



Making sense of the Greek elections

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The Greek election is over and SYRIZA returns to power having secured an emphatic victory over its main political rival, New Democracy. Although the pre-election opinion polls had predicted a close contest between the two parties, the official results proved them wrong; SYRIZA received 35.46% of the vote, which translates into 145 seats in the new eight-party Parliament, while New Democracy stranded at 28.10% and 75 seats. Still, SYRIZA falls short of an absolute majority for which it would have needed 151 out of 300 seats. It is therefore expected to reunite with the right-wing Independent Greeks (ANEL) who command ten parliamentary seats. Yet in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the election outcome, we should also pay particular attention to the following facts:

- The *abstention rate* was approximately 44% and constitutes the highest rate ever recorded in the recent history of Greece. Although an in-depth analysis is needed to explain why Greeks refrained from casting their votes, one could assume that they feel betrayed and disappointed by the current political system. In a span of nine months they have been asked to participate in three elections in the hope to make a decisive step towards changing their lives; but so far their expectations have not been met. It is therefore, possible that anger and apathy made people turn their backs even on democratic processes that can affect them directly.
- The radical right Golden Dawn has managed once again to enter Parliament as the third political power and secure one extra seat: they obtained 6.99% of the vote and 18 seats in total. The good news is that approximately 9.000 people less than last time voted for Golden Dawn in absolute numbers. But both the Greek state and the Greek society need to remain vigilant and speed up their efforts to combat the virulent speech and behaviour of the party. Most worrying is that even though its General Secretary, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, took political responsibility for the murder of anti-fascist Pavlos Fyssas just a few days before the election, thousands of voters did not see this as a reason for changing their minds.
- The last election made it clear that Alexis Tsipras, the leader of SYRIZA, dominates the Greek political scene. This comes as a surprise if we take into consideration the following three factors: firstly, Tsipras failed to keep the promises he gave in the January election regarding his intentions to tear up, metaphorically speaking, the Memorandum, to improve bureaucracy and to fight corruption; secondly, he signed a tough list of reforms and conceded to exhaustive austerity measures amidst a turbulent period in the country where the economy suffocated due to the imposition of capital controls; and thirdly, he lost control of his own party after the revolt of the members of the so-called Left Platform who defected creating a new political party. Because of

the latter development Tsipras lost his majority in Parliament and decided to resign paving the way for early elections. But Tsipras overcame the obstacles and achieved one more victory thus buying time that will allow him to put his plans and ideas into action. Also, by voting this way, people have shown their discontent with the old ruling system that governed the last years.

- As mentioned above, SYRIZA and ANEL will most likely form a coalition government that will occupy 155 seats in Parliament; admittedly a thin majority. Also, it remains to be seen whether they will be able to cooperate on sensitive issues that may cross their ideological red lines. For instance, a few months ago ANEL voted against a bill proposed by SYRIZA to grant citizenship to children of immigrants who were born in Greece. Apart from that, until the end of this year the government should conclude the first review of the bailout programme and enforce changes such as spending cuts and reforms in the pension system which may cause distress among some lawmakers. Hence, the question is: will Alexis Tsipras be able to build a viable government and ensure cohesion in order to withstand the adversities of the upcoming months?

It is a matter of great urgency for Greece to get back on track as soon as possible and follow a path of stability and growth. There is no time left for experiments because both Europe and the Greek people are losing patience. The Greek people gave Tsipras a second chance to serve a four-year term and implement his vision; he should take advantage of his political capital and make changes that will improve the social and economic situation of the country.