were appointed heads of the Ministry of Finance, which was the ministry with the core role of the fiscal and economic adjustment process towards the exit of the crisis.

Thus, Greece has recently agreed on the third EU/ECB/IMF Support Package (or a bail-out agreement) since 2010, while the rest of the Eurozone member states, which faced quite similar difficulties, exited the crisis with just one support package. It was the third agreement, after deficiencies in the adjustment programme (one size does not fit all) and problems regarding the 'ownership' and the implementation of the reform programme, that prevented a 'Grexit' and, unexpectedly, was supported by the large majority of the parliamentary landscape.

Unfortunately, the broad political support for the new programme, which was the largest in parliamentary terms since the beginning of the crisis, was not reflected in governmental changes that could forward the implementation of structural reforms and the recovery of the economy. Politics has overcome economics once more and, in particular, 'micro-politics', as the leading party decided to enter the national elections in order to deal with its internal problems after the U-turn that led to an agreement for a third program. The pre-election period that followed was consistent with the 'immaturity' that characterised the political elite, as the major debate retained populist elements, was based on vague terminology and focused on quasi-moral arguments on the past. There was a significant absence of public and political dialogue on the way forward, on the needed reforms and the distribution of social costs during a new effort to exit the crisis. It is a state of political and institutional 'immaturity' in which society is not absent, as it feeds its existence and continuance. People, and especially the young – justifiably if we take into account the heavy burden that is on their shoulders – seemed to remain angry and preferred to make a statement of reaction against the status quo of the 'adjustment era' instead of focusing on the (real) factors that led to the collapse of the Greek economy paradigm.

This attitude was largely depicted in the results of the September 2015 elections, as a significant part of the society either aligned with the dominant pre-election narrative or preferred to abstain from the voting process (with a historical lower rate of participation), or even voted for the neo-Nazi party. However, the ultra-positive development is that this attitude remained pro-European, as more than 80% of the new parliamentary landscape supports the country's position in the Euro area, while the major political movement that supported a 'Grexit' did not manage to enter the Parliament.

The crucial challenge of the re-elected Syriza-ANEL government is – after a period of economic turmoil (deposit outflows, capital controls in the banking sector, public finance deterioration, shrinkage of growth dynamics, negative pressures on employment, etc.) and social pressures (increased refugees/migrants inflows, etc.) – to work, with the support of the EU partners, on the establishment of a 'business as usual' environment. A stable environment, based on the implementation of the third programme, would allow deposits to gradually return to the banking system (after the new recapitalisation), enterprises to plan their business activities, investments to take place, international transactions to be fully implemented (eliminating the 'Grexit' anxiety), new jobs to be created, long-term debt sustainability to be enhanced, etc. So, the sooner the situation is stabilised the better the prospects of the economy will be. Such a "success story" (the favourite phrase of some Greek politicians) can contrib-

ute significantly to the maturing process of the political elite, but also of Greek society, turning anger into constructive passion for a new paradigm for the Greek economy.

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Official account of the Greek Prime Minister on [Flickr](#)

The Challenge and Opportunity of Leadership

2015 found the Greek people having reached their limits within a stalled economy. Tsipras appears to have understood clearly that there is no time to tinker and wait for Syriza to gain its self-reliance. With this in mind, the coalition with ANEL back in January 2015 aimed to create an effective, strong and stable government, despite their ideological differences, something that has proven to be a challenge. Nevertheless, after a year of promises, hope, hard negotiations and a U-turn agreement of a three-year bailout, the result of September 20th elections could be characterised as a personal achievement for Tsipras. The leader of Syriza has proven to be able to communicate and collaborate with people from across the political spectrum. He has managed to maintain the support of the electorate, who still trust him to be the one to end austerity.

After the second electoral triumph within a year, Syriza and ANEL's newly formed government has yet to achieve stability on the country's political scene. With the country's debt as the top priority and numerous other challenges, such as the ongoing refugee crisis, Tsipras has a difficult winter ahead. Although Grexit scenarios appear to be left aside, at least for the moment, the government needs to work hard on strengthening the country's credibility while negotiating on its debt. Greece looks with optimism towards its future in the EU and the Eurozone but the need for self-preservation is high.

With more than 40% of the population abstaining from the vote and the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn as a third party in power, the country as a whole should demand the appropriate choices to be made to lead not only to economic but also national prosperity. The responsibility of the government lays beyond the electoral result. Now is the opportunity for the leadership of the country to become a role model and motivate its people not to hope, but to act collectively.

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Reviving the Past or Entering a New Political Era?

The electoral result of the 20th of September was not just a single victory for Syriza, but the last act of the political drama that took place in Greece in 2015 (the previous acts being January's elections and July's referendum). In those three elections, Syriza confronted the two parties that have dominated the Greek political scene for the past 40 years and managed to prevail, reducing its political loss to an acceptable level. Why did this happen?

First, because a large part of Syriza's rhetoric concerned the building of a new future, which was in conflict with the Memorandum policies of the last five years. Even after the signing of the third MoU, which was essentially a breach of its election promises, Syriza continued to proclaim its opposition to the economic programme imposed from Brussels in the last summer. Second, while Syriza voters were disappointed by Tsipras' capitulation, they acknowledged that he delivered an honest struggle to achieve a better economic solution for the country. Third, Tsipras remains an incorruptible politician. On the other hand, the political staff of New Democracy and PASOK are, in voters' minds, largely involved with corruption and administrative incompetence that led the country to this situation. Thus, ND and PASOK lost much of their political power because they failed to broadcast a message of hope to the Greek people and to renew their political human resources with young and resilient leaders.

The challenge that the new government has to meet now is to respond – even with only partial success – to people's expectations. Syriza has removed its far left elements, and together with Independent Greeks [ANEL] should implement an organised political action plan and maintain its internal political cohesion. The implementation of the 3rd memorandum will surely cause some political damage to the new government, and therefore should be compensated with developmental and popular measures in order to raise employment, eliminate corruption and redistribute the national income in favour of the Greek middle class which faces the danger of extinction. A possible adjustment of the Greek debt in the coming months will enable Syriza to save time and perhaps negotiate a milder implementation of the 3rd Memorandum, together with the management of other important issues, such as immigration and pension system reform.

Finally, the rise of the extreme right party Golden Dawn (7%) and the high rate of voter abstention (45%) are two signs that should not be ignored. Many people showed indifference and perhaps distaste against the political system during those national elections, but if Tsipras fails in his tenure this time, the resulting outrage will be huge and could transform into social violence and racism. The new government, with the help of the Eurozone, should and must show that populism in Greece has ended and that the painful struggle of the recent years may result in a new and promising future for Greek society.

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Green Prospects in Greece After the Elections of 20th September

The extraordinary elections of 20th September 2015 saw the re-election of Syriza in government with 35.46% of the vote and 145 seats, i.e. 6 seats short from forming a government. That meant that it had to come to an agreement with another party to form a coalition government. The only possible candidates were the socialist PASOK with 6.28% and 17 seats, the centre-liberal Potami (the River) with 4.09% and 11 seats and the populist right party Independent Greeks [ANEL] with 3.69% and 10 seats. Tsipras swiftly announced that the government was to be formed in coalition with ANEL, manifesting in that way that he preferred to continue with the party Syriza formed a government with after the January's elections. This happened in the context of a pro- and anti-Memorandum polarity that Syriza had also exploited by using a populist rhetoric, also used by ANEL, which brought Syriza into an awkward position as the new government now has to implement a memorandum which contains the most punitive measures compared to previous memoranda the country had agreed to implement as part of previous bailout agreements since 2010.

The Ecologists-Greens continued their alliance with Syriza in September's elections and managed to re-elect the candidates Yorgos Dimaras and Yannis Tsironis. This time, Yannis Tsironis has the environment portfolio of the new Ministry of Environment and Energy, with Panos Skourletis as first minister. This appears to be a significant improvement from the position that Tsironis occupied during the preceding Syriza administration, in the 'Super- Ministry' of Productive Reconstruction, Environment and Energy, which was headed by Panagiotis Lafazanis.

Being a member of the old left factions of Syriza, Lafazanis was reluctant to accommodate the new left sensitivities and concerns of the Greens, making this alliance an uneasy relationship. That was accentuated by Lafazanis supporting the construction of a new lignite station of the Hellenic Public Power Corporation and failing to support the Green campaign against the goldmining project by the Canadian Eldorado Gold at Skouries in Northern Greece. With the exit of Lafazanis and his fellow travellers from Syriza and the formation of the Popular Unity party (2.86%, below the 3% threshold for parliamentary entry), the Ministry of Productive Reconstruction, Environment and Energy was briefly headed by Skourletis who immediately stopped operations at Skouries.

The coalition with ANEL has already rattled Green sensitivities, who immediately expressed their discomfort with the possible appointment of an ANEL MP who had publicly expressed anti-Semitic and homophobic viewpoints as a government minister.

In my view, the greatest challenge for the Greens would be to bring back the positive Ecological Modernisations aspects that were briefly endorsed during the brief tenure of the Papandreou government (in the 2009/2010 period), with Tania Birbili holding the environmental portfolio. Yet for that to be possible, ecological modernisation will have to be spearheaded by an analogous economic modernisation. The latter will be possible with the current government succeeding in fulfilling its promises.

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Balancing Stability with an End to Austerity

There is no doubt that Alexis Tsipras and Syriza have been the absolute masters of the game of Greek politics, as it emerged from the recent general elections. Tsipras and his top officials carried out a masterful election campaign, which was based mainly on a very reasonable dilemma: voters should consider whether they want to be governed by people identified with Greece's old political order or by the exponents of a new generation of politicians without the malaise of the past.

With this question on the table, Tsipras achieved to move the agenda from the harsh and unpopular bailout deal he signed with the European institutions in July to a much safer and favourable ground for him: that of the domestic affairs and the restructuring of the state. Being a new face in Greek Politics and a person that was not involved in the corrupt political system of the past, Alexis Tsipras is supposed to have a big advantage in dealing with such issues.

However, bearing in mind that the new agreement between the Greek government and its creditors includes really painful reforms and high taxes for the majority of the people, several questions arise: is it likely for the new coalition government to maintain its dominance for four more years, based only on the task as stated above? Will the electoral base of Syriza be satisfied solely by the fight against corruption and the practices of the old political order?

After two bailout agreements, employees and pensioners in Greece have lost nearly 50% of their income in the past five years. Unemployment rate is the highest in the European Union (27%, 50% among young people), and brain drain continues, with educated Greeks fleeing the country. The third bailout package, signed by the previous Tsipras' government in July, does not allow us to be optimistic, as it has not changed the general framework of austerity and cuts. This means that the Greek economy will continue to be recessionary, and unemployment will rise in the coming period.

This situation could only be reversed if the Greek economy returns gradually to growth. Alexis Tsipras and his new government have the duty first to stabilise the economy and additionally to fulfil their commitment to find a common ground with the creditors for a new debt restructuring plan, so that foreign investments are returning to Greece.

Greek society, which is suffering from the effects of the restrictive policies of the past years, gave the mandate to Alexis Tsipras to put an end to extreme austerity and establish a socially just state. If the new government does not meet its pledges collectively, trust will be lost and new elections will be unavoidable.

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