

Historic victory for the radical left in Greece

Corinne Deloy

Results

Abstract :

In the end outgoing Prime Minister Antonis Samaras lost the second part of his wager. After having failed to bring about the election of a president of the Republic by parliament and of having been obliged to convene a snap election, he did not succeed in retaining the confidence of the Greeks and was beaten on 25th January by the Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA) led by Alexis Tsipras which was just two seats short of an absolute majority. SYRIZA won 36.34% of the vote and doubled the number of seats it holds in comparison with the last general election on 17th June 2012 (149, + 78).

The head of government's party, New Democracy (ND) led by Theodore Fortsakis, rector of the University of Athens won 27.81% of the vote and 76 seats (- 53).

Golden Dawn (XA), a far right party led by Nikolaos Michaloliakos, whose 16 outgoing representatives are in prison and of which 70 members have been accused of belonging to a criminal organisation, is still the third most popular party with 6.28% of the vote and 17 seats (-1). It is followed by *To Potami* (The River), a liberal party led by Stavros Theodorakis, which won 5.05% of the vote.

The Communist Party (KKE) led by Aleka Papatrifa won 5.47% of the vote and 15 seats (+ 3). The Independent Greeks Party (ANEL), a rightwing populist movement,

led by Panos Kammenos, won 4.75% of the vote and 13 seats (- 7). Finally the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) led by outgoing Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos, has collapsed, winning 4.68% of the vote and 13 seats (- 20). The Democratic Socialists Movement (KIDISO), a party created on 2nd January by former Prime Minister George Papandréou (2009-2011) did not rise above the 3% voting threshold, obligatory to have a seat in the Vouli.

Turnout was slightly more than that recorded in the last general election on 17th June 2012 – totalling 63.87% (+ 1.38 points). It is obligatory to vote in Greece until the age of 70 but sanctions are never applied.

General election results of 25th January 2015 in Greece

Turnout : 63.87% (it is obligatory to vote)

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats
Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA)	2 245 533	36,34	149
New Democracy (ND)	1 718 421	27,81	76
Golden Dawn (XA)	388 383	6,28	17
To Potami	373 793	6,05	17
Greek Communist Party (KKE)	338 047	5,47	15
Independent Greeks Party (ANEL)	293 327	4,75	13
Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)	289 382	4,68	13
Others	533 003	8,62	0

Source : Ministry for Home Affairs (<http://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/v/public/index.html?lang=en#%22cls%22:%22main%22,%22params%22:%22%7B%7D%22%22>)

A VOTE OF ANGER AND REJECTION OF AUSTERITY

The Greeks clearly have expressed their rejection of the traditional parties embodied by PASOK and to a lesser degree New Democracy. SYRIZA no longer scares people and the Greeks have chosen it to express their pain in the hope that their vote will succeed in changing their daily lives.

By passing over a ten year period from 3.3% of the vote (2004) to more than 30% SYRIZA has been obliged to change: effectively it has refocused over the last few years saying that it wants Greece to stay in the euro zone. However there are still some supporters within its ranks who lean very much to the left, with whom the party will have to deal.

SYRIZA has succeeded in attracting a wide share of the Greeks who are exhausted by the austerity policy implemented over the last few years. They have been affected by severe cuts in government financing demanded by the troika (EU, IMF, World Bank) in exchange for the payment of 240 billion € in financial assistance. SYRIZA also convinced many of those disappointed by the traditional Greek left symbolised for the last four decades by PASOK.

Rejection of the austerity policies and anger were the first reasons quoted by the Greeks for their vote on the eve of the election. We should remember that 25.7% of the working population are unemployed (49.8% of the under 25's) and that the poverty rate lies at 23.1% - a record in the EU. Salaries have been reduced by a third in the civil service, as in the private sector (the minimum salary totals 586 €), and often people are paid late; retirement pensions have collapsed and household revenues have fallen by 35%. The number of civil servants has dropped from 900,000 (end of 2009) to 656,000 (end 2014). One business in four has had to close.

Many Greeks believe that New Democracy was the party responsible for this. However thanks to the work done Greece's economy has been growing likewise the primary surplus (the debt apart) since the 3rd quarter of 2014. New Democracy called on the electorate's responsibility, as it pointed to the danger that SYRIZA represented, saying that it might "turn Europe against Athens" and that chaos awaited the country if this party won."

AN EXTREMELY LEFT-WING PROGRAMME

"Our common future in Europe is not that of austerity, it

is one of democracy, solidarity and cooperation," declared Alexis Tsipras. "On Monday we shall be done with national humiliation. We will have finished with orders from abroad," he said during his last campaign meeting in Athens on 23rd January.

SYRIZA wants both to relieve the suffering Greeks and revive the country's economy. To do this it wants to sign a New European Deal that will include public investments on the part of the European Investment Bank (EIB) which will enable the purchase of bonds by the European Central Bank (ECB) and the creation of a State Investment Bank. The party wants to reduce the debt in order to release funds to enable the State to invest and improve the social situation of the poorest. It wants to revive the economy by raising domestic demand.

Its economic programme promises the end of austerity: tax reductions (abolition of taxes and social contributions for 7 years and tax limited to 30% of the income which will bring in 3 billion 3 billion € per year), a raise for the minimum wage (to 751 € against 586), re-introduction of the 13th month for the lowest retirement pensions, distribution of electricity or housing coupons and free access to public transport for the poorest (around 300 000 households), creation of 300 000 jobs, free healthcare for all.

SYRIZA wants to negotiate the 2015 debt and the overall negotiation of the debt burden immediately (175% of the GDP, i.e. 318 billion €). It supports nationalisation.

Alexis Tsipras has estimated his programme at 12 billion € which he thinks he will release by reducing the debt, fighting to counter tax fraud and by re-distributing European funds.

"The issue of the budgetary gap can be resolved if we negotiate a reduction of 24 billion € with our partners which we shall allocate to the reimbursement of the debt in 2015. We want to reduce the level of the reimbursement of our government debt from 5% of the GDP to 2% over the next ten years. We shall pay the IMF but we want to renegotiate the share of our government debt held by the European States, the ECB and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) [1] to make it sustainable," declared George Stathakis, professor in Economy and advisor to Alexis Tsipras, deemed to be the main craftsman of the party's turnaround and seen as the future Economy Minister.

SYRIZA "does not want the collapse but the salvation of the euro," declared the party's leader. "We are not in 2012, there is room for negotiation," he added indicating on 21st January that "he would do what he could and not what he wants."

1. The Radical Left Coalition maintains that it will reimburse 3.5 billion € that Greece owes to private investors.

WHO IS ALEXIS TSIPRAS?

Aged 40 Alexis Tsipras is originally from Athens and has a degree in civil engineering from the Polytechnic University of Athens (UPNA). For several years he worked as a civil engineer in the building industry.

He joined the Communist Youth (KNE) at a very young age and took part in several student movements. He was part of the reform movement which split from the Communist Party (KKE) at the end of the 1980's and in 1999, and he became the first political secretary of the party's youth section (Neolaia Syn), a position he occupied until 2003.

Alex Tsipras's first electoral victory came during the local elections on 15th and 22nd October 2006: SYRIZA won 10.50% of the vote in Athens and he became a town councillor with three other members from the list.

In 2008, Alexis Tsipras was elected as chair of Synaspismos (the former far left party member of the SYRIZA coalition) and the following year he became an MP.

He was re-elected during the general elections on 6th May 2012 when SYRIZA achieved the highest score in its history with 16.78% of the vote and 52 seats (26.9% of the vote and 71 MPs on 17th June). On 22nd May Alexis Tsipras was appointed as chair of SYRIZA.

In the European elections on 25th May 2014, the party won 26.57% of the vote and 6 seats. It drew ahead of New Democracy led by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, which won 22.72% of the vote and five seats.

Alexis Tsipras has been the Deputy Chair of the European Left Party since 2010.

The real issue in the Greek general elections on 25th January focused less on the name of the victor than on the majority with which it was going to govern.

Running just short of the absolute majority, Alexis Tsipras

will have to find a government partner. He has launched negotiations with the populists of the Independent Greeks' Party. Both are against the troika but have very few other points in common. He might also turn to To Potami, a party that is also hostile to the troika (it wants to conclude negotiations with the international organisations to enable the payment of the last financial tranche) and it is especially against all types of statism (*"We do not want to make the State grow but the economy,"* indicated the party's leader Stavros Theodorakis).

The election has consolidated the new two-party system that has been emerging in Greece for the last two years, which opposes the right, led by New Democracy and the radical left led by SYRIZA. The PASOK, the Greek left party in existence since the fall of the dictatorship of the Colonels in 1974 has disappeared.

The party led by Alexis Tsipras has therefore become the first radical left party to assert itself in Europe. *"Changing Greece, changing Europe,"* maintained one of the slogans. Its victory has pleased a great number of Europeans and notably *Podemos*, led by Pablo Iglesias, in Spain and the *Left Bloc* in Portugal – two countries which will be renewing their parliament this year. However it has worried the institutions in Brussels, which for the first time ever, will have to work with a national leader who is openly hostile.

It remains that although the Greeks are sovereign, Athens is not really in a strong position and the next government, which says it wants to remain in the euro zone, will not be able to revolutionise the country's economic policy.

Very quickly the new Greek parliament will also have to elect a successor to the President of the Republic, Carolos Papoulias. The first round of voting will take place on 7th February.

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