

Artikulu honetan, Greziako SYRIZA alderdiaren eta Europar Batasuneko erakundeen arteko harreman iskanbilatsuak aztertuko ditugu, greziar gizartearen egoera soziopolitiko larria azpimarratuz. Egoera horrek, lehenbizi, bidea ireki zuen SYRIZAk hauteskundeak irabazteko, eta ondoren, eragin handia izan zuen SYRIZAk Europar Batasunaren aurrean izandako jarrerara sustraitik aldatzeko.

Giltza-Hitzak: SYRIZA. Krisia. Troika. Alexis Tsipras. Europar Batasuna. Identitatea.

En este artículo analizaremos la relación turbulenta entre el partido político de SYRIZA en Grecia y las instituciones de la Unión Europea, haciendo hincapié en la crítica situación sociopolítica de la sociedad griega. Una situación que, en primer lugar, abrió el camino para la victoria electoral de SYRIZA y, luego, influyó mucho en el cambio radical de postura de SYRIZA hacia la Unión Europea.

Palabras Clave: SYRIZA. Crisis. Troika. Alexis Tsipras. Unión Europea. Identidad.

Cet article analyse les turbulentes relations entre le parti politique grec SYRIZA et les institutions de l'UE, en mettant l'accent sur la situation économique et sociale critique de la société grecque. Une situation qui a, dans un premier temps, ouvert la voie à la victoire électorale de SYRIZA pour, dans un deuxième temps, grandement motivé le virage radical négocié par SYRIZA dans sa position envers l'Union Européenne.

Mots-Clés : SYRIZA. Crise. Troika. Alexis Tsipras. Union Européenne. Identité.

# A breach in the Union

A Greek “Odyssey”  
in European Union’s  
opaque waters

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## 1. Introduction

Fifteen years ago, in 2002, the Greek state, after its joining the eurozone in 2001, finally adopted the Euro, in the place of Drachma, as the new official and palpable currency in Greece. Hailing the event as the dawn of a new epoch for his country's prosperity and strength, the then prime minister, Costas Simitis, said, among others:

"The Euro is the steadfast starting point to consolidate the powerful and the proud Greece; a Greece which is not melancholic, which does not renounce, does not complain, but, insists, tries, succeeds and in which, from now on, the image of the poor relative gives its place to the image of a country that believes in itself.<sup>1</sup>"

Greece of today (2017), though, is resembling a country devastated by the effects Troika's relentless therapeutical methods proved impotent- due to the enduring economic asphyxiation and social distress- to heal. In the second mental health conference (Athens, November, 2016) this ugly situation is clearly depicted in figures. According to the correspondent of the prominent Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*<sup>2</sup>:

"In 2015, people with depression are estimated to have surpassed 500,000," the associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Ioannina, Petros Skapinakis, said, adding that matters could get worse if people don't seek treatment... Several experts have insisted that the rise in cases of depression is directly linked to the financial crisis and the problems it has created for thousands of households around the country. According to data of the country's statistics agency, ELSTAT, approximately 36 percent of the population is on the verge of social exclusion and lives near the poverty line, while many experts believe the introduction of austerity measures has led to a dramatic 35 percent rise in suicide rates."

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1. <http://www.cnn.gr/news/ellada/story/69773/perasan-15-xronia-apo-to-antio-sti-draxmi-pics-vid>

2. <http://www.ekathimerini.com/213409/article/ekathimerini/news/greeks-gripped-by-depression>

Except for this already alarming- the least to say- situation, unemployment in Greece, on the basis of EUROSTAT's data, attained its highest point in November 2016. More specifically the unemployment rates reached the 23%, while the youth unemployment rates 45,7%, highlighting, thus, accurately the increasingly harsh conditions the Greek society has been living under the last 7-8 years. Costas Simitis' vision of a non-melancholic Greece- which, apparently, lies much further away than he, or we, could ever imagine- is simply contradicted by the reality itself. The challenges people in Greece are facing in their everyday life seem to be almost insuperable whereas the ongoing conversation about the crisis and its consequences has become the only item in the agenda of the Greek citizens. The crisis has also taken a heavy toll on the trust shown to the institutions of the Greek state given their insufficiency to successfully plan and operate the anti-crisis campaign. In a public opinion poll realized by Kapa Research for the think tank PEYMA (2-3 of March 2017)<sup>3</sup> aiming at comparing the trust shown to the institutions today (2017) and in 2003, we can clearly see that the political scene in Greece is radically changing with no safe prediction about what is to follow. Namely, while in 2003 the Greek citizens were holding in high esteem institutions such as the parliament (45%), the political parties (48,5%) and the public administration (65,5%), today, according to the same poll, the confidence to the above mentioned institutions has fallen down to 9,5% for the parliament, 5,5% for the political parties and 19% for the public administration. The crisis has, thus, become the battering ram bringing down the trust to three fundamental institutions/pillars of the Greek modern state, and paving the way for the emergence of a much darker vision that Costas Simitis could have never foreseen when putting out the flags over Greece's adherence to the club of the countries using the euro currency.

Of course, Euro alone- against some populist voices rising stronger and stronger ourdays in Greece- could not be efficacious in engendering such a catastrophe; neither should Greece along with the other countries of the "Southern Europe", be found guilty for spending their money on "women and drinks", as the current head of the Eurogroup, Jeroen Dijseelbloem, commented in an interview hosted by the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on 20 March 2017<sup>4</sup>. Any attempt either to blame the new currency or to resort to senseless stereotypes in a vain effort to explain every bad happening in Greece would be as if reacting like an austrich in the face of problems that, for almost 40 years, after the fall of the military regime, have been tormenting the Greek economy and the whole spectrum of political life in Greece. In this article, though, we will try to focus on a more general issue which is the relation between Greece and the European Community (ies) since 1974. We will not enter into an analysis of whether the accession to the European Community and, later, to the Eurozone, was beneficial or not to both the Greek economy and the Greek society. This is quite a complex ma-

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3. The whole survey, in Greek, can be found in [http://www.tovima.gr/files/1/2017/%CE%A0%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%83%CE%B9%CC%81%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%B7\\_Kapa%20Research.pdf](http://www.tovima.gr/files/1/2017/%CE%A0%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%83%CE%B9%CC%81%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%B7_Kapa%20Research.pdf)

4. <https://www.ft.com/content/2498740e-b911-3dbf-942d-ecce511a351e>

ter since numerous and/or differing voices/opinions would merit to be heard each one approaching the subject from a different angle. There exists, already, a great variety of rich material providing a multitude of diverse points of view and convictions, wherein the interested reader may search for identifying supplementary elements helpful to his own historical analysis of the downfall of the Greek economy. Nevertheless, given the progressively deteriorating everyday lives of the citizens and the critical socio-economic impasse which Greece as a state and people as a society are trapped into, it becomes imperative for us to seek out convincing answers, possibilities to react and relevant remedies, if we really intent to overcome this endless maze crisis. Since, however, the solution for coming out of the crisis does not depend on the Greek governments' single efforts but mainly, on the European institutions' and the other partners' involvement, as well, it is necessary to have, *ab initio*, a very clear idea of what really Europe is today; in other words, which are the principles, ideals, guidelines, interests and experiences dictating the decision making process and orienting its policies. Finally, it is to be verified if the criteria used by those invested with the responsibility of carrying out the task of such an importance, are adequately implemented.

Concluding, without putting into doubt the importance of tracing back to the past causes of the contemporary results, we believe that, now, more than ever, we have to focus on the future and on finding more efficient ways in order to understand and overcome the grave obstacles that are currently making of the "ordinary life" a concept deprived of its substance and real essence for the vast majority of the Greek citizens.

## **2. 1974-2009: The one way road towards Europe**

Starting our brief analysis, we will center on identifying some of the main processes and facts that have occurred, after the fall of the military regime in 1974 till now. A brief review of the economy in Greece for the period the conservative party of New Democracy was in power (1974-1981), until the socialist party PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) won the elections is given by the ex-minister of economy George Alogoskoufis (2012) in the following abstract

"[...] unemployment was maintained at low levels, inflation decelerated and the current account was in surplus. Until 1981, the fiscal deficit was contained below 3% of GDP and public debt was only around 25% of GDP. The last part of this period was characterized by stagflation, caused by the second oil shock of 1979. Growth fell sharply from 7,2% in 1978 to only 0,7% in 1980. Inflation almost doubled to 22,5% in 1980, from 13,2% in 1978. Unemployment doubled from 1,9% of the labor force in 1978 to 4% in 1981" (pp. 16)

Even though the economic issues are always important, the process of making Greece's return to the club of European parliamentary democracies effective, was, at that time, really at stake along with the political-social stability and the recovery of the social peace, after the collapse of the military regime (summer 1974). We should further underline that during the years of New Democracy's sub-

sequent governance (1974-1980), under its charismatic leader Konstantinos Karamanlis, the political orientations and the frame of the policy to be followed by Greece were defined by two sayings of Konstantinos Karamanlis that have become proverbial. The first one is a statement made before the parliament of Greece, on the 12th of June 1976: "Greece belongs to the West". This statement came one year after Greece had officially applied to join the European Economic Community (EEC), on the 12th of June 1975, starting a process finalized when Greece became full member of the European Communities on the 1st of January 1981. This groundbreaking political and cultural, as well, decision set Greece into the rails of the European train with all the political/economic/cultural benefits and consequences this decision entailed.

The second one, reflecting the prevailing preoccupation of K. Karamanlis' leadership in that period, was uttered by the latter on the 14th of August 1974, just at the time, the second phase of the Turkish military invasion "Attila II" was in execution in Cyprus. When informed about the situation and having been aware that the British military forces on the Island would not intervene so as to stop the Turkish invasion he said: "Cyprus lies away". Thus, a concrete was conveyed: there would be no military support of Greece to stop the Turkish military operation on the Island. This message, of course, except for the people in Greece, was also received by the international organizations and all the parts involved; amongst them, undisputably, Turkey which interpreting it as an indicative gesture of Greece's reticence to militarily confront the Turkish attack on the Island, which –finally, unimpeded– completed the violent occupation of the 37% of Cyprus' territory. Thus, Turkey was allowed: to fully control the northern part of Cyprus, to refuse to comply to the resolutions of the United Nations asking for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Island and to profit from the stagnation of the situation in the occupied parts for its future revendication.

In 1981, though, PASOK under its leader Andreas Papandreou won the elections and opened a new chapter in the political history of modern Greece- a chapter whose evaluation has yet to be better perceived and evaluated. Andreas Papandreou, son of Georgios Papandreou- one of the most important political figures in Greece during the first half of the 20th century- was a charismatic leader, an ardent rhetor who dominated the Greek political scene till his death in 1996. We would not exaggerate saying that PASOK till his death was a leader-centered party; Andreas Papandreou's decisions formed the whole schema of political guidelines followed by the socialist party. Quoting Michalis Spourdalakis (1986):

"Controlling intra-party opposition by administrative means, Papandreou established a centralised organisation in which everything revolved around the omnipotent leader and his inner circle. Taking advantage of the popular appeal of his charisma and the lack of a democratic party structure, 'Andreas', as the people of Greece prefer to call him, has become the alpha and the omega of PASOK's political existence." (pp. 251)

His influence and his almost anti- Western rhetoric have undoubtedly left their mark on the Greek society, a mark that, especially our days, is taking the form of a harsh criticism against the European Union and the market oriented dominance of the Western world. Thus, while, on the one hand, Konstantinos Kara-

manlis had laid the bases for the reshaping of the Greek society's relation with the European Community and the Western world, Papandreou, on the other hand, managed to capitalize the disillusionment felt by many Greeks vis à vis what the European Community's attitude with regard to their expectations. Quoting Richard Glogg (1993):

"The West's inertia in the face of the first military dictatorship (1967-74) to be established in non-communist Europe during the postwar period; its failure to respond adequately to the crisis occasioned by the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, which had precipitated the downfall of the military regime in Athens but had nonetheless left approaching 40 per cent of the land-area of Cyprus under Turkish occupation; and its failure to support Greece over the whole range of bilateral disputes with its eastern neighbour which collectively constituted the 'Aegean dispute..... It was precisely this sense of betrayal and disillusionment that Papandreou was able to harness with his call for a 'nationally proud', nonsubservient foreign policy." (pp. ix)

Though economy has always played a very substantial role for the understanding of the relation between Greece and the European Community, what really mattered, and, finally, managed to become the crucial factor in this relation was the non acting of the European Community in face of what Greeks would call "national sensitivity's issues"- most importantly the very problematic relations that Greece has always had with Turkey. This disillusionment became the fuel for the political engine of Andreas Panadreou, fuel, which along with other important factors, of course, helped him remain (except for a period of three years) as Prime Minister almost till the very end of his life. These different and highly opposed points of view concerning Europe's vision- views which have been endorsed by the vast majority of the Greek people, voting at that time but still persisting, as clearly shown in the recent referendum in 2015- are enlightingly depicted during a political confrontation between the two leaders before the Greek parliament in 1977. The discussion/confrontation<sup>5</sup> went as follows:

"Papandreou: We do agree with the government only on one point; that the decision, the choice, of Greece's joining the common market is the most critical decision ever made for the nation. A decision, though, taken (as an act of sacrifice) on the altar of "we belong to the West"

K. Karamalis interrupting:

"I'm sorry I don't understand, you have to explain this. Greece belongs to the western world; either because of our tradition, or as a consequence of interests, (Greece) belongs to the Western world. Thus, when you repeat that we belong to the West, of course we belong to the West, like other people belong to the non - aligned, others to the Eastern people and others to the African ones; seeing things in this perspective, we belong to the West.  
Papandreou: We do prefer to belong to the Greeks."

The above cited confrontation is critical not only for our better comprehending the political context which it took place in, but as an indispensable compass

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5. The confrontation in Greek: <http://mignatiou.com/2016/10/pou-anikomen-telika-sti-disi-pou-elege-o-karamanlis-i-is-tous-ellines-pou-elege-o-andreas/>

to look into the current Greek politics as well. This opposition/dilemma about the kind of relationship we should maintain with the Western world is of capital significance for those wishing to lucidly approach the way people in the Greek society politically think and react. Thus, Andreas Papandreou, while being in the opposition had promised that a referendum would take place for whether Greece should join the EEC or not. PASOK of that time, quoting Spourdalakis (1986), "saw the USA, NATO and the 'West' as the causes of the 'Greek tragedy', and put the struggle against these forces at the top of its political priorities (pp. 257)". But in a scenery that strikes quite familiar to us, PASOK, getting progressively aware of the fact that the frame of international relations' commitments was not that easy to overcome or rewrite, made a turn of 180o and mostly accepted the Status Quo he was opposing. Quoting Spourdalakis

"In addition to defence policy, it did not take PASOK long to realise the oversimplifications contained in its previous analysis of the EEC. Thus, not only has the country's loyal membership in the Commission continued, but it has also taken full advantage of its grants, particularly those given to the primary sector." (Ibid. 258)

Given the fact that Papandreou little could he do so as to significantly change the commitments of the Greek state to the West was smart enough to elaborate a quite violent political vocabulary which gave him the possibility to polarize the Greek political matrix, providing PASOK, thus, with "enemies"- true or not- who could be used as scapegoat for every promised change that could not take place. This polarization, quite tense in current Greek politics as well, was the perfect ground on which PASOK could remain politically alive, no matter inconsistent it sometimes proved to be in its actions and speech. The enemy, thus, could be interior, in the country, exterior or sometimes both of them, depending on the necessities of each occasion. Quoting Pesmazoglou (1993):

"In fact, the Leader's pet theory, whenever he found himself in serious trouble, was that this could not but be the result of an 'international plot' undertaken by 'foreigners' in collaboration with their domestic 'servants' or 'apostates'. Additional striking elements are the timing and recurrence of appeals to the nation during hard times for the economy, budgetary debate, social strife, but never in the summer or other dormant periods." (pp. 109)

The appeal to the people, the highlighting of the importance of referendums and in general the use of the idea of the "will of the people", in abstract ways, many times, was a basic characteristic and a powerful weapon in the hands of PASOK, a weapon that was latter passed to the current political parties as well. Papandreou, though, taking this powerful tool to the maximum of its capacities reached the point of saying that "there are no institutions, only the People" (Ibid. pp. 107).

Concluding our brief sketching of the political personality of A.Papandreou, we would like to stress here one essential element which should also be taken into account. No matter his populism and his own perception of what Greece really was or should remain- a perception whose consequences were soon to appear- Andreas Papandreou had the stature of a very intelligent political leader, whose personal vision, in concrete cases, provided us with a deep understanding of European



Union structure's weaknesses and deficiencies which needed a lot of changes in order to be successfully countered. We also have to recognize the diachronical validity of the quasi prophetic predictions he had made concerning the Maastricht Treaty; on the 28th of July 1992, when PASOK was in opposition, A. Papandreou addressing the Greek parliament had anticipated the possible negative consequences of the Maastricht Treaty's coming into effect. More specifically, Andreas Papandreou had foreseen and warned against the danger of a European Union of two velocities and of a germanized Europe, as can be seen traced in the following statements<sup>6</sup>:

"But the question remains always whether we are on the way towards a "European Germany" or towards a "Germanic Europe". Lets give an example; recently Germany has increased the rate of interest although, at the same time, all (concerned) in Europe and the USA were asking not to do it because the march towards depression was clear-cut. But, nevertheless, they (Germans) did it. Reasonably one might wonder to which extent Europe can rely on German solidarity"

« For me its crystal- clear. It means that, though not openly stipulated, two velocities are foreseen, in the United Europe; especially if we take into account the huge social cost and the explosive social situations we will be confronted with, during this march, at least, (for) the countries of the South»

After Andreas Papandreou's era, PASOK entered into another phase. Under the leadership of Costas Simitis as Prime Minister, 1996-2004 (former minister of National Economy as well as ex-minister of Commerce and Industry) Greece joined the Eurozone and adopted the Euro as its national currency. Being quite a different statesman compared to Andreas Papandreou, he never set into doubt Greece's belonging to the European Union. The "change of wind" could not be more explicitly reflected than in the foreword written by Jacques Delors, former president of the European Commission (1985- 1995) in a paper of George Pagoulatos (2002):

"From now on, we must forget the stereotypes of Greece's marginalisation in the Union because they are obsolete. I share the author's assessment of the current position of Greece in Europe as a success story, whether this be in terms of its political, economic or administrative evolution, its integration into EMU and the single market or its international stance. I also know the huge role the Prime Minister Kostas Simitis has played in this success, which I feel should be emphasised in this brief foreword"

In general, from 1996 till 2015, when SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) won the elections in January 2015, European Union's importance for the Greek society and the whole political life was never cast into doubt. Even when the economic crisis hit Greece in 2009, and the Prime Minister- leader of PASOK and President of the Socialist International George Papandreou- announced in 2010 from the island of Kastelorizo (Megisti) that Greece would take the bailout loan by its European partners and the IMF, the two bigger political parties New Democracy

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6. Extended part of his speech can be found (in Greek) in <http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/enas-profitikos-logos-gia-tin-eyropi>.

and PASOK, never held questionable the importance of Greece's remaining in the Eurozone club. In this connection, it is worth mentioning the case of the extreme right political party LA.O.S (Popular Orthodox Rally), headed by George Karatzafaris- ex-minister of New Democracy's governments in the past- which went so far as to participate in the coalition government led by Lucas Papadimos (November 2011- May 2012) along with PASOK and New Democracy. This coalition government had popped up as a result of the stepping down of George Papandreou from his duties as Prime Minister after some very risky political manoeuvres which included the announcement, first, and, then, the cancelling of a referendum for the acceptance of the second bailout package. Thus, LA.O.S, by sharp contrast with the rest of the other extreme right winged parties in Europe, not only supported the acceptance of the first Memorandum- though, under concrete reservations- but, moreover, two of its most prominent members, Adonis Georgiadis and Makis Voridis, adhered, later, to the political party of New Democracy, the former openly declaring more than once his support for the mission of Troika in Greece.

The reason why we are mentioning LA.O.S and its participation in the coalition government along with the other two bigger parties, is that it lucidly shows how the ideological differences in Greece during the years of the crisis have been clearly distorted, leaving no space for the typical distinction between the right and the left. On the contrary, the new confrontation, as we will later see, carried out in the political arena between those in favour of the memorandum(s) and those against. While, on the one side, those in favour link the memorandum(s) with Greece's permanence in the Eurozone, the other side, as expressed mainly by SYRIZA (Χρυσή Αυγή) Golden Dawn - represented in the parliament since 2012 and blamed by all the other parties for its neo-nazi roots- and (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες) Independent Greeks -participating, since 2015 in the coalition government with SYRIZA- is a politically paradoxical mixture of the radical left, an often accused of being "neo- nazi" political party and a populist right winged party. The afore mentioned polarization once again appears in the political scene of Greece, taking, though, a politically more violent and extreme form, as it can be easily understood by the vocabulary used in the parliament and outside. It is in this political matrix that we are now going to focus on- analyze the triumph of SYRIZA in 2015, its confrontation with the European Union and the new extremely difficult/dangerous challenges that arose as the aftermath of this confrontation.

### **3. 2009-2015: The socio- political turmoil in a wounded society**

The political and social context explained in the previous part was the ground from which SYRIZA emerged as the first left government in the modern political history of Greece. Before going deeper into our analysis of the specific conditions that led to the victory of SYRIZA it would be enlightening and interesting, from an ideological and political point of view, to comprehend two important factors tied in with the electoral triumph of SYRIZA. The first one is that SYRIZA in the elections of 2009 had received only the 4.60% of the votes whilst in the elections of January 2015 SYRIZA became the most voted political party in Greece reaching a 35.46%.

So, SYRIZA in this interval of 6 years had to be politically transformed from a coalition of heterogeneous, many times, political groups of the radical left-left, to a political party ready to confront the most serious economic crisis the European Union and the Greek state have countered since the latter’s admission to ECC. The difference in the percentages is of real significance because it may serve as an indicator backing up a more accurate political interpretation of the attitude adopted by SYRIZA towards the European Union, as well as the ideological struggles and skirmishes inside SYRIZA during the first months of its governance. From these struggles, brought to an end with the second electoral victory of SYRIZA in September 2015, ensued an ideological political cleaning inside the party which made Alexis Tsipras the strong and undisputed leader of SYRIZA.

The second factor of equal interest is that the first left government in Greece was co-governing, and is still co-governing, with the right-wing populist party of Independent Greeks. This strange, at first glance, alliance between the two parties has been very well understood by Helen Smith, journalist of the Guardian, when saying: “the Rightwing party differs on many issues with radical leftist Syriza, but they are united by a mutual hatred for bailout programme<sup>7</sup>”. This “mutual hatred” seems to be an almost unbreakable bond if we take into account the huge ideological differences between the two parties, ranging from issues like State’s relationship with the Orthodox Church to the crucial current issue’s resolution of the refugees’ status. Furthermore, it must be said that in the first left government in Greece Panos Kammenos, the leader of the right-wing party of Independent Greeks has been endowed with the responsibilities of minister of National Defence. This ideological interplay between the two parties has led SYRIZA to important ideological changes, changes which can be reflected, as we will later see, among others, in the redefinition of both its vocabulary and political identity.

Going back to the first factor, it is to be noted that SYRIZA, before accessing to power has managed to be open to a wide social public whose ideological orientation was not necessarily leftwards, as had been the case in the elections on 2012 (26.89%). The explanation of this success is commented by Spourdalakis (2013) as follows:

“SYRIZA’s support did not come only from public employees (32%), but also from private sector wage earners (33%), from the unemployed (33%) and from precarious workers (27%). The support which came from the small shopkeepers (32.6%) and professionals (26%) clearly hinted that SYRIZA’s “miracle” is based on the fact that it is becoming the political expression of a broad social coalition. This is the social coalition that was formed as a result of the cleavages that developed as the result of the austerity policies. This is the reason for the continuation of SYRIZA’s miracle more than a year after the election.<sup>8</sup>” (pp. 115)

Thus, SYRIZA, before the elections of 2015, in its effort to gain audience of different ideological identity, used much more than once a radical vocabulary, po-

7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/26/greece-elections-who-are-independent-greeks>

8. For additional material concerning SYRIZA’s in concrete, and the Left’s, in general turn towards society see also: Tsakatika, M. and Eleftheriou, C. (2013)

pulist in many cases, whose objective, -successfully, as proven- was to cultivate the anger of the mass against the Greek state mechanisms’ function and the European institutions. As Andreas Papandreou had in his time, SYRIZA, as well, managed to create an external (European institutions and Troika) and internal (mainly the political parties which have been trying to implement the European dictates) enemy. The radical character of the political vocabulary of that time, along with SYRIZA’s endeavour to become attractive to the masses as well, are clearly seen in the following statements, made in 2014 (Crete), when Tsipras was giving an open pre-electoral speech: “Because the people won’t simply vote SYRIZA. They will vote Greece. They will vote dignity. They will vote hope and prospective”, while with regard to the markets, he said: “We will play the Cretan Lyre and the markets will dance in the rhythm of Pentozali”.

It is easily understood that the main basis on which SYRIZA was able to develop its strategy was the state of complete exhaustion of the Greek society- because of the austerity measures- and the constant appeal to the dignity of the Greek people, a dignity which, according to the vocabulary of SYRIZA, has been put into question by the institutions supervising the implementation of the memoranda. According to Spourdalakis (2013):

“Finally, the call for dignity resonated not only in terms of how the aggressive austerity measures had disrupted the lives of so many individuals and families as well as overall social cohesion, but also in terms of the way these measures were imposed and supervised by the Troika, amounting to direct violation of national sovereignty and thus seen as an insult by the Greek people” (pp. 112)

The appeal to the “wounded ego” of the Greek society and the approach of SYRIZA towards a new European Union which would not consign its policies to the market’s and the bureaucracy’s cure, converted SYRIZA into a phenomenon with international impact. In December 2014 Tsipras was proposed, by the European United Left, for the position of the presidency of the European Commission of the European Union. SYRIZA and Tsipras, with their anti-austerity vocabulary and their constant appeal to the people, have managed to convert the Greek political scene into a political playground of international interest. The idea of SYRIZA’s potentiality in the changing of the political scene in Europe can be seen in an article titled *Only Syriza can save Greece*<sup>9</sup> on 13/6/2013, where Yanis Varoufakis and James K. Galbraith, both distinguished academicians of SYRIZA, write:

“[...] the crisis could also take down the Greek government and bring the left-wing opposition to power. This wouldn’t be a bad thing for Europe or the United States. The policies currently imposed upon Europe’s periphery are worsening the crisis, threatening Europe’s integrity and jeopardizing growth. A Greek government that rejects these self-defeating policies will do more help than harm”.

It is easily understood why before, and immediately after the elections, the hopes of a ground-breaking SYRIZA, of a SYRIZA bearer of the change in the Eu-

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9. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/24/opinion/only-syriza-can-save-greece.html>

ropean level, were quite high. Costas Douzinas, Law Professor at Birkbeck, University of London, in an article in Guardian<sup>10</sup>, after the victory of SYRIZA in the first elections of 2015, set forth some important ideas/questions concerning what SYRIZA might be able to do or not. More specifically, according to Profesor Douzinas, "the radical left is an antidote to an obsolete and harmful economic and political system, and to wider Euroscepticism". In addition, he stressed the importance of the impact of the victory of SYRIZA on national and international level, when saying:

"Finally, Syriza promises a defence of democracy. Neoliberal capitalism has replaced democratic governments with technocratic governance that has turned citizens away from politics. Only a different conception that combines direct and representative democracy can gather popular support. Participatory democracy, the legacy of the occupations, must be breathed into the mainstream political system. By promoting social justice and democracy, the left becomes the heir to the Enlightenment principles of freedom, equality and solidarity.

Can the Greek left succeed? Its clean past and commitment to universal values creates a major moral advantage, but more is needed. The left must combine principle and pragmatism, radical politics and social mobilisation. It is a tall order for a small country and organisation. But it is the only hope for Greece and Europe against the rising Euroscepticism of the right. If it succeeds, the Greece of resistance will become the future of Europe."

If we insist that much on the European and international impact of the electoral victory(ies) of SYRIZA is that the aim of SYRIZA, at least at the beginning, was not a rupture with the European Union but, rather, the foundation of a utopian, some would say, European Union, where the Memoranda would no longer exist. SYRIZA with its leader Alexis Tsipras were targeting a mobilization of the European people against the rigid structure of the European institutions. The problem is that such a radical change, when coming from a heavily damaged by the crisis country, and, especially, when occurring inside a European Union desperately looking for stability (economic-political) and severe financial discipline of the Eurozone members, requires a titanic strategy, a flawless vocabulary- along with an unshakeable attitude- and the absolute will to go on till the end, no matter the consequences. Today, we all know what happened, since we have almost reached the situation which the Slovenian philosopher Slavoy Zizek, two years ago, very accurately depicted in his article *The urgent necessity of a Syriza Victory in Greece*<sup>11</sup>:

"The alternative is either Syriza stepping out (or being thrown out) of the European project, with unforeseeable consequences, or a "messy compromise" when both sides moderate their demands. Which raises another fear: not the fear of Syriza's *irrational* behavior after their victory, but, on the contrary, the fear that Syriza will accept a *rational* messy compromise which will disappoint voters, so that discontent will continue, but this time not regulated and moderated by Syriza."

10. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/03/syriza-future-greece-europe-radical-left>

11. [http://inthesetimes.com/article/17561/zizek\\_greece\\_syriza](http://inthesetimes.com/article/17561/zizek_greece_syriza)

Of course, the firm intention of SYRIZA, and of Alexis Tsipras, not to reject the relationship with the European Union, but, on the contrary, to try to set a new approach towards what European Union and Europe should be, had a domino effect on the most radical voices of the party. A prominent fraction voicing the concerns of a possible struggle against the European Union was the Left Platform- now independent from SYRIZA, as a separate political party, called Popular Unity under Panagiotis Lafazanis- which, much more than once, has stressed the necessity of looking for alternatives outside the Euro- even outside the European Union. We present, now, some of the fraction's theses (2013) concerning the strategy SYRIZA should follow, if ever been in power:

'[...] such a possibility of exiting the Eurozone, which demands for a good preparation, in no case constitutes a 'disaster' or a national isolation. Contrary to that, as long as said exit is part of a progressive plan for rupture with the memoranda and the troika, the overthrow of austerity, and towards socialism, it could constitute besides the temporary difficulties, which it will cause, a viable and positive proposal for both the Greek and the European peoples. The possible exit from the Eurozone is not part of a different political plan, it does not lead to a different programme or different alliances, but on the contrary states our decisiveness to implement our programme and our plan of rupture and overthrowing in a socialist direction in an unwavering and decisive manner till the end, fully understanding what a direct rupture with the Eurozone would bring about as well the fact that said rupture demands for a full preparation of an alternative plan'' (Syryza, 2013, pp.1).(Translation from Greek to English Nikolakakis, 2016)

Panagiotis Lafazanis, minister of Productive Reconstruction, Environment and Energy during the first governance of SYRIZA (2015), had never hidden his concern about the way the European Union treated Greece. In one visit to Russia (Moscow, April 2015) Lafazanis did not hide his opinion with regard to the European Union, when he emphatically upheld that Greece was treated "with incredible bias and as a cast-off semi-colony<sup>12</sup>," by its European partners. This point of view is highly instructive on how a large part of the fractions inside SYRIZA considered the European Union. The current minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Kotzias, in 2003 wrote a book entitled *Greece: Debt Colony*, while the former minister of economy, Yanis Varoufakis, after the first elections in 2015, told the BBC: "the austerity regime had been "fiscal waterboarding policies that have turned Greece into a debt colony"<sup>13</sup>.

All those characterizations prove that the political existence of SYRIZA as a coalition of heterogeneous radical left, leftist fractions should have to pass soon through a "trial of fire" that would determine the political and ideological future of SYRIZA. This trial, as we will see in the next section, was no other than the outcome of the referendum which led to the acceptance of the third memorandum.

Certainly, the rise of SYRIZA was not the only radical change that the Greek society experienced during those last turmoil years of the crisis. Another really im-

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12. <http://www.tovima.gr/en/article/?aid=692506>

13. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30981950>

portant aspect of that crisis, whose consequences offer a lot of food for thought, was no other than the steadfast emergence of the political party Golden Dawn coming from a movement known in the past for its neo-nazi roots in the mainstream political scene of Greece<sup>14</sup>. Speaking with figures, while in 2009, Golden Dawn reached its usual percentages, 0,29% in the elections of May 2012, entered for the first time in the Greek Parliament with 6.97% while in the second elections of the same year, June 2012, maintained its percentages winning the 6.92% of the votes. What is most surprising and alarming is how the modern Greek society perceives the role of the parliamentary democracy. In the elections of January 2015, Golden Dawn emerged as the third political force in the country with a 6.28%, percentage which rose up to 6.99% in the elections of September 2015. The above mentioned percentages become even more interesting if we take into account that during those years, Golden Dawn managed, more than once, to be in the centre of media interest. For example, on 7/6/2012, Ilias Kasidiaris, a parliamentarian of Golden Dawn, slapped during a live tv news program the deputee of the Greek Communist Party Liana Kanelli and threw a glass of water to the deputee of SYRIZA Rena Dourou, before storming out of the studio in order to avoid getting arrested. The game changer, though, for this party was when some of its members belonging to local organizations were denounced and arrested for being involved in the killing of the leftist rapper Pavlos Fyssas, on 18/9/2013. That was the event that mobilized the political parties and the juridical institutions against the Golden Dawn. Most of its well known members were put into jail- such as Nikolaos Michaloliakos (leader of the party), Ilias Kasidiaris and Ilias Panagiotaras, among others. The retaliations came also in blood, when on 1/11/2013, two young followers of the Golden Dawn, Giorgos Fountoulis and Manolis Kapelonis were shot dead and Alexandros Gerontas resulted injured after an attack which was later attributed to an anarchist group called “Fighting Popular Revolutionary Forces (Μαχόμενες Λαϊκές Επαναστατικές Δυνάμεις)”. No matter the massive criticism Golden Dawn and its supporters received by the media and by the whole spectrum of the parliament, this party, as we have seen, managed to become in 2015 the third political force of Greece casting into doubt the structure of the whole function of the political system in Greece. Of course, just as in the case of SYRIZA, Golden Dawn took advantage of the instability and the turmoil created by the austerity measures and the crisis in the Greek society. As the professor of political science in the University of Cyprus, A. Ellinas (2013) commented:

“The length and magnitude of the Greek recession has taken a big toll on Greek society and has ultimately led to the collapse of the traditional party system. The two major parties, which had averaged 83.8 per cent of the vote in the ten elections between 1981 and 2009, dropped to 32 per cent in the May election and to 41.9 per cent in June” (pp. 544)

As we can deduce, the leakage of the of the two major parties’s voters, along with the ever decreasing confidence of the Greek society towards the insti-

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14. For a more detailed analysis of the ideology, the structure and the political activity of Golden Dawn see Ellinas A.A, (2013)



tutions- as seen in the last section- and the refugee crisis taken into account, have enabled parties such as SYRIZA and Golden Dawn to avail themselves of this lack of popular trust towards the system, (each one in its own way though), and to present a very aggressive, for the Greek political ethics, vocabulary. Even though it's easy to simplify and generalize the vote and the ideology of the greek voters, it's doubtful that during 6 years the 1/3 of the voters became offsprings of the radical left ideology, while an important 7% found the solutions it sought for in the neo- Nazi ideology. Such fundamental changes, if possible, would take much more time to grow and find a steady ground in the Greek society. What, in reality happened, is that, due to the extreme conditions sharpened by the austerity measures- proposed/imposed by the Troika- the Greek society found new ways to canalize its hope, despair and hatred. While the vote to SYRIZA could be seen in the perspective of a hope for a different European Union and a different Greece, the vote to Golden Dawn is an expression of anger towards inner and outer political institutions.

Concerning the attitude of the Golden Dawn towards the European Union, its main argument was and still is "Yes to the Europe of the nations; no to the Europe of the loan sharks"<sup>15</sup>. Ilias Kasidiaris representative of this attitude towards the European Union and its institutions, speaking in the Greek Parliament, on the 18/07/2016, called the European Commissioner Pierre Moscovici "clueless" and the members of the European Commission "economic assassins and criminals". While we could not, of course, say that the main characteristic of the relation between the European Union and the Golden Dawn is trust, the party's leader, nevertheless, in an interview, hosted in the newspaper "Empros (Εμπρος)", organ of the Golden Dawn, recognized that for the present, due to the fact that Greece does not have a national currency or a national growth it "should remain in the Eurozone but with terms that Greece will propose"<sup>16</sup>. This necessity of the Euro, of course, is not making of Golden Dawn a party recognizing and accepting every aspect of the European Union's policy, as Nikolaos Michaloliakos made clear in the same interview. More specifically, commenting the Brexit, said, among others, the following:

"The British said no to the usury of Brussels. Brexit was not a reaction, it is a fundamental element of the people that say << NO >> to the wrong direction of Europe... E.U has failed, It has failed with the economy and the currency. Who is struggling to keep the E.U alive? The technocrats of Brussels and not the people. The people have seen what Unified Europe means and they don't like it." (ibid. My translation from the Greek text).

The stance of the Golden Dawn towards the European Union can be also considered in the light of its relations with Russia. In May 2014, a delegation of Golden Dawn- Artemis Matheopoulos and Eleni Zaroulia- went to Moscow where they met, among others, the famous Russian philosopher and promoter of the idea of Eurasianism, Alexander Dugin, who had sent a support letter, in November

15. A theme repeated many times in their official online site [www.xryshaygh.com/](http://www.xryshaygh.com/)

16. <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/n.g.michaloliakos-h-eurwpaikh-enwsh-apatuche>.



2013, to the imprisoned, at that time, leader of the Golden Dawn, Nikolaos Michaloliakos. Even though we cannot properly and profoundly analyze in this article the Greco-Russian relationship, it is of great interest that not only Golden Dawn, but Panagiotis Lafazanis as well, as we have seen before, have expressed their support to Russia and they have tried to create in the Greek public opinion the image of a strong pole against the European Union and the Troika, a pole which is no other than Russia. This “asset” of the Russian presence and assistance in Greece has been diachronically used so as to present an alter ego to the “western forces”; an alter ego, though, which after three memoranda in Greece, seems to have lost its validity and maintains itself more as an inner hope than as a political possibility.

The reason of our having chosen to briefly analyze the emergence of the Golden Dawn lies not in our intention to examine the party’s ideology or political action. Its attacks against immigrants and the violent vocabulary it has used have been repeatedly analysed in other more thorough articles and investigations. What we want to highlight, through the presentation of the success of this party, is that modern Greek political scene should be no longer be viewed in the typical frame of the left-right distinction, but, mainly, as a distinction concerning the stance towards the memoranda and the European Union’s role in Greece. It is precisely this change of the perception of the political scene that Alexis Tsipras perceived and set his plan into motion proceeding to the coalition with the right-wing populist party of Independent Greeks. Simply put, Golden Dawn and SYRIZA, have both



<https://pixabay.com/es/mapa-grecia-fronteras-pa%C3%ADs-1027679/>

founded their criticism on the consequences of the austerity measures and their disastrous effects on a national level. While Golden Dawn stressed the refugee crisis' impact on the breaking of the national tissue, SYRIZA laid emphasis on the social cohesion (including refugees) and the reluctance of Troika to realize the gravity of the situation the greek society is facing. So, the necessity of forming a coalition with a right-wing party was apparently the sole way for SYRIZA to continue to play a double role, in the interior and outside the country. While in the interior the "right" defence of the Independent Greeks would serve as a check for both New Democracy and the Golden Dawn- ideologically ranging from the centre to the extremes of the right ideology- since SYRIZA, by its own, could never reach the most conservative core of them, while on the exterior, Independent Greeks could be easily presented as the lesser evil between a right party, New Democracy, whose responsibility for the austerity measures make every coalition with it seem a betrayal in the eyes of the European Left, and the most extreme party- direct consequence of the austerity measures- Golden Dawn, which if not politically confronted, would create a havoc in the parliament and the ideological matrix in general. Europe's distrust shown vis a vis the Independent Greeks is clearly depicted in the reaction of the president of the European Parliament Martin Schulz when, after SYRIZA's victory in the second elections of 2015, and the renewal of its coalition with the Independent Greeks. Based on the information by Reuters<sup>17</sup>:

"Speaking to France Inter radio, Schulz said he could not understand Tsipras' decision to bring the Independent Greeks, who polled less than 4 percent of the vote, back into government."

"I called him (Tsipras) a second time to ask him why he was continuing a coalition with this strange, far-right party," Schulz said.

"He pretty much didn't answer. He is very clever, especially by telephone. He told me things that seemed convincing, but which ultimately in my eyes are a little bizarre."

"(The victory of Alexis Tsipras) It's politically and strategically something that you have to admire," he said. "But after ... this renewed mandate with this far-right, populist party, that I don't understand."

Of course, Martin Schulz could not be totally aware of the radical changes that had been taking place in the Greek ideological and political spectrum, changes which almost dictated this uncanny cooperation between a radical left and a populist right-wing party. Paris Aslanidis (2016), explains the utility of this "strange" coalition as follows:

"The two-pronged discursive tactics fundamentally constrained reactions against the defiant Greeks. Domestically, opponents and critics of the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition framed the issue predominantly as a noble battle against populism. In international forums, however, where SYRIZA enjoyed a considerable level of support from left-wing circles and a part of the academic intelligentsia, the bone of contention was whether austerity was fixing or destroying the Eurozone, with populism as a secondary theme. SYRIZA's distinctly humanistic rhetoric and the radical left's respected heritage in upholding human rights shielded

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17. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-eurozone-greece-schulz-tsipras-idUSKCNORL0LH20150921>

the party from the usual accusations hauled against European populist radical right leaders such as Jörg Haider, Geert Wilders or Marine Le Pen. When cornered regarding the “unholy alliance” with the ANEL, SYRIZA officials would point to the purported absence of alternative partnerships, since a coalition with “establishment” parties or the right-wing extremist Golden Dawn was out of the question and the Greek Communist Party had refused to cooperate.” (pp. 5)

The endurance and the well-being of this coalition, though, have been put many times to test; nevertheless, this is a natural outcome due to the inherent contradictions, ideological and political, between these two parties. What they both had in common, though, was a pure distrust towards the party of the New Democracy and PASOK and of the way Troika was demanding the changes in Greece. Panos Kammenos was expelled from the parliamentary group of New Democracy, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 2011, after his refusal to vote in favour of the ecumenical government of Lucas Papadimos. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2012, he announced the formation of a new political party, the Independent Greeks. His political enmity with New Democracy and his disapproval of the austerity measures made of him a perfect candidate for coalition with SYRIZA, an opportunity that was exploited by Alexis Tsipras, despite the strong reactions in his party. In April 2012, when Alexis Tsipras announced that he would consider accepting the support of the Independent Greeks for forming a government, Panagiotis Lafazanis, reacted saying: “there is a political and ideological abyss dividing us (from the Independent Greeks); our program is totally different” while the current European parliament’s vice president, and member of SYRIZA, Dimitris Papadimoulis said: “Panos Kammenos’ political career and his ideas locate him righter than New Democracy”<sup>18</sup>. Despite the reactions, Panos Kammenos managed not only to form a coalition with SYRIZA, but, in addition, he has been trusted by the Prime Minister the charge of the Minister of National Defence during these last 2 years (2015-2017). Furthermore, his openly declared support and respect for the Orthodox Church, even though alienating him from the left hard core of SYRIZA- whose assistance, nonetheless, had never enjoyed- helped the government of SYRIZA to maintain a delicate equilibrium with the Greek Orthodox Church and to enjoy the latter’s precious help and infrastructure, specially during the refugee crisis.

Summarizing, in this section we have analysed:

- 1) the vision of SYRIZA, more specifically of his leader, Alexis Tsipras, for a new European Union and a new approach towards European politics.
- 2) the dangerous change of the political scene in Greece because of the crisis and the austerity measures, a scene which boosted the appearance of extreme forces of discontent such as Golden Dawn
- 3) the strategically significant the decision of SYRIZA to collaborate with a right-wing party in the first left government of Greece.

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18. <http://txs.gr/news/ekloges-2012-enimerosi/trigmoys-prokalei-i-synenteyksi-tsipra-sto-tvxsg>

Having seen the above, we can now proceed to the examination of the first difficult year of SYRIZA's governance, from January to September 2015, a period which has been crucial for the political and social stability of Greece and for the ideological integrity of the infrastructure of the political party of SYRIZA.

#### 4. The birth and death of the left hope

The 25th of January 2015 is probably one of the most salient days in the modern history of Greece. For the first time a (radical) left party manages to form a government with the help of a populist right-wing party just in the middle of the most serious economic crisis the Greek society has faced after the state's adhesion to E.E.C and with a bailout program which was about to expire, at the end of February. SYRIZA, with the support of Independent Greeks had finally the opportunity to set its program for a new Europe and a new Greece in march. The banner of the pre-electoral campaign was the needfulness of a serious debt-relief for Greece's having a chance to stand on its own feet. Tip of the spear of this new government and of its campaign was no other than the well-known economist, writer and blogger Yanis Varoufakis; a professor famous for his criticism against the austerity measures taken and an ardent supporter of re-negotiating the bailout program with the European partners and Troika. After the official announcement of the victory of SYRIZA in these elections, Yanis Varoufakis, in a somewhat poetic way, said: "Greek democracy today chose to stop going gently into the night. Greek democracy resolved to rage against the dying of the light<sup>19</sup>". His vision, though, was not shared by the majority of the European partners; in Germany the ruling CDU party insisted that "Greece should stick to the austerity programme... they would not deal with the new ruling party. Angela Merkel herself has been noticeable quiet on the subject<sup>20</sup>", while the president of Bundesbank Jens Weidmann declared: "as long as Greece does not fully clean up its public finances, any change in the debt program would only have a short-lived impact<sup>21</sup>". The chairman of the Eurogroup, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, clarified:

"We all have to realise and the Greek people have to realise that the major problems in the Greek economy have not disappeared and haven't even changed overnight because of the simple fact that an election took place<sup>22</sup>"

The EU Commissioner for economic affairs Pierre Moscovici stressed "We also want a Greece that can repay its debts. And what we need to agree upon with the incoming Greek government is not the ends, but the means.<sup>23</sup>", while the

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19. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/04/29/yanis-varoufakis-man-many-words/syris-victory-january-2015-varoufakissaid-greek-democracy/>

20. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/11368970/How-Europe-reacted-to-Syris-win.html>

21. Ibid.

22. <http://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-europe-30980755>

23. Ibid.

president of the European Parliament Martin Schulz remarked: "Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras has the full right to be respected as the new democratically elected prime minister of an EU country" but also stressed that "we have to stick to agreements made to stabilise Greece and the European Union"<sup>24</sup>

As it was expected, due to the unusual intensity of the vocabulary used for the needs of the pre-electoral campaign as well, the European Institutions would have to make a stand against the radical wave of SYRIZA whose intention was to redefine the rules of the game and set new goals, the goals that the party considered more important for Greece. Of course, as it was later tragically proven, the rules and the goals were already set and only the means, if possible, might change; a reality which SYRIZA, even though unwillingly, had to accept and conform to it.

The first important political "bras de fer" between SYRIZA and the European Institutions occurred in Athens, some days after the electoral victory of SYRIZA. During a conference press with the president of Eurogroup, Yanis Varoufakis- casually dressed- said, among other things, that the government "had no intention of cooperating with a three-member committee whose goal is to implement a programme the logic of which we (SYRIZA) consider anti-European"<sup>25</sup>; characteristically, he named it "a committee built on rotten foundations"<sup>26</sup>. The president of the Eurogroup, a bit surprised and taken aback by this open declaration of opposition, on the part of his Greek counterpart, stood some seconds listening before getting up and unwillingly giving his hand to salute Yanis Varoufakis, while at the same time whispering in his ear " you have just killed the Troika", as Varoufakis in later interviews commented. The reaction of Yanis Varoufakis was "wow". That was the first act, at the very beginning of the new government's term, which made clear that mutual trust and comprehension between the two parties would be a far-fetched desire, not speaking about goal. From that moment on, SYRIZA, and more specifically, the Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, realized that his struggle was to take place, inevitably, in two battlegrounds: the inner one- namely the reactions from the "left" voices inside the party asking for a direct confrontation with the Troika and European Union- and the external one, where he had to convince his European partners that he was able to regain their trust and confidence. These two contradictory goals made the first months of SYRIZA's governance, probably the most intense political ones in Greece, after the fall of the military junta, since what in the past was considered to be a mainly national issue, now, to be with the Euro or not and to be inside or not the European Union, from a national issue was being transformed not only to a European but international issue as well.

In the interior of the party, the main opposition came from the fraction of the "Left Platform"- under the guidance of Panagiotis Lafazanis- and the extrovert and dynamic president of the Greek Parliament, Zoi Konstantopoulou, also member of SYRIZA. Nevertheless, their threats of not supporting what the government would

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24. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20150123STO13903/reactions-of-meps-to-greece-elections>

25. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31055069>

26. Ibid.

bring to the parliament were mostly limited to an "unwilling" support for the first left government. The real frontal collusion took place only when the negotiations with the European partners reached a dead end during summer, and more specifically after the answer NO prevailed in the referendum.

In the exterior, the "tie" issue has been, many times, the cause for sarcasm and political jokes. Alexis Tsipras and, especially, Yanis Varoufakis were not ready to change their dress code or accept the conventional clothing of the institutions. At least, Alexis Tsipras left a small window open for his changing of clothes and putting a tie, on the condition of achieving a serious debt-relief<sup>27</sup>. Apart from the ties, the first "victory" of SYRIZA came on the 20<sup>th</sup> February when the Eurogroup took the decision to extend the application of the bailout program- expiring at the end of February- for four more months, giving, thus, vital space, and money from the European Central Bank, of course, to the Greek government to adapt its strategies, wishes and goals to the requirements of the European Partners and institutions. The decision of the Eurogroup provoked controversy in the interior of SYRIZA- largely by the most radical left fractions. The more acute of the reactions of the reactions came from the chief economic advisor of SYRIZA himself, Giannis Milios, who on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February published a post on the facebook where he was openly accusing the SYRIZA-ANEL government, making special reference to the "neoliberal" spirit of the agreement and to the attack against the working middle-class<sup>28</sup>. He was further denouncing that by the signature of this agreement SYRIZA's hands were tied, and, thus, it would be unable to fulfill his pre-electoral promises. The last accusation was actually grounded on the text of the agreement where it was clearly specified that SYRIZA should

"[...] refrain from any rollback of measures and unilateral changes to the policies and structural reforms that would negatively impact fiscal targets, economic recovery or financial stability, as assessed by the institutions<sup>29</sup>"

On the other side, Yanis Varoufakis insisted on the importance of the agreement:

"We genuinely and faithfully targeted one objective, and that was the interests of the average European" and "Greece had not used threats or bluff during the talks and the four-month period will be a time to rebuild new relations with Europe and the IMF.<sup>30</sup>"

Posthumously, Yanis Varoufakis persisted in the significance of this agreement:

"Instead, it (the agreement) specified that the Greek government was to submit its own list of reforms. This was a 'game changer' that Schäuble and other finance ministers op-

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27. <http://www.kathimerini.gr/909935/article/epikairothta/politikh/tsipras-8a-foresw-gravata-an-tanea-gia-to-xreos-apodeix8oyn-toso-8etika>

28. <http://www.newsbomb.gr/politikh/news/story/560906/o-milios-apodomei-ti-symfonia-varoyfaki>

29. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/02/150220-eurogroup-statement-greece/>

30. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-31556754>

posed tooth and nail during the 20 February Eurogroup meeting: For the first time since the euro crisis hit Europe, a ‘program’ (i.e. bankrupt) country was invited to propose its own reform agenda, rather than being forced to accept the troika’s.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from any different opinions or diverging points of view concerning the agreement, the fact is the latter gave the Greek government the possibility to receive more money and prepare itself for the end of the program, a program which would inevitably lead to another agreement, whose terms should be negotiated and accepted by SYRIZA- all the fractions involved- and the Independent Greeks. This new program was the red line of the radical left fractions in SYRIZA, a line which was later crossed by Alexis Tsipras. The crucial moment finally came on June 25 2015, after months of unfruitful negotiations with the no longer called Troika, but “Institutions (European Commission- European Central Bank- IMF)”- when Alexis Tsipras announced live on the Greek Public television that a referendum would take place allowing the Greek citizens to give their approval or not concerning the program proposed by the “Institutions”. This proposal, as expected, provoked an unprecedented turmoil in the Greek society and in Brussels since a possible negative answer could eventually lead to the exit of Greece from the Eurozone. In addition, issues have been risen concerning its functionality, its credentials<sup>32</sup> and the way the main question was phrased. The issue about the question is of interest because, as Yannis Sygkelos (2015), a Lecturer at DEI College, Thessaloniki, comments

“Another important constitutional oddity concerns the clarity of the question. According to 4023/2011 art.3, “the question is phrased in a comprehensible and succinct manner.” On the contrary, the question was puzzling and vaguely framed.

The ballot read: should the plan agreement submitted by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund in the Euro-group of 25.06.2015, be approved? It consists of two parts, which constitute an aggregate proposal: the first document is entitled “Reforms for the Completion of the Current Program and beyond” and the second “Preliminary Debt Sustainability Analysis (both document titles appeared in English with a translation in Greek placed in brackets)”

It offered two options: Not approved/NO and approved/YES. Apart from being too lengthy to be placed on a referendum ballot, the question cited two documents of a very recent non-paper amounted to 34 pages that the voters themselves had to find out and read carefully” (pp.3)

To better understand the circumstances under which the Greek society had to vote, it should be underlined that when the bailout program ended with no immediate perspective of the signature of a new one, the European Central Bank denied to give Greece more emergency aid. As a result, the government, willing avoid the havoc that such a decision would provoke in the bank system and its clients’ accounts, decided to close the banks and impose “capital controls”. Thus, with closed banks, with a limit of cash withdrawal- 60€ per day- and, in a politi-

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31. <https://www.yanisvaroufakis.eu/2016/10/05/why-did-i-sign-the-2022015-eurogroup-agreement-what-is-diem25s-strategy-for-democratising-europe-opendemocracy/>

32. [http://www.oegfe.at/cms/uploads/media/OEGfE\\_Policy\\_Brief-2015.24.pdf](http://www.oegfe.at/cms/uploads/media/OEGfE_Policy_Brief-2015.24.pdf)



cal environment extremely radicalized and polarized after all those months of endless negotiations, the Greek society had to decide about its future: in or out the Eurozone and in or out the European Union. As it's normal, decisions that had to be taken by the Greek side, under such extreme conditions, could generate groundbreaking and hard to resolve problems/situations. The European partners, considering the referendum much more than a Greek internal issue, made direct, sometimes, interventions in the domestic political affairs. The president of the European Parliament, Martin Schultz said:

"[...] if the Greek government didn't get back to Brussels and negotiate, then he was prepared to go to Greece to reach out to Greek citizens personally, and that Sunday's vote, is not only about a program, it is a fundamental vote about whether to stay in the eurozone or not.<sup>33</sup>"

The German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble told Bild newspaper, on Friday before the elections, that negotiations "would pick up after the referendum, and would be approached on a totally new basis and in more difficult economic conditions which will take time<sup>34</sup>", in an effort to show that the referendum proclaimed by the Greek government was no longer based on a stable ground, since the proposal had already been withdrawn.

In this maelstrom of fear, doubt and anxiety about the future, the Greek people gave a 61,3% to NO, making, this way, even more unclear and blurry the future of Greece in the Eurozone and in the European Union. This NO, however, was the first of the impetuous events that took place afterwards in the political scene of Greece. Yanis Varoufakis, ardent supporter of the NO, few hours after the result of the referendum was known, resigned, and his post was filled by the current Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos. Alexis Tsipras, some days later, started once again the negotiations with the "Institutions", negotiations in which the "milder" character of Euclid Tsakalotos contributed in blunting the political pretenses his antecedent Yanis Varoufakis was blamed for having provoked by his European counterparts. The negotiations went on, a proposal for a third bailout plan draft was backed, a plan though with many similarities, if not harsher in austerity measures than the one rejected in the referendum. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, Alexis Tsipras brought the Greek parliament the question of supporting or not the new draft so as to take it as a base for the negotiations with the European officials. 251 deputies voted in favour of the plan but since 17 parliamentarians from SYRIZA did not back the plan, Alexis Tsipras relied on the votes of the opposition parties to get the permission to negotiate the third bailout plan. The crack inside SYRIZA was now more than evident and reached its peak when the final form of the bailout plan was brought for voting on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August. That day, more than 40 deputies of the coalition of SYRIZA and Independent Greeks voted against or abstained from the

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33. <http://www.politico.eu/article/schulz-greece-campaign-yes-greferendum-grexit-vote-eurozone-parliament-president/>

34. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/hoy-san-diego/sdhoy-proposal-in-greek-referendum-no-lon-ger-on-the-2015jul03-story.html>



voting, making more than evident that there was a raging civil war inside the left party. Alexis Tsipras, aware of the fact that his coalition no longer had the 120 votes to survive a censure motion, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, submitted the resignation of his government to the President of the Republic, opening the way for the elections on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September.

The elections of September were the only possibility for Alexis Tsipras to get rid of the radical left elements in his party. Having faced the consequences of an open confrontation with the European institutions, he was capable of realizing that the more radical the vocabulary and the actions were, the more radical the reactions would be. As it proved to be, the elections were a smart move which made of Alexis Tsipras the undisputed leader of SYRIZA. In the elections, SYRIZA easily won, once again, with a 35,46% and formed government, for a second time, with the Independent Greeks, which managed to enter into the parliament with a 3.69%; a coalition which governs till our days (May 2017). The main ideological rival of Alexis Tsipras, Panagiotis Lafazanis, with his newly formed political party Popular Unity, did not manage to get seats in the Greek parliament, limited to a 2.86%.

Having reached the end of this brief analysis of the turbulent first months of the SYRIZA governance, and before embarking upon a presentation of some concluding ideas concerning the relation between Greece and Europe in the complex geopolitical schema of ourdays, we would like to stress here some interesting, at least to us, points:

- 1) As proven, Alexis Tsipras was in no case ready to follow the plan of Yanis Varoufakis to the end. No matter the radical vocabulary before getting elected, once he saw the way the European Institutions did function, he realized that there was no middle way in this confrontation. He would either go to the extremes, with a plan B whose details, however, are not exactly known<sup>35</sup>, or he would bow to the demands made by Troika -baptized “Institutions”- due to the lack of another viable plan.
- 2) The Greek society, even though it gave a huge 61% to NO in the referendum, voted once again in favour of SYRIZA/Alexis Tsipras- leaving out of the parliament Panagiotis Lafazanis and other radical left, or just radical, ex members of SYRIZA- and the Independent Greeks. Feeling the pressure of the closed banks and seeing that there was no other serious or viable choice, Greek people were ready to interpret the NO, not as a refusal of the Euro, but, rather, as a denial to accept everything from the European partners without having a say on it.

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35. The plan B became a kind of an urban myth ranging from the intention of the most radical side of SYRIZA, the Left Platform, to occupy the Greek Bureau of Engraving and Printing so as to print national currency, to the scenario of the parallel payment system of Yanis Varoufakis. See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/11764018/Varoufakis-reveals-cloak-and-dagger-Plan-B-for-Greece-awaits-treason-charges.html>

- 3) The European institutions managed to lose the trust and the support of the Greek society. A survey made by Kapa Research, presented by the newspaper *To Vima*<sup>36</sup>, shows that the main feeling created by the situation in the country is uneasiness (71%); 41.5% of the people believing that the European partners gave evidence of a revengeful attitude towards Greece during the crisis and the 44% considering that Greece should thoughtfully contemplate leaving the Euro currency.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Before putting an end to this article, we would like to show off one point, which has come from what we have seen so far: the political strife between SYRIZA and the European Union's institutions, far from being an exclusively domestic issue, has brought into light an inner chasm in the European Union, a chasm which could eventually segregate the institutions from the people of the states, making, thus, of this Union a creature just for politicians and bureaucrats. This chasm, at least in our opinion, has been clearly demonstrated in the stance of European partners and institutions towards SYRIZA after its full compliance with all their demands. So, while SYRIZA left no stone unturned in order to implement all the changes it has been asked for, inside his party, as well as in its attitude towards Europe, the European Union's stance has not changed leaving the Greek society the impression that the errors made before would not be that easily forgotten, and that a "vengeful" reaction of European Union is still persistent. Thus, up to date, SYRIZA, though with the radical left fractions out of the party, and without Varoufakis, is, nevertheless, in front of the same lack of trust and solidarity as before. Even though, earlier this month, the so called "4<sup>th</sup> Memorandum" has been approved by the Greek Parliament, only with the votes of the coalition SYRIZA/ Independent Greeks, the conversations concerning the debt relief are again postponed as if this main issue for Greece's people destiny did not constitute a priority for the European institutions. On the other hand, the signing of the last bailout program- considered to be another proof of SYRIZA's will to cooperate- is casting into doubt whether this lack of trust can be countered or it will much longer remain stagnated in the press conference of Varoufakis and Jeroen Dijsselbloem, two years ago, where Troika "left its last breath".

Moreover, without, of course, questioning the weight of a common currency for the cohesion of the European Union we do believe that more important than Euro are the Europeans and their well being. A prosperous Euro, when not relying on or contributive to the well being of the citizens they use it, cannot constitute the stable base upon which the European Union could ground visions and perspectives of its members' people. To start with, a Union should not be limited only to the use of a common currency. A Union presupposes a direct answer when Turkey threa-

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36. <http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=875272>

tens full members of the European Union (Republic of Cyprus and Greece) with war<sup>37</sup>, as well as a more profound understanding of the situation Greece is facing in the double field of the economy crisis and the unprecedented refugee crisis. Finally, a Union should not always strictly perceive the “NO” s in the referendums as NO to Europe or to Euro, but, rather, as the urging appeal of those voting NO to see an affirmation that we are all still in a Union; a Union which, of course, faces problems, but which is something more than a mere sum of gathered economic interests. What we are really in need of is a diaphanous political identity, a re-forging of our European entity.

Our opinion is that Greece, within a solid and self-confident European Union enjoying the support and solidarity of its partners, could play a crucial role in the forging of a new European identity and co-belonging. Without, of course, denying that radical changes should further go on in the domains of Greek economy and administration, what we want to highlight is the needfulness for Europe of Greece’s rich potential (historical, cultural, political and humane) in such a politically unstable environment. Greece, having made its choice of belonging to the West- a choice reaffirmed by the acceptance of Memorandums’ draconian terms, as well- could become a pole of stability and a credible guardian for the safe borders of the European Union and Europe. If the European Union sincerely wants to become a real Union, whose members will feel and share the same cultural identity’s foundations, then the emphasis should not be limited to the economy. Solidarity towards Greece would mean and be solidarity’s stance towards the same idea of the European Union and its core-values. A Union which is in no need of Russia’s help or the USA’s assistance to define its own future and actions; a European Union which- far from being a mere sum of States under a directorate which does not respect their peoples’ joint hopes and desires- will potentially become what it must be: the defender of the cultural heritage of the European struggles and history.

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37. <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/05/03/turkey-says-cyprus-hydrocarbon-exploitation-of-certain-sea-plot-is-cause-of-war/>

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