

The Greek Parliament fails to elect a new President of the Republic in the first round of voting

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Results

Abstract :

As expected the Greek parliament failed to elect a successor to the outgoing President Carolos Papoulias on 17th December. The only candidate running, Stavros Dimas, former European Commissioner for the Environment (2004-2010) and former Foreign Minister (2011-2012), won 160 votes of the 300 members of the Vouli, the only Chamber in Parliament. 135 voted against him and five abstained. This result is deemed to be weaker than the one hoped for by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras (New Democracy, ND).

Indeed Stavros Dimas only managed to attract the votes of 5 MPs beyond the government majority of 155, comprising New Democracy and the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). In the first round of the election, as in the second, which will take place on 23rd December next, a candidate has to win a 2/3 majority of the MPs (i.e. 200 MPs) to be elected.

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras has however said that he is confident of Stavros Dimas's chances of being elected as President of the Republic after the third round of voting (on 29th December) when only the majority of 3/5 (i.e. 180 MPs) is required. *"Today we had the first of three rounds. There are two left,"* declared the head of government.

The Deputy Prime Minister and leader of PASOK, Evangelos Venizelos, called for a consensus of MPs from the democratic camp. *"We are moving towards a third round by trying to bring the parties in the democratic camp closer together, to conclude the negotiations with the creditors; general elections would be damaging to Greek interests,"* he stressed.

The days preceding the presidential election were turbulent. Antonis Samaras qualified the vote in support of Stavros Damos as *"the choice to avoid a political adventure that might prove fatal for Greece's development*

in Europe." He warned of the risk of political instability which might result from Parliament's failure to elect the head of State at the end of the year. Failure would lead to the dissolution of the Vouli and the organisation of a snap election (end of January or beginning of February) which would complicate negotiations with the Troika (IMF, World Bank, European Union) on the end of the second financial aid plan in Athens. Moreover if the Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA) wins the snap election its leader Alexis Tsipras, would have very little room to manoeuvre to negotiate with Greece's creditors.

The leader of SYRIZA has accused Antonis Samaras, whom he qualifies as *"the Prime Minister of chaos"* of being capable of staging a flight of capital to aggravate the electorate's fears. *"The frenzy of fear spread by the Prime Minister is the penultimate spasm. The countdown has finally started for the end of the coalition in office and the catastrophic policy it is undertaking,"* declared Alexis Tsipras.

Fotis Kouvelis, leader of the Democratic Left (DIMAR), who is of the same opinion, indicated that the result of the first round of the presidential election opened the way to new general elections.

The parties in office fear the organisation of snap general elections. *"What will happen if we ignore the*

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five years of sacrifice made by the Greek population," wondered MP and former Mayor of Athens (2003-2006) Dora Bakoyannis (ND). Minister Dimitris Stamantis (ND) accused SYRIZA of adopting a dangerous attitude, *"which is pushing the country towards elections - again ignoring the wishes of the Greek population."* However we cannot be certain that the Greeks would oppose a new general election.

For the first time in its history the European Commission intervened in the electoral campaign of a Member State. In an interview on the Austrian TV Channel ORF III its President Jean-Claude Juncker (European People's Party EPP) called for a vote against "extremes" and in support of "familiar faces" (Stavros Dimas is a former European Commissioner). *"The Greeks know very well what a*

bad result in these elections would mean for Greece and the euro zone," he said. Another sign of Brussels' specific interest in the Greek situation was the visit by the Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, Taxation and Customs Union, Pierre Moscovici (PS) to Athens on 15th December.

"It is unimaginable, unacceptable for the European institutions to be open show their preference for one party or another just before the election. This is has never been seen before," declared historian Constantin Tsoukalas.

The second round of the election, which will take place on 23rd December when a 2/3 majority is required, will probably lead to a further dead end. The third and final round will take place on 29th December and will be a true litmus test.

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