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FIRST THOUGHTS ON THE 7 JULY 2019 ELECTION IN GREECE

Edited by

Panagiota Manoli

GPSG Pamphlet No 6

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First Thoughts on the
7 July 2019 Election in Greece

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Panagiota Manoli

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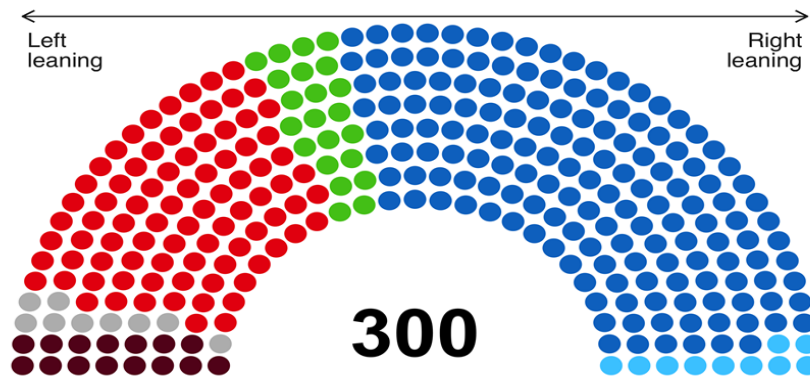
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Greek election results 2019

Seats by party, includes 50 seat bonus for winning

- Communists: 15
- Movement for Change: 22
- MeRA25: 9
- New Democracy: 158
- Syriza: 86
- Greek Solution: 10



Source: Greek Interior Ministry

BBC

Source: Greek Interior Ministry and BBC, 2019



New Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis takes over from Alexis Tsipras on 8 July 2019. Photo: ToVima, 8/7/2019

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Editorial

By Panagiota Manoli

After suffering a heavy defeat at the double – European and local (municipalities) & regional – elections on 26 May 2019 the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras was forced to announce early parliamentary elections on Sunday, 7 July 2019, four months ahead of schedule. The May elections had some novelties as ruling SYRIZA lost to New Democracy by an unprecedented 9.3% which is the widest margin of defeat ever in a European election in Greece, while this was the first election in Greece where the voting age was lowered to 17.

The 7th July parliamentary election reinforced the May election results. It was the first parliamentary election after a long period of economic adjustment programmes (“Μνημόνια”) in the country came to an end. It thus politically marked the conclusion of nearly ten years of crisis in Greece. How did the Greek electorate decide on the way it wants to see Greece being governed over the next four years? Not all Greeks went to vote as only 57.92% exercised their voting right.

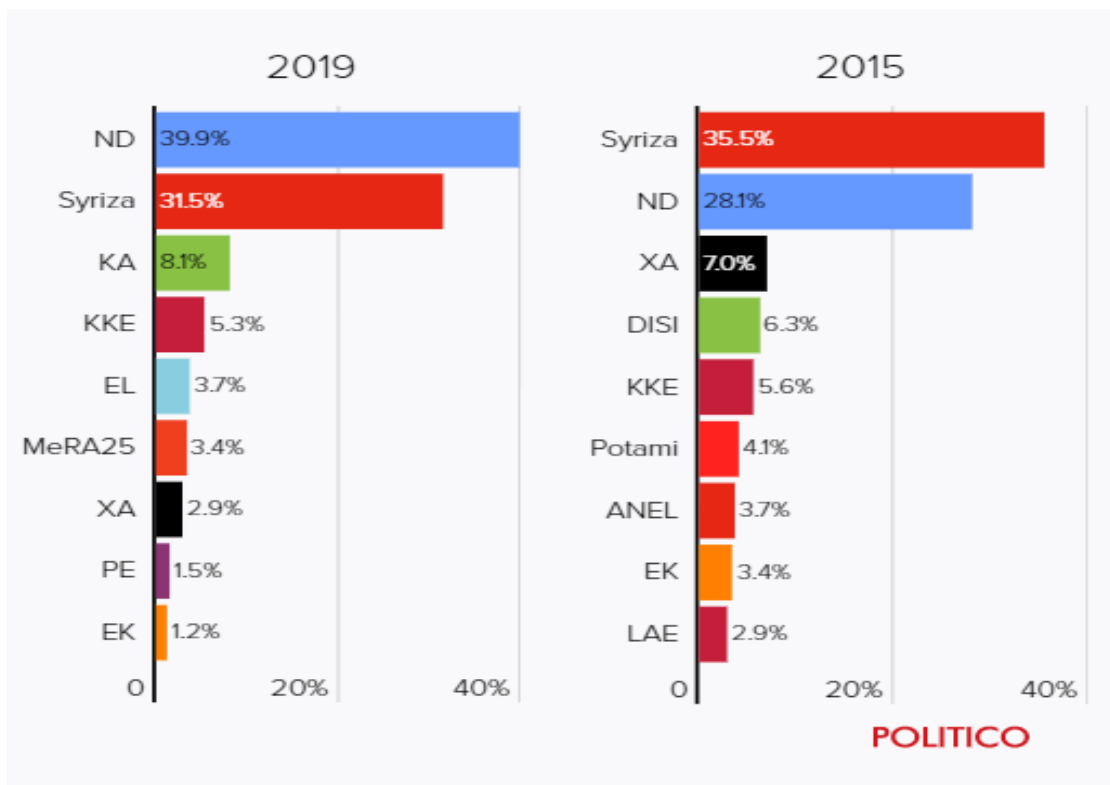
New Democracy won by large margin (39.8%) that allowed it to form a majority government of 158 seats. A total of six parties entered parliament with the neo-nazi Golden Dawn party losing its place in it. SYRIZA managed to maintain a high percentage of 31.53% while two new parties passed the 3% threshold to enter the parliament; the Elliniki Lysi (Greek Solution) party led by K. Velopoulos and the ΜεΡΑ25 party led by Y. Varoufakis. KINAL, the centre-left party managed to attract 8.20% while the Greek Communist Party received 5.30% of the votes. The reading of the results points to the voters’ desire for a stable government of four years to take Greece into the next, post-austerity period and focus on the restructuring of the state, wealth and job creation. On this election, Greeks followed the path of pragmatism and looked ahead voting for a better future for their country rather than looking back in anger with a desire to punish or rebel against the ‘establishment’.

The purpose of this collection of opinions is to offer an initial rapid response from political and social scientists that can interpret and explain the results of the Greek elections to a wide audience.

Dr. Panagiota Manoli is member of the Executive Committee of the GPSG and Assistant Professor in Political Economy of International Relations at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Peloponnese



The new Nea Dimokratia Government is sworn in at the Presidential Mansion on 9 July 2019. Photo: EUROKINISSI/Giorgos Kontarinis



7 July 2019 Parliamentary Elections Results Compared to 2015 Elections.

Source: Politico <https://www.politico.eu/2019-european-elections/greece/>

Section I

The 7th July Election in a Context

1 | Greece beyond the crisis

By Roman Gerodimos

It is now exactly ten years since the summer of 2009, when the extent of the Greek deficit and debt started to become impossible to ignore. During this last decade, Greek society has gone through a rollercoaster of events, emotions and reactions: realisation and shock (2009-2010), shame, anger and radicalization (2010-2014), depression and adjustment (2014-2019). A rising anti-establishment feeling led to the near-collapse of the post-1974 party system, with PASOK being electorally decimated, populist Syriza becoming a party of government, and radical and extremist parties (such as the Golden Dawn and Independent Greeks) entering parliament and becoming players in the system.

The January and September 2015 victories of Syriza, and the formation of a coalition government with the Independent Greeks, acted as pressure valves that allowed a significant part of the electorate to vent a lot of their anger and frustration over the extreme austerity measures that had been implemented over the previous five years.

In this linear trajectory of phases, the July 2019 election may come to be considered as a potential endpoint of the Greek crisis – or, at least, the beginning of the end. New Democracy's 39.9% means that the party has now been rehabilitated after 10 years of electoral punishment. This victory should be personally attributed to its leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who in the space of three years managed to build a viable electoral coalition, mobilizing traditional conservative party supporters, liberals and centrists. While banking on his image as a well-educated and professionally successful technocrat who will cut taxes and facilitate foreign direct investment, he also placed strategic emphasis on the youth vote. He voted in favour of civil partnerships for same-sex couples and spent time meeting with drug addicts in rough parts of Athens. He also carried out a radical renewal of New Democracy's parliamentary candidates and party aides, promoting many people in their 20s, 30s and 40s. In doing so, he managed to build up support in the crucial 18-24 demographic, reaching 27%-30% in the recent elections, and so ending Syriza's monopoly on the youth vote.

After spending four years in government and implementing a tough Third Adjustment Programme (Memorandum), Syriza managed to get 31.5%, which means the party now looks like a credible second pole in the system. Again, this should be personally attributed to its leader, Alexis Tsipras, without whose appeal, Syriza might have never reached such a broad electoral base.

The collapse of Independent Greeks and the Golden Dawn add further credibility to the thesis that radical populism, which had been such a prominent element of Greek political culture during the first periods of the crisis, seems to be gradually running out of steam. Whether this is, indeed, the case will become apparent very soon, as the Mitsotakis government looks set to carry out a series of reforms, emphasising law-and-order (e.g. by scrapping the university 'asylum' law). The reaction of Greek society (which is normally allergic to law enforcement), and in particular of younger people in universities and urban areas, will determine whether Greece is ready to turn the page.

Dr. Roman Gerodimos is Associate Professor of Global Current Affairs at Bournemouth University. He is the founder and former convenor (2004-2017) of the Greek Politics Specialist Group.

2 | Understanding the Greek election result: a multi-dimensional framework

By Kira Gartzou-Katsouyanni

As political scientists and commentators, we are often constrained by the reductionist – often unidimensional, left versus right – models that we use in cross-country analysis, which lead us to group together political parties that are actually quite heterogeneous. The highly misguided interpretation of the Greek electoral result by several international commentators as an example of the more general sweep of a conservative-populist tide across the West, illustrates the dangers of such overly simplistic approaches. I would like to propose here that a slightly more complex, multi-dimensional framework can offer a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the Greek election result.

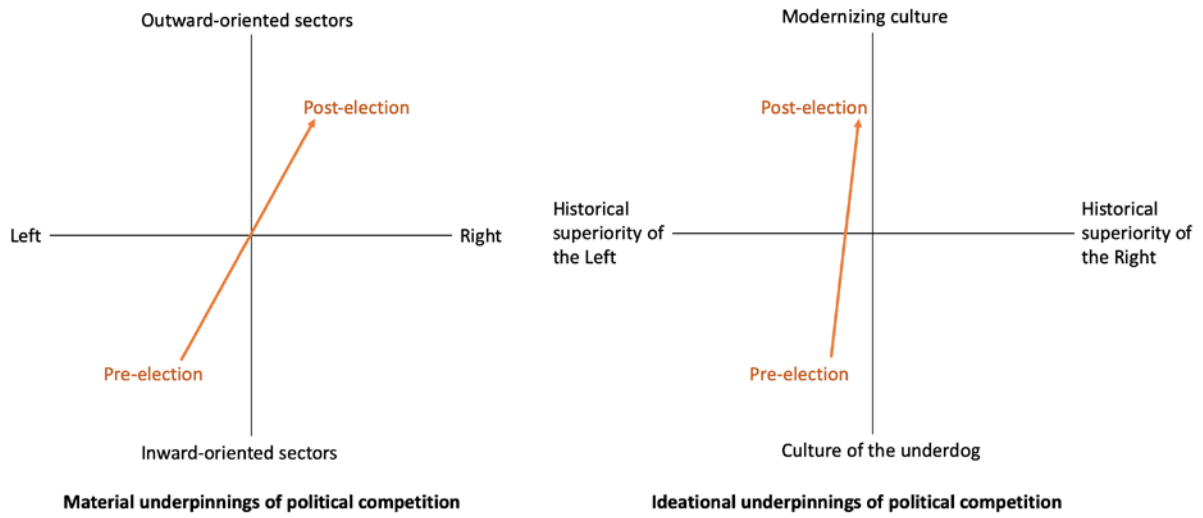
The proposed framework, illustrated in the figure below, recognises that support for political parties usually has material as well as ideational underpinnings. While the former are rooted in the structure of the economy and are easily amenable to categorisations that are applicable across countries, the latter are more idiosyncratic, as they are rooted in meanings attached to individual party families that are shaped by nationally-specific historical experiences and narratives. In terms of material underpinnings, it is useful to identify the classic left-right divide, based on social class and the income distribution; and a pro-/ anti-globalisation divide, based on one's economic engagement in outward-oriented, globally-competitive sectors, or inward-oriented, sheltered sectors. With regard to Greece, Aristos Doxiadis' book *The Invisible Rift* (2013) provides an excellent account of the political importance of the divide between those occupied in competitive versus sheltered sectors, and the historical tendency of the latter to play a dominant role in political parties across the left-right spectrum.

These two material divides also interact with historically-shaped narratives about different party families, which are influenced by, but are not reducible to, material interests. On the one hand, the material left-right cleavage is accompanied by a set of meanings about the role and character of “the Left” and “the Right” shaped by historical experience, and especially by a narrative of victimization of the Greek Left during Civil War and the Colonels' Dictatorship, which has bestowed on the Left a position of clear moral superiority in public discourse. On the other hand, the outward-/ inward-looking material dimension is also accompanied by an ideational divide. This can be analysed well using Nikiforos Diamandouros' concepts of the “culture of the underdog”, a strand of Greek political culture which is characterised by a statist orientation, a defensive perception of the international environment, and an anti-Western outlook; and, at the other end of the divide, the “modernizing culture”, for which Western Europe is a symbol and an anchor of political and economic modernity.

It is true that Greece's election represents a shift from the left to the right, but the extent of that shift is moderated by Syriza's pursuit of austerity policies following the economic debacle of the 2015 experiment and the consequent lengthening of the country's supervision by the lenders; but also by the decidedly centrist orientation of New Democracy's leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis. In ideational terms, there is some evidence that the perceived moral superiority of the Left in public discourse may have started to wane, but Syriza's resilience despite the failure to deliver on most of its pre-election promises shows the persistence of the strong anti-Right reflexes of a large part of society.

However, the belief and hope of many centrist (and even centre-left) voters who supported Mitsotakis in this election is that the election results signify a far more major shift in the outward-/ inward-looking and modernizing/ underdog dimensions, than in the left-right dimension (see orange arrows in the figure below). The representation of the outward-looking, modernizing segments of Greek society has never been the exclusive purview of either the Left or the Right. Nevertheless, at this particular moment in time, it was Mitsotakis who succeeded to articulate a vision about Greece's future that appealed to voters who believe that

the only way forward for Greece is to become a more productive, more entrepreneurial, and more export-oriented country at the heart of the EU. For an important share of his voters, this vision of inclusive growth was the reason for supporting Mitsotakis in this election and the yardstick against which his tenure will be measured.



Kira Gartzou-Katsouyanni is a PhD Candidate at the European Institute of the London School of Economics (LSE)

3 | Snap elections in Greece: The boiled frog syndrome?

By Ilia Xypolia

Compared to the attention that the three *voces populi* received in 2015, global media and pundits ignored the most recent snap elections in Greece. In 2015, numerous media outlets were focusing on the crucial outcome of the Greek ballot as there were many things at stake: a radical left government was poised to challenge the austerity panacea of the European and global institutions. Last Sunday's elections, unsurprisingly, have not even attracted a third of that interest. The stakes, however, are not less urgent.

There are five key takeaways from the Greek snap elections.

First, it was one of the lowest voter turnouts for Greek elections for the past 45 years. A meagre 5.7 million voters went to the ballot boxes with an abstention level of 42.08%. Though taking into account the inaccurate electoral register and the timing of the elections, the voter turnout is at similar levels with the other even more crucial elections in the crisis-torn last decade. Yet a closer look at the pre-crisis 2000s elections, where usually 7 million voters were exercising their electoral right and duty, reveal *inter alia* the brain drain of the Greek society.

Second, the centre-right party of New Democracy resurged and won a landslide victory. With a central theme of being the anti-populist party in an era of populism that would lead stability and normality back into the political life of the country, Kyriakos Mitsotakis managed to bring together a wide variety of voices in the broad church of the New Democracy party. The newly elected Prime-Minister, who avoided to hold a television debate with his main opponent Alexis Tsipras, has promised to his electorate to follow through with the neoliberal commitments stemming from the consecutive memorandums Greece has signed with its lenders.

Third, the transformed Syriza, that started as a radical left party and ended up embracing neoliberalism, campaigned as the leader of a progressive coalition of the centre-left and established itself as the second pole in the two-party system. This transformation was evident in the preference the Syriza voters gave within its renewed lists of candidates. While many historical members of the party did not manage to win a re-election, many newcomers with loose left ideological affinity managed to get elected in a party that now unites around its leader.

Fourth, one of the most celebrated outcomes of the ballot box was the failure of Golden Dawn to gain re-election in the Greek parliament. Yet, the fact that the leading members of the neo-Nazi party are currently on a murder trial lost only by a whisker should not be overestimated. Many of its far-right voters opted for the racist, xenophobic and nativist rhetoric of the newly founded party of "Greek Solution". So, nobody should feel relieved with the diminishing share of vote for the white supremacist party that while undergoing a trial has still attracted the support of several hundred thousand voters.

Fifth, these snap elections were arguably the least polarised in recent Greek politics. During the last decade, the division across the political spectrum has been shaped across the neoliberal austerity programs. Yet, in these elections, voters turned their back to the parties promised to challenge the neoliberal structural reforms that Greece is chained to at least in the next decades.

The main reading of the electoral result in the snap Greek elections, shared by the global media is that populist forces were defeated by a sober and moderate politician. Yet, there is a second reading, the boiling frog syndrome. A frog that enters boiling water can adapt to the rising temperatures. Frogs are still capable of escaping up to a certain point when they become paralysed. So, to escape from a difficult situation there is only

a limited window of opportunity. After that they cannot. It seems that to a large part of the Greek society this has happened while Greece hasn't escaped from its Sisyphean task to overcome the crisis.

Dr. Iliia Xypolia is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Aberdeen.

4 | European Consolidation Success Story

By Petros Vamvakas

Over the last 40 years political scientists have debated the point of democratic consolidation for transitioning democracies. The Greek elections of 7 July 2019 were significant in a number of ways, two of which being: that democratic process and the party system has endured a protracted period of economic uncertainty and instability; and that Greek constituency has firmly committed to the European orientation and the European project.

In 1976, Prime Minister K. Karamanlis stated in Parliament that “Greece belongs in the West,” which crystalized a dominant perspective within a divided constituency. However, over the next 43 years, national elections in Greece have primarily been won by political parties whose platforms were more in line with the popular notion voiced by then opposition leader, Andreas Papandreou, “Greece Belongs to the Greeks.” During the recent campaign, for the first time since 1976, the top three parties, with 90% of the votes, had a firm pro-EU stance. The victorious New Democracy actually won with a more neo-liberal agenda rather than a popular right platform that had characterized both the Karamanlis, and Samaras victories in 2004 and 2012 respectively. Similarly, SYRIZA and KINAL as political parties with governing experience during the period of austerity had de facto committed to the EU and EMU projects through policy advocacy and implementation.

Political scientists tend to agree that on the level of party structure and democratic consolidation, Greece, along with Portugal and Spain, have returned to the politics of the early 1980s. I would argue that we have to consider those dates for all three countries since in all three cases the recent economic and social challenges have not ultimately destroyed their political commitment to the democratic process. Despite the challenges by extreme political voices, party fluctuations and restructuring, the party system has ultimately survived. In fact the populism of the right and of the left has been waning. In the case of Greece, 7 July 2019 should mark the day of the consolidation of the party structure, as an overwhelming majority of the constituency is represented by three urban centrist parties with governing experience.

Regardless of what is to come, the Greek political party system has weathered the economic storm and has emerged more centrist and more European.

Dr. Petros Vamvakas is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Director of Institute of Eastern Mediterranean Studies at the Emmanuel College.

5 | Political developments and the importance of values in contemporary Greece

By Charalambos Tsekeris

The 7 July 2019 general election authorised the 51 year-old President of New Democracy, Kyriakos Mitsotakis to lead Greece in the post-memoranda era. This arguably signifies, on the one hand, a societal desire for normalcy (after a long period of exhaustion) and, on the other hand, a liberal shift in the political system (against the hitherto anti-systemic wave), even though no one can safely predict the stability and the durability of such healthy shift.

It also signifies the majority's will to change the overall political paradigm, boost economic openness (economic complexity), and look forward, leaving the old ideological skeletons and the sterile polarisation discourses behind. And yet, Greek society is evidently not immune to populism.

In contrast, populism seems to be a highly resilient and pervasive political phenomenon which grows slowly and often silently in Greece (as well as throughout Europe), albeit with temporary regressions and defeats. Indicatively, the neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn, did not reach the three percent threshold, but the nationalist, pro-Russian Greek Solution and MeRA25, the party of former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, succeeded to enter the parliament. This can partly explain why the Greek crisis has been of unprecedented length, depth and social cost. It is customary that, in the long run, highly diverse "underdog" demographics, in Nikiforos Diamandouros's terms, prevails upon the public agenda, toxifies the political environment, and impedes structural reforms and qualitative social and cultural progress.

Over against this traditional/"underdog" or "introvert" political dynamics, Mitsotakis promised to modernise the public administration and cut taxes (overshadowing the modest economic recovery achieved by the SYRIZA government), as well as to promote liberal reforms that improve the business environment and the quality of institutions, in particular the efficiency of the justice system. This would potentially foster economic resilience in crisis-ridden Greece, resulting a significant positive impact on investment decisions and attracting businesses.

In addition, the new government's main challenge is to achieve a sustainable economic recovery (especially for the country's exhausted middle class) and tackle the excessive macroeconomic imbalances by continuing and completing all necessary reforms. What is also needed is a strong and urgent focus on investment-related economic policies, taking into account regional disparities and the pressing need to enhance (digital) human capital and ensure (digital) social inclusion.

Nevertheless, the tension between the modernist/extrovert culture (linked to post-material values) and the traditional/"underdog" culture is permanent within the Greek socio-political structure, something signifying that the emergent reformist dynamic is highly fragile and uncertain. In other words, the cultural dualism that diachronically permeates Greece implies that the reformist hegemony can be easily lost. Values do matter. The unconscious insecurities of the Greek people (concerning their identity and social life), which are ascribed in an imaginary way to foreigners, and the low levels of trust, social capital, cooperation and reciprocity, as well as the high levels of corruption and of tolerance toward that corruption, eventually leave us little room to hope for any long-term favourable change.

Dr. Charalambos Tsekeris is Research Fellow (Assistant Professor rank) on Digital Sociology at the National Centre for Social Research (Athens) and Professor Extraordinary at the School of Public Leadership, Stellenbosch University.

Section II

Explaining voting behavior

6 | The Five Stages of Grief: Austerity Politics in Greece

By Georgios Karyotis

Since 2010, Greece has found itself at the epicentre of the Eurozone economic crisis, having to rely on record-high external loans by international lenders to remain solvent, in return for draconian austerity measures. In the last decade, its society and politics underwent fundamental social and political transformations, while its national economy contracted by almost a third, a recession that is globally unprecedented in peacetime. The election on 7 July 2019, where voters gave the centre-right 'New Democracy' party a healthy majority (39.9% of the vote, and 158 majority in the 300-seat parliament) and a mandate for accelerating long-overdue reforms designed to enhance the competitiveness of the economy, marks the end of a fairy tale: a sort of David and Goliath battle between Greece and the 'troika' of lenders (European Commission; International Monetary Fund; European Central Bank) that captured global imagination, especially at its peak in the summer of 2015. This story of austerity politics in Greece mirrors, in many ways, the five stages of grief, a model introduced by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in 1969: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.



At the start of the Greek drama, few were able to foresee the severity of the crisis or its duration. Greece had enjoyed a period of on average 4% growth in the first few years of the new millennium, which reversed in 2008 during the global economic downturn but remained, nominally, manageable with a projected budget deficit of 3.7% of its GDP in 2009. When this was later revised to 15.4% of its GDP, paving the way for international bailouts, **denial** was replaced by public **anger**. One in three Greeks participated in anti-austerity protests during 2010, and even more did so during 2011, when the

Greek version of the *indignados* (the '*aganaktismenoi*' i.e. 'outraged' citizens) occupied central squares across the country, demanding direct democracy and an end to austerity.

With blame falling heavily on the 'old' political establishment – conservatives New Democracy and socialists PASOK had taken turns to rule the country since the restoration of democracy in 1974- **bargaining** and populism thrived, benefiting the radical left (SYRIZA) and far-right (Golden Dawn). SYRIZA, which had received only 4.6% of the public vote in October 2009, rose to government in January 2015, bringing the anti-austerity movement from the streets to the parliament, and mobilising public rejection of austerity on the 5 July 2015 referendum, before capitulating a week later and agreeing on a third bailout of 86 billion Euros, conditional on just the type of measures that it had long campaigned against.

Depression, the fourth stage of grief, was not only an inevitable reflection of the rise and fall of the anti-austerity movement and the questions this raised for the responsiveness of liberal democracies in expressing the will of the people. It was also a marker of the failure to translate enforced compliance and macro-economic improvements to either tangible benefits for citizens, one third of whom currently survive on less than 400 euros a month of precarious employment, or durable reforms that would correct the long-standing structural problems of the Greek state, most notably its propensity to corruption, red-tape and clientelism.

The new government, led by the self-proclaimed moderate reformist Kyriakos Mitsotakis, hopes to move the country to the final stage of **acceptance**. The central elements of his strategy involve attracting foreign direct investment to boost the private sector, scaling back and reforming the public sector, and safeguarding public order and national interests. For any of this to work, the government will have to build bridges with all sectors of society, including the disenfranchised voters who became disillusioned with politics (42% abstention rate in

this election, despite compulsory voting) and with its political opponents like SYRIZA, who largely maintained their share of the electorate (35.5% in September 2015 to 31.5% in July 2019).

Rather than accepting a terrible present, which neither mass protest nor anti-austerity voting were able to arrest, Greeks are, once again, faced with a critical juncture that could, at last, flip the crisis into an opportunity: take ownership of reforms and proceed with a sense of personal responsibility to build a better future. The time for saviours and scapegoats has passed and the stage is set for resilient citizens, irrespective of voting preferences, and responsible leaders, irrespective of electoral calculations, to work together in pursuit of shared objectives for the benefit of all. The task remains Herculean and faced with pitfalls, both within the new government, whose far-right wing will have to be contained, and whose party's own past mistakes will have to be owned up to, but also in relation to global stakeholders.

While the outcome of this effort remains entirely volatile, and the form acceptance would likely take is entirely uncertain, an emerging paradox is that David, for the first time in ten years, appears to be in better shape than Goliath, who is arguably lagging behind in this cycle of grief. The EU, for instance, originally interpreted the crisis as an exceptionally 'Greek' problem, denying the institutional vulnerabilities of the Eurozone itself and adopting a punitive approach that both projected and created anger among citizens, not only in Greece but, indirectly, across Europe.

The way the crisis was portrayed and managed in Greece has parallels with, and may have contributed towards Brexit in the UK, which represents an even more overt threat to the foundations of European integration. Britain has replaced Greece as the country facing the 'abyss' of a disorderly exit from the Union. While in both cases, the EU appears to be emerging victorious and unnerved in bargaining with governments and publics that challenge it, the unintended effects of this do not appear to have been fully recognised, perhaps contributing to the rise in Euroscepticism in certain contexts. The Greek crisis serves as a reminder to both the EU and member states of the need, not for sensationalist, short-term and polarising victories, but for self-reflection, joint efforts and meaningful reforms that are in line with the shared needs, interests and aspirations of European citizens, or as Pink Floyd put it: "Hey you, don't tell me there's no hope at all, Together we stand, divided we fall".

*Dr. Georgios Karyotis is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Glasgow, Co-Convenor of the Greek Politics Specialist Group of the Political Studies Association and co-editor of *The Politics of Extreme Austerity: Greece in the Eurozone Crisis* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).*

7 | From political mobilization to a new bipartisanship: Neoliberalism as the Lernaean Hydra of the 2009-2019 decade

By Mike Tastsoglou

During the past decade, Greek politics was characterized by a bold political line between parties that accepted the policies of austerity (Memorandum) and those who did not. In both Greek parliamentary elections held in 2015 the electorate gave the majority of its votes to parties that had chosen to reject the neoliberal ideology that was imposed by the Troika (the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank) through the programmes of the first two Memoranda. In the September 2015 elections, the majority of votes (51.69%) went to parties advocating anti-Memorandum policies. Despite their pre-electoral commitments, the coalition government of SYRIZA and Independent Greeks followed the Memorandum way, since their negotiations for a better agreement for the Greek people had been unsuccessful with the creditors. As a result, the 2015-2019 coalition government and its strategic choices (strongly tied to a third Memorandum programme) impoverished the anti-Memorandum bloc. In the 2019 elections, anti-Memorandum parties gained only 8.75% of the votes (the Greek Communist Party and the Diem25 party).

Neoliberalism embedded in Memorandum policies and imposed by the Troika (with the coordination of several state apparatuses such as the political system, the media and the legal system) managed to dominate completely the ideological field during this decade although the Greek people desired and had voted for another political orientation. Furthermore, ten years after the 2009 elections (when PASOK and New Democracy together gathered 77.5% of the votes) bipartisanship comes back, as New Democracy and SYRIZA gathered more than 70% of the votes.

The political mobilization of the period between 2010 and 2015 seems as if it never happened. Although economic conditions in Greece are by far worse than those in 2009, bipartisanship is strong again, and despite the failure of neoliberal ideology to rebuild something better during this decade it is still dominant on the agenda of the three parties that did better in 2019 elections. These parties (New Democracy, SYRIZA and the Change Movement - a coalition with PASOK at its centre) have been governing Greece for ten years, have been voting for the implementation of the neoliberal doctrine, and, although they failed to restore the pre-Memorandum era, they still have the support of 80% of the electorate. Neoliberalism is by all odds the winner both in the field of ideas and in the field of practice.

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8 | The expected victory of Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the shifts in the map of the Greek Parliament: the good, the bad and the ugly

By Evi Palaiologou

The good: New Democracy was the legitimate winner of the snap elections of the 7th of July 2019: almost 40% of Greek voters gave Kyriakos Mitsotakis a strong mandate to serve as their next prime minister. While the results were to be expected, taken into account New Democracy's victory on the European and regional elections at the end of May, it is true that the polls were predicting an even higher difference between Syriza and New Democracy. This though, could not be the case in the end, as Greek citizens living abroad cannot exercise their right to vote for national (and regional) elections abroad. Nevertheless, 51 out of 59 electoral districts in Greece were colored blue. The worrying figure of the elections remains the low turnout being the lowest after 1974, as nearly 42% of the registered voters abstained from the electoral process, due to being abroad or not having any interest to vote.

The bad: Greek voters decided to show the exit door to the Golden Dawn and the centrist Enosi Kentroon; the Greek liberal party, Potami, did not run in the elections, following the same path as Syriza's former government coalition partner, the Independent Greeks, due to their low results in the May elections. Although still the Golden Dawn gained two seats at the European elections and Giannis Lagos was elected an MEP, he requires special permit to fulfill his parliamentary duties, as he remains in custody for his involvement in the murder of rapper Pavlos Fyssas in 2013. While seven years ago the Greek society and Europe were shocked by the entrance of the Golden Dawn in the Greek parliament, due to the rise of extreme-right parties on a European level, the murder of Pavlos Fyssas exposed the neo-Nazi criminal organization and their illegitimate activities, including hate crimes on migrants and members of the Greek communist party.

The ugly: The Greek communist party, KKE, traditionally received the same seats as in the September 2015 national elections; KINAL, the new version of PASOK, gained five extra seats and became the third party in the Greek parliament. Two controversial parties for their own different reasons became the new entries in the political power distribution game: MeRA25 and Greek Solution (EL). Despite his unsuccessful effort to enter the European Parliament, Yanis Varoufakis who has been accused of being the cause of the bank closure and capital controls in 2015 was a far exceeding surprise in the elections, as polls did not predict his gaining 9 seats.

The Greek Solution of Kyriakos Velopoulos, the new radical right-wing party, filled the gap of the Golden Dawn and the Independent Greeks in the political map and gained 10 seats in its' first entrance at the Greek Parliament. Velopoulos, a pro-Russian controversial journalist, TV presenter and former MP of the ultra-conservative LAOS party, has been in the spotlight after his election as an MEP, due to his xenophobic statements and claims that he wants to build a wall at the Greek-Turkish border, in order to reduce the migrant and refugee influx to Greece.

To put it in a nutshell, the Prespes agreement, the financial hardship and the Syriza clientele system became the tombstone of the Tsipras government. Now the conservative prime minister, has to prove to the majority of Greek voters that trust him, that he is capable of fulfilling his pre-electoral promises to modernize Greece, decrease taxes and pave the way to economic growth, as well as increasing the country's influence in the Balkan region, the Mediterranean neighborhood and the European Union.

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9 | The lead cause of Syriza's loss

By Theofanis Kakarnias

When Syriza won its second national election in 2015, it was evident that a large majority of voters forgave Syriza for its so-called "kolotoumba" i.e., the reversal of its thinking about Greece's approach to its international creditors to avoid bankruptcy. Syriza enjoyed relatively wide approval of its policies heading into 2016, but public confidence in the Syriza government started to drop significantly soon after it assumed power. Its actions were still perceived as "normal" compared to the record of previous Greek governments, despite some efforts that could be perceived as aiming to weaken democracy; e.g., Syriza's failed attempt to limit the number of national TV broadcast licenses or attempts to influence the judicial system.

Even when polls in 2016 suggested that conservative New Democracy, after having its new leadership elected, could win the next elections, Syriza was still capable of returning to first position. The turning point that sealed Syriza's fate in the national elections was a major, unfortunate event that took place in July 2018: a series of wildfires in the coastal areas of Attica. Syriza took no blame for the incident, but brought up climate change and accused the inhabitants of the fire-stricken areas for the messy urban development of the coastal zone. The fire caused 102 deaths making it the second deadliest wildfire worldwide in the 21st century. By then, polls were pretty clear that Syriza would not win the next elections, suggesting a double-digit difference between them and New Democracy.

There were a number of key reasons why Syriza lost these elections, such as the over-taxation of the middle class, the Prespes Agreement (whether one perceives it as a bad or good agreement), and Syriza's overplay of the early results of its economic programme as of 2016. Thus Syriza lost the elections, despite some positive developments, notably the recovery of the Greek economy.

Yet there was an unprecedented and "overarching theme": an arrogant style of governing mainly expressed in the communication of leading Syriza Ministers, Members of Parliament and the Greek Prime Minister himself, evidenced during the July 2018 wildfires. This style of communication even became aggressive when a certain Minister repeatedly launched verbal attacks against public officials and the media until the very last days of the Syriza government. This approach can be seen as the reason Syriza maintained its strong public support (31.5% of the vote), which is a significant increase from Syriza's single digit percentage before 2012. But to Syriza's dismay, this same approach induced the large majority of Greek citizens to turn their backs on Greece's first ever far left party and go for alternative options, including smaller parties such as Varoufakis' MeRA25.

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10 | The Communist Party of Greece:

Instead of a political intervention... A blast from the past

By Aimilia Vilou

The Communist Party of Greece (CPG - KKE) is an 'orthodox' communist party represented in the Greek parliament since the democratic transition of 1974. After a deep, twofold split (1989-1991), the party managed to maintain its traditional 'Marxist-Leninist' characteristics and a significant pool of voters. In the years 1996-2004, the CPG appealed to the voters through an explicit anti-imperialist discourse; unfolding an interclass agenda. The CPG's coalition strategy was to call the working class and its allies to reinforce the party in order to assume power through election, and, in the course of time, to prepare the socialist revolution. During this period, the CPG sought support from voters "even if they didn't totally agree with its agenda".

Since 2004, the party opted for a harder line by narrowing the criteria for including potential allies. Therefore, in 2010, when the financial crisis emerged in Greece, the CPG was already highly selective of its coalitions and extremely distant from the spontaneous outburst of the masses. During the double 2012 elections, the CPG declared that it has "no intention to govern" and that it did not consider itself "a part of the Left", referring to SYRIZA and DEMAR. At the June 2012 elections, the party achieved a 4.5% share of the votes, which was its lowest since 1974. At its 19th Congress (2013) the CPG proceeded to alter both its statutes and programme, thereupon the front strategy of the party would be a "boot camp" for the masses, a preparational stage for the revolution. When the time is right, party forces and their allies will assume power through a revolutionary road. Thus, the party's electoral agenda during both 2015 elections was a detailed, but future-oriented revolutionary plan. The outcome for the CPG was slightly improved (January 2015: 5.47% of the vote and in September 2015, 5.55%), but it seemed that the CPG couldn't capitalize on popular discontent.

In the 2019 elections, the CPG's campaign was surprising in relation to its previous tactics. The CPG tried to regain the trust of alienated voters and former member of the party and approached discontented members of other leftist parties. In an unprecedented political move, the General Secretary of the party, Dimitris Koutsoumpas, asked the voters to reinforce the party "even if they don't fully agree with us". This was a 1990s throwback. Moreover, Koutsoumpas assured the voters that the CPG would use predominantly the legislative path to defend people's rights. In the same manner and in spite of party's programme and resolutions, the party's leader emphasized the CPG's intentions to join in a popular government, but he was unable to detect any potential allies amongst the existing parties. It was the first time in the past four decades that the CPG General Secretary was the protagonist of a political advertising video, considering that CPG's stance against idolization was legendary. The party asked for the leftists' vote, promising to restore the left and its values that had been "brutally abused" by the radical left party SYRIZA. This was also a blast from the past. The CPG widened its appeal to include skeptical voters; tried to defend the concept and the values of the left; and proposed an alternative to both parliamentary and militant methods. All the above are borderline positions of CPG resolutions and it is not known if any collective body of the party had agreed upon them. Last but not least, the ten-minute pre-election political intervention by the party consisted of a truly moving video of artists expressing their trust in the CPG, pleading based upon the party's history and ideals. That was exactly the kind of intervention not anticipated by that CPG, which has usually restricted its political campaign to an exhausting, detailed list of ascertainties and demands. The electoral outcome was not satisfactory (5.30% of the vote) and it seems that the CPG still cannot capitalize on voter discontent. But there are strong indications that something is changing. The CPG is approaching leftist voters, trying to cover the space between itself and SYRIZA using old and new tricks.

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Section III

The fading of extreme politics and populism?

11 | Greek Parliamentary Elections 2019:

A step towards political stability but populism is still apparent

By Stylianos Ioannis Tzagkarakis and Ilias Pappas

Undoubtedly, the July 7 snap parliamentary elections in Greece led to major political changes indicating a return to political stability after ten years of crisis. The last time when a party gained absolute majority in the Greek parliament was in 2009 by the Panhellenic Socialistic Movement (PASOK), when the debt crisis and turmoil had not yet occurred. After the outbreak of the crisis, the first party which gained absolute majority was New Democracy (ND) on the 7th July 2019 elections. Thus, ND has the chance to govern for the next four years without problems if it manages to implement the structural reforms and the tax decreases that were promised without bringing further retrenchment in social rights and the welfare state. However, several challenges still exist as long as the high primary surplus goal of 3.5% remains and the equilibrium between tax-cuts and meeting fully the obligations of the agreements with Greece's creditors continues.

On the other hand, SYRIZA has essentially lost only about 3.5% of its 2015 voters, which seem to have voted for Yanis Varoufakis's MeRA25. Thus, SYRIZA maintains most of its electoral vote, even after 4.5 years of austerity measures under the agreement of the 3rd memorandum of understanding with creditors, after reversing the result of the 2015 referendum, the Prespes Agreement about North Macedonia name dispute and the refugee crisis. This is certainly a major achievement, deriving -inter alia- from the implementation of a party-state policy as well as from a still effective populist-divisive rhetoric.

Moreover, it turns out that KINAL-PASOK (Movement for Change-Kinima Allagis) remains stable and even slightly consolidated, despite extreme polarization from the two major parties. However, if it does not make drastic changes in its leadership and gradually be transformed into a modern social democratic progressive movement, it will not manage to escape from the level of 8%. At the same time, the communist party (KKE) seems stable. ANEL (Independent Greeks which did not run in the elections), a right wing populist party, appears to have been replaced by the Greek Solution (Elliniki Lysi) populists. Furthermore, far left wing populism is enforced by the 3.5% of Varoufakis's MeRA25 that managed to enter the Greek parliament. The very positive result for democracy in these elections was that, although marginally, the neo-nazi Golden Dawn party did not manage to enter the parliament.

It is thus clear enough that populism still prevails in Greece but a step forward towards political stability has been made and ND is presented with the challenge to enforce it. SYRIZA faces the challenge to transform itself into a social democratic party, however this seems very difficult if it does not abolish its populist character. At the same time, the transformation of KINAL-PASOK into a modern social democratic party is important should they want to gain the electorate that is now still attracted by SYRIZA. Finally, far-left and far-right populism still exists in Greece but the defeat of Golden Dawn has weakened its far-right version.

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12 | Political Elites in the Greek Far Right:

The case of Kyriakos Velopoulos

By George Kordas

In July's Greek elections, Golden Dawn failed to surpass the electoral threshold of 3%, not managing to enter the Greek Parliament for the first time since 2012. While the Greek far-right did again gain parliamentary representation, its most extreme faction is experiencing its electoral disappearance as Golden Dawn's trial enters its final stage. We had the appearance of another political party: the *Hellenic Solution (Elliniki Lysi)*. Its quaintness is based on the political legacies of its founder Kyriakos Velopoulos. While it is deemed necessary to focus more on his personality – i.e. the party's manifesto and the political decisions it will take during the new parliamentary season – there are some characteristics we can derive from Velopoulos' himself.

Velopoulos began working as a journalist on political TV shows, from which he became known for his populist, conspirational and very often racist perspectives on political developments. By entering the central political scene with Giorgos Karatzaferis' LAOS, in 2004, he belonged to a new generation of politicians who reached their adulthood under the guidance of Giorgos Karatzaferis. To support such a thesis, we have to focus both on his TV presence and his political decisions since then. Regarding his political decisions, Velopoulos abandoned LAOS in 2012, when the party's importance began declining. Before the creation of his own party, he acceded to New Democracy (ND), verifying the theory that there is a blue – like ND's colour – “block of flats”, where you can additionally cohabit every political formation farther right than the official right party. Nevertheless, Velopoulos decided to follow his path by creating the Hellenic Solution.

To conclude, we have learnt so far that some political personalities allowed the populist radical right in Greece to succeed in renewing its representation in Parliament once again since 2007. Even though it is hazardous to talk about charismatic politicians, they confirm the personalisation of politics in far right parties, a target that is fulfilled only by aggregating the power and the media's interest in the leadership. The far right has understood, since Karatzaferis first steps (as Psarras mentioned extensively) that if it wants to enunciate its beliefs, it had to use the media. Moreover, this could be realized only through a leader who expresses no fear in using conspirational and fake material.

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13 | A televised political solution:

The case of the Greek Solution and its leader

By Vasiliki Tsagkroni

On the European elections of May 2019 some may have been surprised by the electoral win of party Greek Solution that has managed to gather 4.19% of the popular vote and elect its leader, Kyriakos Velopoulos, as an MEP in the European Parliament. There was less surprise though, on the night of Sunday, July the 7th, when the party passed the electoral 3% threshold, and managed to elect 10 MPs to represent the party's views in the Greek Parliament.

Emerging as a counterweight to the absence of the Independent Greeks from the elections, the distinctive decrease of supporters and the final complacency from the cut off, of Golden Dawn, Greek Solution stands as a proof of reminder to the Greek people that the extreme right has a binding and sturdy audience in the society.

Velopoulos, a journalist, a Macedonian by origin, a good Christian, and a supporter of Orthodox Russia, has served as a MP with the People's Orthodox Rally (LA.O.S.), from where he resigned in 2012, then joined the conservative party of New Democracy, only to leave also this party in 2015 in order to form the Greek Solution party. The official line of the party seems to follow the same nationalist and religious rhetoric as the one of the party that nourished its leader. The party among others stands in favour of a strong state, both in economic and military terms, and against multiculturalism, raising the threat of Islam that goes against the Greek Christian values and the Greek nation.

Velopoulos, just like Karatzaferis before him, used his access to the media in order to steadily build an electoral base, aiming to those who were disappointed by the coalition of Independent Greeks with Syriza, and the betrayal of Macedonia as a result of the Prespa agreement. Based on a combination of conspiracy theories, pseudoscience, misleading audience narrative of spreading false news, Velopoulos offers his solution. The Greek Solution advocates a Greek state protected behind a proposed wall built up on Evros, as a natural border between Greece and Turkey, with less migrants who are kept isolated not to spread diseases, the reintroduction of the capital punishment and a focus on attracting other than western great powers questioning thus the stereotype of Greece's western allies. This is a solution that 3.7% of Greeks identified with.

Therefore, the conclusion that extreme right has been rejected in the country in the latest elections is rather too premature. The vote to Greek Solution and Velopoulos proves that the newly formed party emerged as a proud decedent of LA.O.S and Independent Greeks, and evolved gradually from an originally protest vote, to a more exonerated one.

Dr Vasiliki Tsagkroni, Lecturer and Researcher, Institute of Political Science, Leiden University.

14 | Far-right voters and the Greek Elections

By Thanasis Dimakas

Despite the failure of Golden Dawn to enter the Hellenic Parliament, the “far-right” in a broad sense seems to have retained its forces in Greece. The term “far-right” is used in a broad sense to include both the Golden Dawn, which is a neo-Nazi party, and the Elliniki Lysi (Greek Solution) party which is a far-right wing party of nationalist ideology. The Greek Solution is a new entry in the Hellenic Parliament which managed to also elect one MEP in the recent European Parliamentary Elections held in May. The far-right audience in Greece seems to represent a notable percentage of the electorate, as indicated by data of the recent elections.

In the 2015 parliamentary elections, Golden Dawn gathered 379,722 votes representing 6.99% of the votes and managed to elect eighteen members at the parliament. In the elections of 2019, Golden Dawn received 165,709 votes and a share of 2.93%. On the other hand, the Greek Solution received 208,805 votes, and thus managed to pass the threshold of 3% and to enter the Greek Parliament securing ten parliamentary seats. Comparing the votes of Golden Dawn of 2015 (379,722) to the sum of the votes that Golden Dawn and Greek Solution received together (374,477) in the recent 2019 elections, it is observed that the difference is only 5,000 votes. This indicates that there is still a solid basis of voters of the extreme right-wing parties. It is safe to say that far-right, regardless of its form, has a notable number of voters of about 370,000. Despite Golden Dawn losing a large percentage of votes, the far-right as a bloc is not weakened, at least in terms of the total number of voters and parliamentary representation. This is an observation to be held in mind in the process of transforming the political arena in Greece.

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Section IV

Greek politics in a post-austerity era: resurging
bipartisanship and a weak green surge

15 | The 2019 Greek National Elections: Long live (real) Bipartisanship

By Ioannis P. Sotiropoulos

If the May 2012 Greek national elections signalled the collapse of the two-party political system, one that was prevalent for the last 35 years, the elections of 7 July 2019 resulted in the re-institution of bipartisanship to the Greek political system. Without a doubt, the Greek national elections of 7 July brought a wide margin electoral victory of the centre-right, liberal political party New Democracy (ND), with 39.9%, set against the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), which gained 31.5% (a cumulative percentage of 71.4%).

The election made clear that the Greek electoral body unhesitatingly 'punished' SYRIZA condemning its policy, mainly due to its poor performance in economy and foreign policy. As a result, ND's victory was with significantly more votes (8.4%) than the second place incumbent, SYRIZA. This leads to a comfortable, but not vibrant majority for ND in the Greek National Parliament; 158 out of 300, *vis-à-vis*, SYRIZA with 86 seats. Still, the most important thing for the winning party is that its victory is accompanied by certain qualitative characteristics; ND prevailed across the various groups of the electorate. Thus, the new government has a greater opportunity to implement its programme within a *grosso modo* 'friendly' social environment.

On the other hand, in the recent elections, the incumbent SYRIZA managed to persuade a significant electorate of the need that it remains a fundamental front-line political party in the Greek political landscape, leaving the traditional, single-sided social democratic Movement of Change (KINAL) in third place with 8.1%. Indeed, SYRIZA strategically consolidated itself as the one of the two protagonists of the Greek political system. After a four-year period governing through vast crisis and intensive political pressure, it survived losing only four percent of its power base. Its structural transformation towards social democracy, announced by its leader immediately after the elections, shall certainly be a long and painful, but an absolutely necessary procedure for its own political emancipation as well as for the benefit of the Greek political system.

Certainly, the emerging political system will not have the bipartisan characteristics of the years 1995-2012, which only exhibited management differences between the two party poles of New Democracy and PASOK. In contrast, the new bipartisanship will demonstrate the profound philosophical and ideological differences between ND and SYRIZA being, *mutatis mutandis*, a phenomenon of systemic *déjà vu* of the end of the post-Second World War decade with the National Radical Union (EPE) and the Unified Democratic Left (EDA) as antagonistic poles. Key areas of social activity, foreign policy and national interests will definitely be fields of intense confrontation between the two parties with central issues being the sovereign state, the social state, state protectionism, trade liberalization, private initiative, wealth and income redistribution.

Even after the imminent attempt of SYRIZA's transformation into a modern social democratic party, it is not certain that there will not be any turbulence and leakage in SYRIZA's left. This is due to the fact that SYRIZA is a coalition of left wing parties, comprising various leftist political forces such as leftist socialists, Marxist Leninists, traditional Euro-communists and revisionists, radical internationalists and revolutionaries. As a result, it positions itself ideologically and politically between social democracy and communism and party-wise between KINAL and the Communist Party of Greece, being also in support of extra-parliamentary groups. In the absence of any substantial class layering in Greece, for SYRIZA the contemporary hybrid neo-proletariat includes minorities, socially oppressed and marginalized groups, internationalistic groups and all sorts of anti-capitalists and anti-liberals, those opposing traditional social institutions such as the Greek Orthodox Church as well as anarchists.

Amidst the political and ideological transformation of SYRIZA, the new bipartisanship should be extremely interesting.

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16 | The establishment of a new two-party system in Greece

By Stavros Rakintzis

If the dual electoral process of 2012 constituted a critical juncture for Greece's political system and the correlations of party forces within it ending a period that began in the mid-1970s, the national parliamentary elections of July 2019 have essentially consolidated this new reality.

The recent election process took place right after the expiration of the so-called memorandum period in August 2018 when the third memorandum between Greece and its lenders ended. The memorandum period began in 2010 as a result of Greece's debt crisis and the implementation of economic adjustment programs.

A basic characteristic of the 2019 parliamentary elections is the preservation of the two-party system; a political system that remained powerful in Greece in the first phase of the transition to democracy after 1974 (known as the *Metapolitefsi*) especially in the 1980s. For nearly three decades and until the parliamentary elections of 2009, the two political parties most prevalent and resistant to political shocks and mutations were ND and PASOK. The international economic crisis and the compulsory attachment of Greece to a memorandum period weakened PASOK, which, during the period of its governance had to manage the first difficult phase of the crisis, through unpopular policies that burdened Greek citizens. The choices and the policy that PASOK adopted resulted in weakening itself politically and being replaced in the two-party system by a small party from radical left, SYRIZA, in the 2012 elections. SYRIZA then went on to win the elections of January 2015, displaying anti-memorandum positions and finally forming a government.

SYRIZA confirmed its position in the 2019 parliamentary elections in the new two-party system despite the fact that since 2015 its political opponents called it the "left bracket", predicting that it would return to its single-digit percentages when it was a small and weak party; others spoke of the party's strategic defeat. The combined vote of the two main parties was 75.31%, returning to pre-crisis levels. In the 2009 parliamentary elections it reached 77.39%, shared between PASOK and ND. The combined vote of the new two-party system of SYRIZA and ND in the mid-term elections were 35.63% in May 2012, 56.55% in June 2012, 64.15% in January 2015 and 63.55% in September 2015.

This change in the composition of the two-party system arising during the economic crisis was confirmed in the parliamentary elections of 2019. At the same time, the parties formed during the memorandum period either disintegrated or failed to be elected. ANEL and Potami did not participate in the 2019 elections. Golden Dawn and the Union of Centrists (*Enosis Kentroon*), remained outside the Greek parliament. Already in 2015, DIMAR had formed the Democratic Alignment with PASOK.

Another feature of the 2019 parliamentary elections is a return to a single-party majority government. Until the elections of 2009, single-party majority governments were a dominant element of the Greek political system. During the memorandum period, the 2012 and 2015 elections led to coalition governments. Today, New Democracy managed to gain absolute majority in the Greek parliament with 39.85% of the vote and occupying 158 parliamentary seats having a pre-election campaign for growth and jobs creation.

Despite voters' disapproval of the austerity memorandum policies that SYRIZA implemented, the latter gained the high percentage of 31.53% of the vote and confirmed its position in the new two-party system. The day after the elections, however, will mark SYRIZA's attempt to gain the centre-left, held by the once powerful PASOK for decades. This attempt will bring distinct features to the new two-party system, ideological displacements and new social alliances, thereby introducing a new policy period in Greece.

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17 | The Green Surge and the Greek Exception

By Vasilis Leontitsis

In the past few months we have been surrounded by news about the Green surge that has been transforming the political landscape of many European political systems. In countries from Germany to the UK, Green parties have been doing well in the European, national and/or local elections. However, the surge does not seem to have reached Greece. To the contrary, the once promising electoral results achieved by the Greek green parties, and especially the results of the Ecologist Greens in the period 2009-2012, are long gone. The party has managed to survive only by way of co-operating with SYRIZA during and after elections, and by attempting to gain parliamentary and ministerial posts out of this collaboration. In the process, it has accepted painful decisions put forward by SYRIZA, such as the continuation of mining operations in the gold mines of Chalkidiki by Eldorado Gold and the decision to push for oil extraction in Western Greece. In the Sunday, 7 July elections, once again the Ecologist Greens did not take part, opting instead for the relative comfort of continuing the parasitic relationship with SYRIZA. The pre-election debates hardly featured any mentioning of the climate crisis, plastic pollution or the absurd consumerism that strangles our future. The big European Green wave has never made it to the Greek shores. And yet, as the ecological crisis looms, one is left with the question: for how long...?

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18 | When the Green Wave hits a breakwater:

Contemplating Green fortunes in the snap national elections of 7th July 2019 in Greece

By John Karamichas

On Monday 27th May 2019 at the meeting of the Central Committee of Syriza, Alexis Tsipras, the Greek prime minister and President of Syriza, confirmed his intention to call early general elections. The possibility of snap elections was mentioned by Tsipras on the previous night of the elections (26 May) after he conceded defeat to centre right New Democracy. In closing, Alexis Tsipras looked at the front row where Yannis Tsironis, the spokesperson of the Ecologists Greens (EG), sat and mentioned the near 1% (0.87%) that they managed to achieve and talked openly about collaborating in the elections. The EG had participated with two cadres in ministerial posts in the Syriza government but decided to run independently in the European parliamentary elections. What explains the EG's failure in elections held in Greece?

First, a simple perusal of the results of the European parliamentary elections suggests that the heralded green wave was a reality, albeit that reality was mainly confined to northern EU member states. Indeed, in most northern EU member states, their respective green parties nearly doubled their yields from the 2014 European parliamentary elections and the European Green party achieved the best results in its history. However, in eastern and southern Europe there was either a decrease or maintenance of the 2019 electoral yields when compared to the 2014 achievements. Second, the autumn 2018 standard Eurobarometer shows that immigration was important for 44% of Greeks; the economic situation for 27% and unemployment for 17% as compared to much lesser concern of climate change which was only 4%, compared to the EU average of 16%. Third, the Greens-Solidarity, another green party formation also participated and scored 0.45% of the vote. That party was formed by Chrysogelos, the only elected Green MEP who replaced in the EP the green veteran activist, Michalis Tremopoulos elected on an EG ballot in the 2009 EP elections. The consultation between the EG and Syriza resulted in the participation of eight EG candidates from Syriza lists and one candidate from Syriza's state ballot. None of these candidatures were successful and the Greens-Solidarity party of Chrysogelos decided not to participate in the last national elections.

These disappointing results and the abstention from the last elections do not mean that the Greek parliament is bereft of ecology voices. In fact, the MéPA25 (DiEM25) of Yanis Varoufakis managed to score 3.44% and elect nine MPs in the Greek parliament in Green campaign against hydrocarbon extractions that the Syriza government has signed to implement and the ND government is very much likely to continue along with work against a number of other environmentally harmful projects. We are very likely to see an intense wave of green mobilizations, only this time the protest milieu that supported Syriza when in opposition will find it hard to fight against projects in which Syriza was a key partner.

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Section V

(Neo)liberals and Leftists:

A scent of ideology

19 | Greece's Liberal Comeback

By Athanasios Chatziioannou

The snap parliamentary elections in Greece sent a clear signal: economically, as well as politically, the country yearns for calmer waters. With the landslide victory of the conservative Nea Demokratia (ND), Kyriakos Mitsotakis can rule alone with a comfortable majority. However, with Syriza's unexpectedly strong performance he faces a large opposition party in parliament. In short, the two-party system has been largely rehabilitated.

Alexis Tsipras was right on the election night when he claimed that he hands over the country in a much better condition than when he took office four years ago. However, he didn't fulfil people's expectations. Promising to free the country from the austerity dictates of foreign creditors he aroused a feeling of hope among the population in 2015. This feeling of hope brought him into office but he was unable to fulfil it.

His tenure's tougher austerity measures left the country scarred and created a lot of dissatisfaction. But it wasn't only his inability to bring about a tangible economic recovery that discredited him among the electorate. The political newcomer with a clean record, who opposed the corrupt political establishment, assumed a similar arrogance in office in his four years as those who he always considered his enemies. His latest practices included the use of public offices for party-political purposes, the non-transparent treatment of financially strong businessmen as well as influencing the media and the judiciary.

Mitsotakis was able to present his vision more convincingly when as an economically liberal conservative he came up with a plan for economic growth: reductions in corporate taxes and administrative reforms should attract foreign investors and tax cuts for low incomes boost domestic demand. His programme includes the streamlining of the state, digitalization, public investment, privatization – an economic programme for a country that still hasn't seen an upswing one year after the end of the bailout plans.

Syriza, with more than 30% of votes, has done much better than expected, and Tsipras confidently accepts his mandate as a strong leader of the opposition. He stands for a shift towards the centre and the formation of a broad progressive alliance involving other forces such as the Greens, but above all the PASOK successor party KINAL – of course under his leadership. We can therefore expect that he will distance himself from his populist street fighting rhetoric and expand the statesmanlike image he has acquired in office. Only 44 years old, he will work on his return to government.

There's also another familiar face among the left spectrum back on the political stage: Yanis Varoufakis jumped just over the three-percent hurdle with DiEM25, but he's more likely to stir up the plenary debates than to exert real political influence.

For Europe, the change of government in Athens isn't bad news at first sight: the conservative government intends to stabilize the economy in agreement with its European partners. In foreign policy, it promises continuity – including the respect of the Prespes Agreement. Like his predecessor, Mitsotakis will have to be judged against his promises.

Athanasios Chatziioannou, Political Scientist, Graduate of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

20 | The left bloc¹ is still a work in progress

By Yiannos Katsourides

The rise of SYRIZA from the margins to centre stage in 2012 signaled a process of restructuring within the wider left bloc. Electorally, the leftist forces – i.e. those parties to the left of social democracy – increased their vote share to the detriment of social democratic PASOK and became dominant. In terms of party competition it further aggravated the confrontational relationship between SYRIZA and other leftist forces, particularly the KKE.

The ostensible closure of the most extreme phase of the crisis cycle seems to have stabilized SYRIZA as one of the two pillars of a renewed bipartyism and simultaneously the main party within the left bloc. However, it signals at the same time, yet another phase of restructuring within the left bloc both in terms of ideology and organization. Four parties of this bloc are present in parliament (SYRIZA, KKE, MÉPA25 and KINAL), whereas SYRIZA's good result has squeezed out all other extra-parliamentary parties on the left which did not pass the 3% threshold, thus not achieving representation. SYRIZA's transformation to a governing, social democratic party as already announced by A. Tsipras will re-trigger controversies and polarization between the component parts of the left bloc. Issues of parties' ideological identities will be at the heart of this debate with some of the parties in this bloc still vying to find one.

As the biggest party in the left bloc, SYRIZA's apparent social-democratization poses a more fundamental question that goes beyond the party itself and touches upon the entire family of the radical left in Europe. The question of SYRIZA's imminent ideological transformation (many argue that it has already been ongoing for a while) begs the question whether the radical left in Greece and in Europe as an alternative to the communist left has come to a political end. In view of most social democratic parties' failure to live up to expectations and their electoral downturns some 'pragmatic' parties of the radical left – such as SYRIZA – are moving towards taking their place as the main parties in the left bloc. Their political proposal, however, seems to exhaust itself in a 'new' social contract of incorporation with an emphasis on individual rights. However, this does not qualify as radical and invites the question of what differentiates the radical left from classic social democracy?

Whatever the answer, the inner workings and the eventual crystallization of the left bloc in Greece is far from being concluded; it is still a work in progress.

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¹ Although some authors do not include social democracy when referring to the left bloc, for the sake of best making my argument I choose to include social democracy in the left bloc.

21 | 'Robust Greece' vs. 'We are voting for our lives': a view from the campaigns of ND and SYRIZA

By Lazaros Karavasilis

The results of the European elections and the victory of the conservative New Democracy (ND) led Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to proclaim national elections on the 7th of July. This led to a month of electoral campaigning with the two primary contenders for power deploying their own vision for the future of Greece. A closer look at those campaigns in connection with the results of the European elections can offer a more comprehensive picture on why ND won the national elections with almost 40% of the vote and why SYRIZA lost only 4% compared to the elections of September 2015.

The end of SYRIZA's momentum?

After four and a half years in power SYRIZA started its campaign with two things in mind: the defeat in the European Parliament elections and governmental performance. With the unexpected results of the 26th of May, the party had a somewhat slow response to the challenge posed by ND's victory that translated also in how they handled the campaign in the beginning. However, as the 7th July approached, Tsipras was the one that led the campaign with one major slogan: 'this time we are voting for our lives'. The latter message, while it was also featured in previous electoral campaigns, this time was brought to the forefront and acted as the symbol on which the campaign was built. Through that slogan SYRIZA and more prominently Alexis Tsipras posed a dilemma between a return to the old political establishment and a new way for economic growth beyond the Memoranda austerity politics. At the same time, the party had to promote the work during the 4 years in government, including handling the political cost of the 'Macedonian question' and its solution. The outcome of the 7th July election showed that SYRIZA managed to prove more resilient than expected, given their bad performance in the European elections and the political cost of being in government.

New Democracy and the return to 'normality'

New Democracy managed to take advantage of its victory in the European elections, allowing the party to create an image of the return of 'normality' in Greece, especially since the prospect of a return to power appeared to be more realistic. The party's slogan 'strong growth, robust Greece' encapsulated the optimistic image that ND created before the European elections and continued in the campaign for the national elections. The focus that was given on issues such as 'law & order' and the necessary presence of police forces in allegedly 'forbidden' areas like Exarchia in Athens, gave the sense of return to normality of a democratic country. Along with the presentation of a controversial yet neoliberal political programme, ND managed to rally the majority of right-wing voters, appeal to disappointed ones and become the main beneficiary of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn's voters after the party's collapse.

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Section VI

New Democracy and SYRIZA:
pre-election political communication and
election effects

22 | A new old era

By Nikolaos Katsoulotos

The general elections that took place on 7 July in Greece were the first of the post-memorandum era having a series of effects. Indicatively, the elections led to a one party government for the first time since 2009 elections, and a two party system where SYRIZA (replacing PASOK on one pole) and New Democracy gathered together 70% of the votes (for the first time since 2009). Another effect is that political parties that emerged as a result of the crisis did not enter the parliament and/or they were dissolved. Golden Dawn is the best example of this trend. As a result of the elections, only six parties managed to enter the parliament instead of seven or eight as in elections prior to the crisis era (i.e., elections between 2012 and 2015).

Two features of the July elections were that, first, these elections were held early and unplanned, imposed as they were by SYRIZA's overwhelming defeat in the European and municipal elections in May this year. Second, there was no substantial surprise on the outcome, at least on the winner, as the almost ten point difference (9.37%) between the two leading parties at the European parliamentary elections in May, could not be overturned in 42 days! Even the "expectation" of self-reliance was more theoretical than substantial. Within the above framework, the communication strategy of the two main parties was obvious. New Democracy avoided any tension that would threaten its supremacy. SYRIZA sought polarization with the aim to dominate the centre-left spectrum. Both strategies proved successful! The posters from their campaign reflect these communication goals.



In New Democracy's main poster, the body posture of Kyriakos Mitsotakis exudes tranquility and unity, which is emphasized by the central slogan "United we Can". He is also portrayed as human and approachable as he doesn't stand over his interlocutors but is seated next to them. The viewer feels as if he is participating in a discussion with Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The party's logo is located centrally on top of the poster, which is unusual. However, the position is important to raise awareness of a newly designed logo with the Greek voters. Its abstract design of multiple-triangles could be interpreted as sending a message that the party is open to society and new ideas. Additionally, as Kyriakos Mitsotakis noted: "Our new logo is so distinct that it stands out from every other". Finally, the colors chosen for the poster exude serenity. The red triangle in place of the accent on the word "strong" («ΙΣΧΥΡΗ») exactly mimics that in the party's logo.

On the other hand, SYRIZA's central poster shows Alexis Tsipras' leadership skills by portraying him confident and optimistic. The development of the logo is interesting. In view of the European elections SYRIZA adapted its visual identity to the need for greater openness in society, placing the logo in a pattern of square dialogue bubbles (referring to social media) and adding the phrase "progressive alliance".

In the July elections, however, the logo changed once more as the square dialogue bubbles were replaced by colorful triangles. Each triangle is meant to symbolize a different political position and political view. The triangles point, like arrows under SYRIZA's main red triangle, aiming at a single point: the need to "Decide for Our Life".



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23 | New Democracy after the election:

Conformation and party developments under Mitsotakis leadership

By Constantinos Saravakos

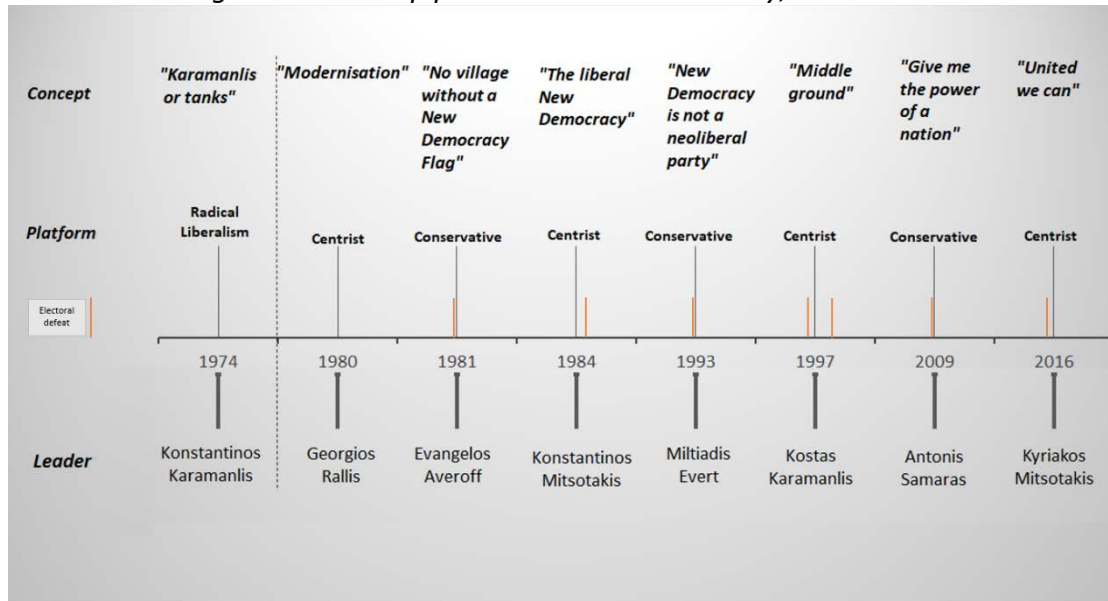
New Democracy has been elected in order to apply a liberal pre-election economic program designed to tackle the macroeconomic crisis and aim at economic growth, cut government spending, reduce taxes and boost investments. The plan of this aggressive reform package has to overcome several obstacles that will also challenge Mitsotakis' leadership, let alone governance. The most important obstacle comes from his own party and it concerns a deep ideological contradiction. Mitsotakis hopes to reform Greece towards a liberal path by governing with a conservative and old-fashioned party. In addition, the vast majority of the MPs elected do not belong to the liberal faction of the party. Consequently, Mitsotakis has two possible ways of governing and this choice determines the success of the reform program's implementation.

The first option is to govern by appointing non-elected technocrats as cabinet officials and grant them more power to drastically reform the Greek economy. This will possibly lead to a direct internal conflict, since the party still has strong relations with interest groups, represented by several MPs. The view that New Democracy is a people's party and there is no space for a (neo) liberal agenda is more than popular in the party's social base. The other option is for Mitsotakis to be a moderate leader who implements only reforms with no significant political cost. However, in this case the economic recovery promised will not happen and Mitsotakis' power to succeed will be questioned both by the opposition and by his own MPs.

This internal confrontation is far from new to New Democracy and we would rather say that it is a core element of the party's "DNA". New Democracy is a ruling party and its organizational structure is largely determined by its leader: a centrist leader makes a catch-all party, while a conservative leader makes a mass-based party. These transformations reflect also a clear leadership pattern. A conservative leader replaces a centrist one who did not manage to gain or retain power and vice versa (see Figure). Soon after every electoral defeat, the party either returns to its conservative base, or it tries to exhibit a liberal turn, depending the leader who lost. These transformations should be seen as embedded in the cartel party system established in Greece in the *Metapolitefsi* era.

New Democracy's liberal policies are *per se* purely instrumental if the party tries to return to political power. The party's social base is conservative and in favor of statism, elects conservative candidates and accepts a liberal agenda only to get back to power so that it can employ the resources of the state to secure its own survival. Undoubtedly, Mitsotakis' successor will be a conservative politician who will try to bring the party back to its base. The only question is whether Mitsotakis will choose to lose by reforming the Greek economy, or by giving in to populism and the party's clientelistic networks. The possibility that Mitsotakis will break the leadership pattern seems to be incredibly unrealistic.

Figure: Leadership pattern in New Democracy, 1974-2016



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24 | SYRIZA's Imminent Metamorphosis

By Pavlos Gkasis

Many times in life we are faced with inevitabilities, something which is even more common in the realm of politics. One such case has been the recent elections in Greece where New Democracy (ND) rose to power again after four years, while SYRIZA suffered a painful (?) defeat. The argument put forth in this short analysis is that if someone takes into consideration a series of events regarding Greek politics in the past ten years and (s)he attempts to present a sober and unbiased analysis of the recent election results in Greece they will quickly reach the conclusion that SYRIZA might have lost this election but New ND's win is one with a few important asterisks. The aforementioned inevitability refers to the fact that almost every Greek government that had to manage the successive bail-out programs imposed by Greece's foreign lenders (i.e. ECB, European Commission, IMF) lost in the elections that followed. PASOK was the first victim of this trend, not only losing the elections but being practically annihilated, since it was the political party that was the first to have the responsibility to handle the harsh austerity measures imposed to Greece. Then, the ND-PASOK coalition followed suit when it also lost the 2015 elections, and now SYRIZA faced, what we consider here as the inevitable.

As stated above though, this defeat comes with a series of asterisks. The first is that SYRIZA lost only 4% compared to the previous elections held in September 2015 after having signed a third Memorandum of Understanding with the country's lenders, adopting in the meantime some of the most harsh austerity measures Greeks have experienced in recent years. On top of that, the SYRIZA government just recently passed one of the most contested agreements in modern Greek history, for the long-lasting dispute between Greece and the now called Republic of North Macedonia regarding the latter's official name. This was a dispute that plagued the two countries' bilateral relationships for almost three decades, laying the ground for the advent of extremist and nationalistic voices in both. Last but not least, abstention was the highest recorded since 1974, reaching 44% and signalling that a massive number of voters feel underrepresented in the current political scene.

This final point is probably the most important outcome of the recent elections. Having gained experience as a ruling party and in significantly difficult times for the Greek economy and society, SYRIZA will probably transform to a centre-left party occupying the political space that PASOK used to hold and not only winning back the 4% that it lost in the recent elections, but also gaining access to a pool of voters that is traditionally in the centre feeling underrepresented by the current form of the two dominant political parties.

SYRIZA's defeat will give Alexis Tsipras the opportunity to move his party's political agenda closer to the centre of the political spectrum, and to depart from radical left positions that shaped SYRIZA's agenda for many years. With SYRIZA being in the opposition, Tsipras will win valuable time in his endeavour to further push his party towards this direction and gain access to this crucial pool of voters. This is the exact same time that ND will not necessarily have due to its responsibility in governing the country and its sustained inability, or even indecisiveness to rid itself of its own radical voices emanating from its right. This will prove costly leading a large volume of centre voters closer to SYRIZA rather than to ND.

The obvious outcome of the recent elections is that ND definitely won. What is not so obvious though, at this point in time is whether SYRIZA really lost. It definitely didn't win but it seems as if Tsipras was ready to lose this battle eyeing SYRIZA's metamorphosis to a centre-left party, one that will allow it to bounce back quickly being better prepared for the next round.

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25 | The outcome of the elections and SYRIZA's challenge

By Chrysanthos D. Tassis

The outcome of the 7th July general elections has been determined by the elections for the European Parliament held in May 2019, as the great electoral defeat of SYRIZA did not leave many expectations that the party of the Greek Radical Left could reverse this trend. The tactic of SYRIZA's leadership to transform the European Elections from "second order elections" to "first order elections", judging SYRIZA's capacity to govern, as well as with the "surprising" reactions by the "unexpected" result, indicate that the leadership of the party expected a totally different electoral result. Moreover, this trend was strengthened by the weakness of the party to establish important political alliances for the Regional and Local Government elections, along with the immense decision of the leadership of the party to declare national elections.

Thus, New Democracy (ND) finally managed to win the national elections securing an absolute majority. However, in politics, sometimes, a better political result can occur by an electoral failure rather than by an electoral success. In the case of SYRIZA, the main problem of the party is that, at the end of the (governmental) day, it has become a rather moderate, mainstream (in terms of radical left) governmental party which mainly focuses on the fulfillment of the necessities of the (capitalist) state, as the radical elements of the party have been dramatically decreased. This political transformation is based mainly on three major factors. First, the political culture of the party which made the adoption of a mass party structure almost impossible. This evolution weakens the ties of the (governmental) party with the society, as it empowers the "party in public office" (government) and undermines the "party in central office" (secretary general and central committee) and the "party on the ground" (local branches) in shaping governmental policies and producing new political personnel. Second, the restrictive economic and political framework for a governmental party in Greece in 2015 when SYRIZA came to power, and thirdly, the dominant European political elites and political parties including the European Social Democrats were hostile to the prospect of a party of a radical left identity coming to power and even introducing Keynesian style politics.

However, SYRIZA managed to gain 31,5% of the votes which indicates that it has become the dominant political party of the Centre Left, as the anti-SYRIZA tactic of PASOK/KINAL did not deliver. Therefore, the party of the Greek Socialists seems unable to "attract" its "traditional" voters as SYRIZA maintains a political and electoral dynamic. In this framework, the new challenge of SYRIZA is to reshuffle its organisational structure as a mass-based party reflecting social division of labour in Greece. Even in opposition, it has the opportunity to make fundamental changes on the main principles and values of the political agenda, to frame the political dialogue on issues such as the welfare state, progressive taxation, reduction on inequalities, collective consumption, democratization of EU politics. Such issues will make SYRIZA to become a real leading political party in order not only to win the next elections, but to introduce a radical governmental program as well.

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26 | SYRIZA's Victorious Defeat

By Iakovos Makropoulos

Between 2015 and 2019 SYRIZA was in power. During this period, Alexis Tsipras cancelled the result of the 5th July Referendum, voted for the 3rd Memorandum despite the anti-memorandum rhetoric of his party, and has recently passed the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia, despite many protests. Moreover, SYRIZA was blamed for badly managing the deadly 2018 fires in Mati. In this context, it was reasonable to expect that the electorate would punish the incumbent government on both economic and nationalist grounds.

Nevertheless, though defeated, SYRIZA maintained its electoral base, winning 31.6% of the vote. This is just four percentage points down from the last general elections in September 2015, which is remarkable in comparison to the previous austerity governments. Since 2010, none of the former government parties completed a four year incumbency. In the previous general elections and after voting for the two memoranda, PASOK and New Democracy won 5.2% and 28.1% of the vote respectively.

Additionally, compared to the 2015 general election, SYRIZA is the only successful so-called populist party. Its minor coalition partner ANEL and the far-right Golden Dawn failed to reach the three percent threshold.

At this moment, the center-left and left wing has lost ground in Europe. In the post economic crisis period, the ideologically similar left-wing party in Spain, Unidas Podemos of Pablo Iglesias, gained only 14.3% of the vote, down from 20.7% in the 2019 Spanish general elections.

The results of the Greek general election indicate the revival of two party politics in Greece. The two major parties in the post-economic crisis increased the difference from the other parties in their share of votes, creating a bipolar system between New Democracy (on the right) and SYRIZA (left-wing) with 71.4% cumulatively. However, what could be now the rhetoric of SYRIZA as an opposition party? Could SYRIZA adopt the role of PASOK as the main centre-left component? This would mark a change in party narrative from populist and anti-memorandum to a more ideological central-socialist content. Probably SYRIZA will disengage from its previous positions and move towards the centre.

The future goal of Alexis Tsipras and SYRIZA would be to regain the power in the next elections. The most likely pathway would be for SYRIZA to also move towards the centre. Additionally, the easiest path to convince Greek voters to return their confidence to SYRIZA would be for that party to support any good initiatives of the new government in addressing the perpetual issues of Greek society: economic development, unemployment, social security, foreign relations with Turkey and Greek demographics.

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Section VII

The Day after the 7th of July

27 | Back to the Future: Greece after the July 2019 Elections

By Dimitris Tsarouhas



Outgoing Prime Minister A. Tsipras congratulates incumbent K. Mitsotakis outside the Prime Minister's Office (Athens, 8 July 2019)

Photo: Intimenews/Liakos Yannis, www.iefimerida.gr

The democratic maturity with which Greek voters delivered their verdict on the incumbent Syriza administration as well as the opposition parties confirms the country's deep, and enduring, democratic tradition. Granted, after ten long years of punitive austerity and party political (but hardly any societal) polarization, the record high abstention rate of 44% reflects disillusionment with the political class and widespread fatalism on a substantial part of the electorate.

Nevertheless, the new Greek Parliament emerging from the 7 July elections also demonstrates the widespread desire, by centre-right and centre-left voters alike, for the return of the country to normal, stable and more predictable political competition. How so? First, more than seven out of ten voters opted for the two largest parties, breaking the cycle of fragmentation and successive party splits inaugurated ten years ago. Second, again after ten years, the country is run by a one-party majority government with a strong reform mandate and the luxury to confront problems head on without regard for awkward coalition-building. Moreover, the new Prime Minister (PM) Mitsotakis enjoys widespread legitimacy that allows him to implement his tax cutting, investment-friendly reforms without delay; excuses and delays will hardly be tolerated. Third, departing PM Tsipras obtained a commanding 31.5% of the vote; his popularity as strong as ever, the Syriza leader can now seize the opportunity to turn Syriza into an organized political movement and away from a personalities-based electoral machine. Fourth, Golden Dawn's paltry 2.9% means that the shenanigans of the last few years can be replaced by a more responsible and less divisive parliamentary session. The quasi return of a two-party system in which both parties are headed by young, popular leaders is undoubtedly positive. Nevertheless, the boost to economic recovery that the incumbent New Democracy party has promised rests on a new settlement with the nation's creditors.

Obligated to deliver primary surpluses of 3.5% over the next three years, the new Greek government ought to lose no time in seeking to renegotiate the current agreement downwards so as to obtain the necessary fiscal space to deliver on its pre-election promises. Failure to do so, and fast, will quickly turn the short honeymoon of the new administration into a prolonged nightmare, and is likely to reinforce voters' apathy towards politics in general and mainstream political parties in particular. The European Union needs to display the sort of flexibility and willingness for constructive cooperation with the new administration that it denied to the last.

After all, Greece has put its fiscal house in order and is in good standing. Moving faster and further than the last government is what voters opted for; they rightly expect tangible results now.

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By Athanassios Gouglas

Greece is the first country in Europe to exit the populist era, a decade dominated by a left-nationalist narrative against the EU, as well as by a 'war' like rhetoric and at times extremism that brought electoral and social dominance to parties representing such ideas: SYRIZA, the Independent Greeks, Golden Dawn. The European Parliament and regional/local elections in May 2019 already pointed towards this direction. The July general elections only made it official. Populists and extremists of all sorts have been politically and socially marginalized. Their drums of war have silenced. SYRIZA has been morally discredited in the eyes of the voters because of the many turnarounds and most importantly the various attempts to corrupt democratic institutions. The right wing populists, Independent Greeks, were annihilated already in May and did not even run in the July elections. The neo-nazis of Golden Dawn are out, after a dramatic election night that sealed the fading electoral fate of the party.

A new post-populist era is emerging in the country, in which the party system looks more 'absorbed' than 'transformed'. The conservative party of Nea Demokratia (ND) is back, but this time it is led by a genuinely liberal politician who has opposed the populist front both inside and outside his party. Moreover, ND has gotten 40% of the vote, an absolute majority in parliament and consequently the first majority government since 2009. Additionally, thanks to PASOK winning enough seats, there is an anti-populist super majority of 180 seats in parliament for the first time since the beginning of the crisis. SYRIZA too is signalling a desire to transform into a more mainstream party of the left, if not the centre left.

Given that Greece is out of bailouts, has been running big budget surpluses, the coffers have some money and growth has returned, it looks as if the country is set to enter an era of post war reconstruction. There is an interesting story here to be told, which is of relevance also for the rest of Europe. Back in 2009 Greece was the canary in the coal mine signalling an imminent catastrophe. It is now a messenger of better news. There is hope. But many European countries fighting populism nowadays are only half way through their odyssey at the moment. There are no bigger examples than the UK and Italy.

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29 | The end of an era

By Konstantina Kotsiopoulos

These elections have been a real turning point in the recent history of Greece. The economic crisis has radically changed the political scene since the transition to democracy in 1974. Since then, the dominant voting pattern has been based on the ideological axis of left and right. Pre-election programs have been based on this separation in order to declare the identities of party positions. The two major parties, ND (New Democracy) and PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) maintained the two-party system for decades, as parties fanatically supported by large masses of citizens.

However, during the economic crisis, Greek voters seem to have stopped voting based on this dichotomy. Instead, the new polarity became Anti-Memorandum vs Pro-Memorandum and political speech was shaped accordingly. The fall of the two-party split between ND and PASOK came with the elections of 2012, when PASOK received its lowest percentage of votes ever. Similarly, ND plunged to very low votes, while the emergence of new, small parties entering the parliament changed the entire political landscape. Furthermore, during the crisis, pre-election programs have been quite poor, often without a clear ideological position, but instead mainly referring to the economy's stabilization.

In 2015, SYRIZA succeeded in winning the elections due to its strong populist rhetoric against the "old tactics" and their defense of Anti-Memorandum. In addition, new entries to parliament (e.g. Golden Dawn) appeared due to punitive voting and a protest against a political system that no longer represented the voters. In these elections, on the other hand, there has been no Memorandum issue. The main demand has been the country's future development and the increase of its economic growth rate.

The high percentage of votes for ND shows, firstly, that the largest proportion of voters still does not vote ideologically nor punitively, but considers the benefit of the country. Secondly, the result signals a successful opening towards the political centre, which aims beyond ideological boundaries. Thirdly, a structured program with clear pillars has been introduced by New Democracy so that Greece achieves growth and modernization. Additionally, the displacement of Golden Dawn suggests that a significant number of the traditional extreme right voters returned either to ND or chose to support the new party, Greek Solution. Though, SYRIZA's percentage was higher than expected. It is obvious that SYRIZA, with its populist discourse, has succeeded in creating and maintaining a climate of pessimism and division. The benefits delivered to citizens by the previous government in a welfare context have also played a significant role.

Nevertheless, Greece seems to have returned to regularity, trusting a liberal party profile to obtain the much-needed economic growth. The parliament does not seem to be fragmented; there are no extreme voices and SYRIZA is now called to take the role of the main opposition with a satisfactory portion of electoral support. Finally, the parties are again turning to the adoption of structured programs for forming the Greece of the future. The new two-party political split, with ND and SYRIZA, is now based on different aspects. Thus, a new era is inaugurated on the political scene.

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30 | Greece under New Democracy:

A promising start or another déjà-vu in history?

By Aris Trantidis

New Democracy won a spectacular electoral victory under the leadership of Kyriakos Mitsotakis, son of the late Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis. Like his father, Mitsotakis is offering a reformist narrative but is leading a party with a record of mismanaging Greek economy which became a systemic threat to the Eurozone in 2009. For both Greeks and observers from abroad, the puzzle is whether the new government will avoid repeating its own record of over-promising and under-delivering on issues such as reform, sound management and meritocracy.

History and political analysis tells us that the odds stand against this promise. In my book [‘Clientelism and Economic Policy: Greece and the Crisis’](#) I studied the Greek case in developing a rational-choice theory on clientelism as a mechanism for political organisation and party cohesion. There, I demonstrated that a party system that feeds on the distribution of clientelist benefits to party cadres and allied entrepreneurs creates strong vested interests in preserving an unreformed clientelist economy. The clientelist [‘equilibrium’](#) dictates that no political leader can unilaterally withdraw benefits from party allies without risking internal party rebellion as well as strengthening the opposition. When [Constantine Mitsotakis](#) took power in 1990, his promise of economic liberalisation was fiercely opposed not only by the main opposition party but also by New Democracy’s own support base including senior party cadres, some of whom brought his government to an early end. The lesson is, that clients who join a political party and support it primarily because they anticipate special treatment and privileges will work to pre-empt, undermine or abort any reform agenda that reduces the range of benefits they have secured or seek to obtain. In Greece, the network of party cadres and crony entrepreneurs operating in several government activities such as hospitals, public construction, pension funds and local administration, created multiple ‘pockets of fiscal instability’ in places where spending and corruption were allowed to grow, aggregating into a larger pool of fiscal deficit. The excesses of [this system](#) led to the monumental fiscal derailment of Kostas Karamanlis New Democracy government in 2009, despite his government’s pledge for a ‘mild’ path to fiscal discipline.

Ten years later, circumstances have changed under the pressure of three Memoranda. Mitsotakis leads a party with a clientelist network already in place since the years of fiscal largess but has to deal with its clients in an economy that offers limited capacity to deliver to their expectations.

Greece’s problematic political economy has been a risk not only for its own citizens but for Europe as a whole. Will right-wing supporters and party cadres oppose a reform agenda? Is the left going to rebel against it? Can the government contain new pockets of corruption and fiscal derailment? Will it sustain fiscal discipline without risking a party rebellion? Will this forthcoming period become another déjà-vu in history?

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31 | A new political era is rising, though some of the past's injuries remain

By Alexandros Ntaflos

A long electoral period of European, local and national elections has just finished. The results show a new political reality with the right wing party, Nea Dimokratia (ND), being the dominant political entity. In analyzing the results of the 7th of July national elections, we firstly mention some basic facts arising and then seek some short conclusions.

Let's start with the percentage of voter participation, which was around 57%. It's interesting that this percentage was even lower than the May 2019 European elections. Generally, there is a continuing trend of declining voter participation with roots prior to the start of the economic crisis. However, during the last decade this pattern has increased further; in 2009 the percentage of voters in national elections was around 70%.

Moving to the power of the political parties, for the first time since 2009 a party has gained an absolute parliamentary majority in this election. The right wing party, ND, gained approximately 40% of the votes. On the other side of the political spectrum, the left wing party, Syriza, holds a strong percentage of electoral power, with 31.5% of the votes.

Parties like the centrist KINAL (the successor of the old ruling socialist party, PASOK) and KKE (the Communist party) have stabilized in their positions as traditional, but no longer major political powers. Golden Dawn (Xrysi Avgi), a Neo-Nazi party, lost its position in the parliament for the first time since its entrance in 2012. Last but not least, we have two new political parties entering the Greek Parliament: the far-right and Eurosceptic party, Elliniki Lysi, and the liberal left, DiEM25 (MεPa25) led by the former Minister of Finance Yanis Varoufakis.

The aforementioned results create a new political frame in which two major pro-EU political poles will have a dominant role in the political system. The right wing ND gained its highest percentage since 2007. Expressing a convincing narrative for the post-crisis period, ND managed to alienate smaller liberal and right wing parties covering a broad area of the centre and right of the domestic political spectrum.

On the other hand, SYRIZA managed to establish itself as dominant on the centre-left and left-of the political spectrum, without seeing a harsh decline in its percentage due to the implementation of the unpopular, third memorandum program. This result could be characterized as a strategic victory for SYRIZA in the battle with KINAL for dominance of the centre-left.

Another important outcome of Sunday's election was the failure of Golden Dawn to surpass the 3% electoral threshold. This development demonstrates that protest voting, prominent during the 2010-15 crisis period, has lost its appeal. The political system is gradually recovering, shaping a new, pro-EU equilibrium of power. However, the injuries from the previous, harsh decade remain, not only in the economy and labor markets, but also as regards the weak legitimization of the political system, clearly shown in the high percentage of electoral absence.

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32 | The Calm after the Storm?

By Miltiadis Rizakis

The conclusion of the 2019 Greek legislative elections resulted in an altered political landscape, something which has been a trend for the last decade. Initially the crisis had led to a decline in the electoral support of the parties which had dominated Greek politics since 1974, and the ascension of other parties which had adopted a more radical identity.

But after a decade it seems that the entire situation characterised by feelings of anger and resentment has come full circle. Some would say that the results of the elections indicate that Greek society has been imbued with a sense of sobriety and acceptance, and that the radical solutions no longer appeal to them. Both the parties of New Democracy and SYRIZA were exceptionally low key in their respective campaigns. Gone were the grandiloquence and aggression which characterised the previous elections, and instead the rhetoric of both parties was based on realistic propositions regarding the improvement of the economy and the state apparatus.

The death of the politics of resentment, for now at least, can be best exemplified by the collapse of Golden Dawn. The party was long considered as a pariah in the system of politics, up until its meteoric rise in 2012. Many saw the party's entrance into the Greek parliament as a form of revenge by the increasingly alienated Greek public, and opined that sooner or later the party would inevitably sink back into irrelevance. In these elections the hour of judgement came for the party and its defeat can be attributed to a single factor: its inability and unwillingness to evolve.

Other parties such as the *Rassemblement National* managed to evolve and finally be considered as viable contenders in the political arena by gradually detoxifying their brand. Golden Dawn failed to do that and recycled the same rhetoric which gave them their first taste of success. Some believed that the citizen's dissatisfaction with the SYRIZA government would lead to additional electoral gains but instead lead to their defeat. As it was previously mentioned the Greek public has gone through the phase of anger and has opted to support the parties which promote an ideology of moderation and pragmatism. In the end, Golden Dawn was similar to the powerful and luminous explosion of a supernova, since it burned brightly by being fuelled by the citizen's negative sentiments and its aggressive rhetoric, but in the end it simply burned out. Possibly, the end of Golden Dawn may indicate the gradual phasing out of radicalism from Greek politics, but whether this is truly the case remains to be seen.

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