

Greece: right-wing landslide, left-wing collapse. Surprise or predicted electoral result?

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How can we explain the victory, or rather triumph, of the Greek right and the defeat, or rather collapse, of the Syriza Left in the May 21 elections? How do we explain the fact that Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis's New Democracy (ND) party more than doubled (41%) Syriza's score (20%)? And how can we explain the fact that, right up until the eve of the elections, the Left - practically of all persuasions - was predicting electoral results that would serve as a springboard for the final assault by a burgeoning Greek popular movement against the power of a weakened and crisis-stricken Right?

Rather than looking for the causes of all these huge "surprises" in the "communication errors" traditionally evoked after defeats, or in this or that pre-election "blunder" committed by someone who can be used as a scapegoat (as, for example, former Foreign Minister George Katrougalos is currently doing) in order to save his boss, we prefer to look deeper, starting by recalling a fact understandable to European readers because it refers to the recent Greek rail disaster, which was widely commented on well beyond Greece [1]. As you will recall, the transport minister responsible for the accident, Konstantin Karamanlis jr., was forced to resign, and part of the political and media Right campaigned for him not to stand for re-election so that his party (ND) could avoid electoral defeat. To all this we might add that, a few days before the elections, the families of the 56 people killed in the rail disaster demonstrated in front of Mr. Karamanlis' electoral office, shouting "Karamanlis' place is not in Parliament but in prison!" In the end, however, Mr Karamanlis not only won re-election, he made a real splash!...

The case of Mr. Karamanlis' triumphant re-election speaks for itself, and is also highly emblematic of the current state of Greek society. So, if we want to find the causes of the recent electoral "surprises" not on the surface but in the depths of Greek realities, we have to start by accepting as a starting point the observation that current Greek society is very conservative and even downright reactionary. In other words, it is terribly racist, much more so than Polish society, a fact confirmed year after year not only by facts but also by opinion polls, including the annual ISTAT surveys. That, with a few exceptions, it systematically closes its eyes and ears to the countless inhumane - often murderous - acts by the authorities against migrants, which have been denounced and publicly condemned by dozens of NGOs (who are often called... "terrorists" by the Greek government), as well as by the UN, the Council of Europe and even the...European Commission! That it persists in cultivating an aggressive chauvinism against its Balkan neighbors, also perpetuating an ancient and virulent anti-Semitism which manifests itself above all in the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, since there are virtually no Jews left alive in Greece after the Shoah. And also, that a very high proportion of it declares itself pro-Russian, pro-Putin and anti-Ukrainian like nowhere else, just as it was pro-Milosevic and pro-Karadjic 30 years ago during the Yugoslav wars. It also votes by the hundreds of thousands for racist parties that fall somewhere between the extreme right and outright neo-Nazism. That's why, in the absence of the dissolved and banned Golden Dawn party, the various parties of

the Greek far right came to just over 10% in the last elections. And this despite the fact that the traditional right-wing New Democracy, which includes a very strong wing of right-wing extremists, has just triumphed with 41% of the vote...

But how could the Greeks have become so conservative or even reactionary when these same Greeks voted en masse in favor of and brought to power a rather radical Left (Syriza) only eight years ago? The answer to this critical and essential question has nothing to do with metaphysics, DNA or Greek "predispositions". In reality, the real metamorphosis of Greek society in the space of a few years has not fallen from the sky, but is the direct consequence of the political choices made by the Syriza leadership when it governed the country from 2015 to 2019. The story is well known and cannot be summed up by the capitulation of July 2015, when Tsipras and his friends betrayed the trust of their voters and the 60% of Greeks who had voted NO to submission to the dictates of the EU and IMF creditors. In reality, Syriza's enormous betrayal was made up of countless small, medium and large capitulations, which have continued after 2019 and right up to the present day, and have contributed to the metamorphosis of this party from an allegedly radical left one to a party whose leaders no longer hesitate to define as ... "center-left"...

The consequences have been and continue to be dramatic. Both in Greece and beyond. As we wrote back in August 2015, ***"the situation created in the international socialist and progressive movement by Syriza's capitulation is terribly dangerous. It is not just that there are thousands and thousands of people who are forced to abandon all activism and to withdraw into themselves; nor that there are as many who feel paralyzed and choose to wait passively for the course of events, it is especially that Syriza's betrayal comes at a very critical historical moment, when the racist extreme right is advancing almost everywhere in our continent, which already makes immediate and direct the threat that many of the citizens Europeans disappointed by Syriza will fall prey to this racist and neo-fascist self-proclaimed"anti-systemic"extreme right"*** [2] And a few months later, still in 2015, we noted the devastation already wrought by Syriza's capitulation, while warning that *"the great event that is opening up pathways for the far right is, however, the disappointment caused to tens of millions of European citizens, who recognize themselves neither in the austerity policies nor in the corruption of the traditional neoliberal parties, by the betrayal of their hopes invested in Syriza's Greece and Podemos's Spain. When, on August 21, we were already talking about the"criminal responsibilities of Mr. Tsipras"in"the catastrophic international consequences of Syriza's announced capitulation"there were very few people who really understood what we were talking about. Today, when these"catastrophic international consequences"are staring us in the face and appearing in all their nightmarish grandeur, who would still dare to dispute the"criminal responsibilities"of Mr. Tsipras, but also of the entire Syriza leadership, in the disappearance of the last hope that constituted the last European dike able to hold back the tide of the extreme Right?"* [3]

Taking advantage of the unpreparedness of the Right, which had only just begun to reorganize itself, the lack of perspectives and scope of the rest of the Left, and above all the apathy of the "people of the Left", who remained stunned by the real blow they had received in 2015, Syriza was able to stay in power until the end of the legislature. In fact, although it was beaten by ND in the 2019 elections, it relinquished power with a more than respectable result (31%).

But Syriza's time in opposition has not served the leadership well, either in recognizing its mistakes or in correcting its course. On the contrary, it continued and even deepened its right-wing drift towards a mythical "center" that it wanted - in vain - to compete with the Right. This is how, with the distance from power, we arrived at the disaster of the May 21, 2023 elections. The Syriza "miracle" was coming to an end, and the party of 2023 was nothing like, or rather the antithesis of, what it had been in the beginning: ***from a unitary grouping (unique in the world!) of a dozen left-wing***

and far-left parties and organizations, Syriza had become a party of careerist notables and other defectors from a dying PASOK. The circle had been completed, and the initial radicalism had now been replaced by the arrogance and cynicism of the nouveau riches...

And what about the rest of the Greek Left? The fact that it is hardly benefiting from Syriza's collapse speaks volumes about its current limitations. The far-left **Antarsya** coalition remains remarkably stable, repeating (ad infinitum?) its 0.5% result. And the ever viscerally sectarian **Greek Communist Party (KKE)** calls the fact that its result has risen from the 5.3% of 2019 to the current 7.2% a "great victory" and, as usual, remains cowering in its corner, still harmless to the Right, which respects it and leaves it alone just as much as the KKE respects it and leaves it alone to govern the country. As for Mr. **Varoufakis** and his allies in the Popular Union (LAE), their result (2.6%) is more than eloquent: not only do they fail to confirm the triumphalist forecasts - bordering on mythomania - at which Mr. Varoufakis traditionally excels, but they don't even manage to enter Parliament, and are down (-30%) on 2019! Once again, Mr. Varoufakis' inconsistency has not paid off, despite the fact that he has done everything to surpass even his LAE allies in unconditional Putinism...

Obviously, the conclusion cannot be optimistic. When the right-wing New Democracy manages not just to win, but to triumph, despite the generally accepted fact that Mr. Mitsotakis's highly neoliberal government has been overwhelmed by a tsunami of unprecedented scandals, the facts speak louder than any analysis of the state of Greek society and the Greek left. Likewise, Mr. Tsipras remains far less popular than Mr. Mitsotakis, even though everyone knows and admits that the latter is unscrupulous and does not hesitate to systematically bug even his own ministers and a few thousand other friends and enemies. So Mr. Mitsotakis could remain confident if it weren't for the extreme "volatility" that has characterized Greek society for the past 15 years. As almost everywhere else in Europe, social explosions are by no means out of the question, but the big problem is that no one can predict who will benefit politically. Will it be a new, united radical Left that we'll have to invent, or the extreme Right that's steadily on the rise? What happens next promises to be very exciting...

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Footnotes

[1] See "Greece: The infamy of a predicted terrible rail disaster":
<http://www.cadtm.org/Greece-The-infamy-of-a-predicted-terrible-rail-disaster>

[2] See "The catastrophic consequences of the announced international capitulation of Syriza ... and the criminal responsibility of Mr. Tsipras":
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4196>

[3] « Les responsabilités criminelles de la gauche qui refuse de voir le tsunami européen d'extrême droite »: <https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article36899>