

transform!

european network for alternative thinking
and political dialogue

Special Edition focused on the political situation in Greece, in cooperation with *Nicos Poulantzas Institute (NPI)*

“It’s All Greek To Me!”

Hegemony and Despair

By Stavros Panagiotidis, Nicos Poulantzas Institute

Before the elections of 6 May, the most likely result seemed to be the formation of a government of *New Democracy* (conservatives) and PASOK (social democrats). However, the slogan for the “government of the Left”, which was brought in the political arena by Alexis Tsipras, led people to face SYRIZA not just as a force of protest, but as a party with a view to govern, offering a prospect of getting over the crisis. The results brought closer the realization of what seemed just as a good slogan.

Entering the final week before the elections, the mode in which the political conflict in Greece is carried out crystallizes the difference between the two main poles. On the one hand, *New Democracy* is the dominant power of the pro-Memorandum pole. On the other hand, SYRIZA is the strongest anti-Memorandum political force. It is quite characteristic that in last month’s elections, SYRIZA came first among private sector workers, civil servants, self-employed and unemployed, also in age groups up to 55 years old and in the largest urban centers. So, it presented a surprisingly strong acceptance from the most dynamic segments of Greek society. The presentation of the party’s posi-

tions has given even more momentum. Within the strong comparative advantages of SYRIZA is that for the citizens it represents a new political force, against the corrupted political personnel of the two (former) major parties. Currently, SYRIZA seems to be surfing on a big wave. This wave is the need of people for a Greek Renaissance, the desire to finally change something in this country, which has been governed by the same two parties since the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. The public may not know the details of SYRIZA’s program. The party, however, due to its steady anti-Memorandum position, whereby it refused to participate in a coalition government with the *New Democracy* and PASOK, seems to convince them that in it consists the only real hope for a new political and moral progress in Greece. The hegemony that SYRIZA seems to achieve is such that the party gains people’s support, though they may not believe that it will apply all of what it says. But the hope of a rebirth is as strong as the need for it.

When sadness lays madness

New Democracy, on the other hand, proves itself completely unable to articu-

late a hopeful political proposal. This is both because it has accepted the political framework of the Memorandum, and that, due to the numerous changes of its leader’s stands, it has lost its credibility. Antonis Samaras talks about the need of “renegotiating” the Memorandum – in contrast to its “cancellation”, on which SYRIZA commits itself – that is to change some of its details. But what the party mainly offers is not vision, but fear. The basic – almost unique – *New Democracy*’s argument is that because of SYRIZA Greece will be expelled from the Eurozone. Since everyone had to admit that there is no legal possibility to drive off a country from the EMU against its will, *New Democracy*’s propaganda states that if a Greek government cancels the Memorandum, the country will not get any loans and will be forced to abandon EMU in order to have its own currency. So, the refusal of the Troika (EU, ECB, IMF) to accept the terms of a left government will have this effect. But when the representatives of *New Democracy* are asked what they would do in case the Troika will deny their own proposals for a renegotiation, they find a thousand ways to avoid answering.

New Democracy is experiencing a major impasse. So, they use any type of propaganda that can be based on fear. They circulate gray television ads (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j24Tphmp-00&feature=related>) which show, as a picture of the future, ten years old students to ask their teacher why Greece is out of the Eurozone (receiving allegations of unacceptable use of children) with the slogan “we do not gamble with the future of our children”. The Youth organization of the party has released an anonymous video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcgBIQILQ3w&feature=related>) where Alexis Tsipras is represented by an actor as a macho customer of an expensive restaurant who refuses to pay his bill and the waiters throw him out, with a clear

message that if Greece fails to pay its debt, she will be kicked out of the EMU. But it is an extremely provocative and insulting advertisement, because we all know that the Greek people have been eating not at all luxurious in recent years. But this shows the absolute distance of the party’s political personnel from people’s needs. Up to panic, the leadership of *New Democracy* placed as head of its campaign a populist and (used to be) extremely popular politician, but who is now on trial for financial scandals.

As a result of all the fore mentioned, the leader of *New Democracy* uses any type of ridiculous excuses to refuse participating in a TV debate along with Alexis Tsipras, apparently realizing that this would cause the loss of all his

chances for a victory in the elections. He also avoids organizing a public speech (an unprecedented situation for the political life of Greece) due to the fear that the attendance would be very small. At the same time, Alexis Tsipras gives public speeches in crowded square all over Greece, discussing the program of SYRIZA with citizens and answering their questions, sometimes for more than three hours!

So, a few days before the elections, in Greece a great struggle is being conducted between obedience and resistance, compromise and conflict, humiliation and dignity. A battle between fear and hope. Who do you think will be the winner in the end?

The rise of the Neo-Nazi extreme Right in Greece: A Child of the Crisis and the Peculiarities of Greek Society; A Challenge for the Left

By Michalis Nikolakakis, Nicos Poulantzas Institute

On the 6th of May, 440,000 people chose to vote for neo-Nazi party of *Golden Dawn*. They chose to support a political group, which, besides being openly Nazist, is responsible for hundreds of murderous attacks against immigrants and members of Left and Anarchist organizations. A group, the very existence of which should be forbidden. Not because the prohibition of any political ideology has something to offer to the Greek democracy, but because many of its cadres should be prosecuted for crimes of the common criminal law. After the assault of a member of *Golden Dawn* against two left-wing MPs of KKE and SYRIZA, the TV stations decided to break their silence and speak about the role of the party, which, for so many years was denounced by the Left.

The rich debate taking place these days regarding this new phenomenon conceals the real characteristics of the party’s voters behind the statement “let’s not overreact; these 440,000 people are not nazists”. So, in this text

I will try to shed some light on what the support of this group really means, not as a means of reaction against a collapsing party system, but as a choice per se. To this direction I make the following observations:

1. Opposite to what happens in the rest of the countries of Western Europe the polls in Greece managed to forecast the electoral result for the Extreme Right because its voters were not ashamed to declare that they would vote for it, as it was the case in France for example.

2. The electoral geography of *Golden Dawn* reveals that the party is present all over Greece, but stronger in urban centers with a traditionally conservative electoral behavior. Its highest percentages were realized in the “right-wing” area of the Peloponnese, and more specifically in regions that do not face severe problems with immigrants. Correspondingly, the lowest percentages were realized in the “democratic” area of Crete, even though the cases of

racist violence during the last years are not few even there.

3. While the two parties in power were creating clientelistic networks, the political forces of the Extreme Right were integrated in them without claiming major things. However, the inability of these parties to deliver has politically released the bearers of far Right ideas.

4. Thus, the 400,000 voters of *Golden Dawn* are not Nazist. However, they adhere to a social, ideological framework where the expression of their support to *Golden Dawn* is not blame-worthy. This is because racism, as a political stance is far more wide-spread than the condensed core of the voters of the Far Right. The fact that the attitude towards immigrants constituted a basic criterion set by the parties of the former two-party system and the big media for a growing part of the electoral base, is not irrelevant to the shift of the political agenda from unem-

ployment, austerity and recession to security and fear for the “polluting effects” of illegal immigrants.

5. Nevertheless, racism is not the only element that runs across the electoral base of *Golden Dawn*. Vote to this party also expresses an existing and visible ideological shift inside the Greek society towards anti-parliamentarism. A shift, in other words, to the direction of an open questioning of the opinion that bourgeois parliamentary institutions constitute an adequate way to articulate political and social antagonism. This anti-parliamentarism is expressed today – at least in public – with the cult extravagance of the cadres of *Golden Dawn* in front of the cameras, but also with their assault against specific parts of society. Tomorrow, though, we can see this antagonism being transubstantiated in a more mature political proposal that even ideologically incorporates “modernizing” or “reformatory” parts of the Greek society, as was the case in the interwar period with fascism.

6. In this conjuncture, the Left and the Extreme Right constitute directly opposing outlets and proposals for the

understanding of the crisis of political representation on the ideological level. In this framework the Left has to primarily focus on the fascist danger in order to counter it, but more importantly it has to succeed to what the Left itself intends to do. As such, it has to confirm and maintain that it holds the heritage of the original fiduciary of democracy.

7. The vote to *Golden Dawn* is not only indicative for the spread of racism and anti-parliamentarism in Greece. It also testifies the spread of a new type of defensive sexism. The vote to *Golden Dawn* is greatly higher among young men. The political changeover (Metapolitefsi) was a huge positive incision (this is something we always tend to forget) regarding the female position in Greece both socially and economically. The economic crisis places the role of the two sexes in the forefront. The value shift realized in Metapolitefsi has deprived Greek men from their ability to embody the masculine ideal of bringing food and leading the family. The crisis today seals this shift given that, even if they wanted to, the unemployment and the reduction of incomes, forbids them to

play this autonomous and utterly dominant role in the division of power inside the family. Thus, echoing the analyses of the Frankfurt School regarding the "authoritarian personality" which supported fascism, economic and social "castration" of the Greek man is replenished by extremely violent and masculine options (until recently, cultural, and only during the last period also political). Violence in the stadiums, the emergence of body building as a particular aesthetic ideal, and the aesthetic codes of nightlife for years showed the emergence of this new defensive sexism. The *Golden Dawn* is the authentic political expression of this new sexism, as a request to restore a social order where the woman stays in the kitchen and paranoid homophobia (which discovers sexual perversions everywhere, to cover any "deficiency") in authority. A similar trend clearly emerged with both the Neo-Nazi attack against the two parliamentary candidates of the Left (what seems to make him feel humiliated and react so that he was attacked by women), and some of the supportive comments for the act, which was expressed these days in private talks in Greece.

The Special Regime of Media in Greece

By Stelios Fotinopoulos, Nicos Poulantzas Institute

Media crisis in Greece comes as a consequence of the lack of real democracy that becomes more and more intensive. If in Greece, there is a non-pluralistic sector of public life, this is definitely the mainstream private media. These stations took their license to transmit through public frequencies after a ministerial decision back in 1989. This decision gave the opportunity to people who had “a traditional experience in the Media System”, to establish “non-state television channels”. The particular law that gives this ability is actually based on a governmental law of the 1970s that opens the way just for amateur local TV and radio stations. These businessmen, who were described to the fore men-

tioned law, were none other than the major well established publishers. They were the first to deal with this whole new status and seize the upcoming opportunity. The basic criterion so far for having a license to use the public frequencies in order to transmit a TV signal, was only the quality of the projected program.

For many years, the private mainstream media were identical to corruption and many times accused for manipulating the public opinion. The “framing” method* was presented as the main rule in journalism, most of the times without penalties by the National TV and radio council. The last extremely intense phenomenon of framing

by the Greek media, happened during the social explosion of December 2008, when police shot a 15-year-old boy causing massive riots. Greek Television and newspapers reported merely the riots and clashes and associated them to the peaceful context of the youth movement. As a result we had a total overthrow of the public opinion in interest of the Greek government and the police. The main enemy of the system at that time was SYRIZA. SYRIZA, who was nothing but reasonable and respectful to the thousands of young students who were demonstrating across Greece, said that we do not agree with the violent riots and brutalities but we have to focus on the reasons that provoke the whole

social explosion: social exclusion, education, unemployment. From this point of view, December 2008 was a glimpse from the future economic and social crisis. A crisis of the democracy itself.

Governments, banks, media owners: the triangle of sin

It has to be stressed that none of the dominant media organizations that own TV channels, have paid so far anything for the public frequencies they use. On the contrary, these particular media are sources of bad quality news and closely connected with private business plans and public investments. It is highly indicative, that the four of the biggest

Greek TV stations are owned by ship owners and owners of big construction enterprises that undertake all the major public construction projects. SYRIZA has repeatedly described this situations as a “triangle of sin”, consisting of the two former major parties (PASOK and *New Democracy*), TV station owners and bankers. The story goes like this: governments favour the banks in a thousand ways, bankers then give loans to the TV stations and to the business of their owners, and as a result, their TV stations support the government. All these have caused a great lack of democracy and Greek people share this view in high percentages.

SYRIZA has a clear thesis on this. All TV stations that use public frequencies in order to transmit their signals have to pay for this concession. A democratic and effective National TV and Radio Council will also be a crucial parameter towards this direction. Dealing with these issues that all previous governments have created and taken advantage of, is of the utmost importance for a government of the Left.

* *In the field of communication, framing defines how news media coverage shapes mass opinion. To be specific, framing effects refer to behavioural or attitudinal outcomes that are due to how a given piece of information is being framed in public discourse.*

Left Opposition in Germany:

Europe: Change of Direction is Necessary

By Axel Troost, fiscal spokesperson of the parliamentary group of DIE LINKE; Vice chairman of the party DIE LINKE

For implementing its prestige project, the fiscal contract, Germany's government has to change the constitution and therefore depends on the votes of the opposition.

Negotiations on this issue will take place until 13 July, and DIE LINKE will join them on different levels.

Why we cannot Support the Fiscal Contract

The fiscal contract explicitly proposes a constitutionally embedded debt limit for all participating nations. We disapprove of this for the following reasons:

- First of all it is economic reasons that speak against the contract: It will become more difficult to perform an active stabilization policy as well as a formative policy of finances, for example in order to induce a socio-economic turn
- Secondly, the fiscal contract stands for an assault on democracy,

since national parliaments are obliged to cede their budget rights, in case they breach the wrongful requirements of the contract

- We also disapprove of the contract for socio-economic reasons: The principle of competition among states will not lead to a budget consolidation through the introduction of higher taxes on assets and corporate profits, but will be primarily executed at the expense of employees and the recipients of state subsidies.

The fiscal contract is a threat to the European integration process. It will be the reason why many countries will associate the EU solely with austerity cuts and the deconstruction of democracy.

Taking all this into consideration we cannot approve of a compromise with the coalition. Additionally, the claims of SPD and the Greens show significant weaknesses.

The Growth Pact

The SPD and the Greens, similar to France's president Hollande, demand that a development and employment agreement shall be added to the fiscal contract.

The project bonds for financing infrastructural projects, which had been discussed in connection with this matter, will prove to be nothing but a drop in the bucket. The same thing can be said about the required immediate action program to fight youth unemployment as well as the EUR 10 billion for the European Investment Bank. The development agreement proves to be rather a PR-campaign than a political programme that is worth being called by that name.

The Financial Transaction Tax

In fact it is time to stand up to FDP's stubborn blockade and be determined to introduce Europe-wide measures. Con-

cerning this issue, the SPD, the Greens and DIE LINKE take the same stance. Furthermore it would be sensible to speak up against various attempts of maceration.

Nevertheless: The financial transaction tax is a tool for financing global matters, as to say development aids and worldwide environmental and climate protection; similar to what Attac and the “Tax against Poverty“-campaign are demanding.

The German parliament must not sneak away from its responsibility towards the rest of the world, only because it needs the funds resulting from a transaction tax to overcome the Euro crisis.

Subsequently, other sources of revenue must be found. Therefore it is appears strange that the Greens' claim for a property tax cannot be found any longer in the paper they published together with the SPD: Different from the financial transaction tax, whose introduction also depends on other European governments, some of them being stubborn, the German government could achieve much more by itself as far as a property tax is concerned.

The Debt Redemption Fund

The SPD and the Greens took the idea of a debt redemption fund on board that had been elaborated by the “Expert Advisory Board for the Assessment of Economic Development“. According to this concept the participating states would outsource debts exceeding 60 per cent of their GDP to a common stock and receive temporary financial aid in form of the bond issues of the stock (Eurobonds). In response, the participating states would be obliged to commit to a debt limit and a clearance plan, which would already come into effect with the introduction of the fiscal contract.

The financing via a communal fund shall assist the states to gain back the financial investors' faith. But the goal of emancipatory politics should not be the appeasement of the financial markets, but instead the overcoming of their dictate on a permanent level – e.g. via Eurobonds or the re-organisation of the ECB.

The proposal as a whole is not very promising either: Spain does not suffer from a high debt level; it is its future perspectives that appear dark. Due to the amortisation fund Spain is only entitled to EUR 88 billion, which would barely take away any pressure. The second big insecure case, Italy, would not only have

to present a balanced budget – difficult enough – but also pay off debts annually at a level of EUR 50 billion. Nowhere in the proposal it is mentioned how all of this shall be done.

The debt redemption fund might be a nice idea if it comes to teasing the German government with the idea of communitarising the debts but not a practicable solution for overcoming the crisis.

Prospects

We cannot expect much from those negotiations: The SPD is more likely to cast out Willy Brandt than not to agree to the fiscal contract. Therefore the SPD will sell her agreement cheaply, and along with it also the Greens. Against the background of a severe crisis of the EU that questions the European project on a principal level, taxing financial transactions on a tenth of per cent level cannot be considered as a major breakthrough. Even the distribution of a couple of billions for single projects here and there is an inadequate response to the serious problems of the Monetary Union and also the wrong rescue strategy of the German government. Whoever aims to achieve a change in the politics of crisis management has to vote for DIE LINKE.

Forum at the European Parliament “Another Road for Europe”

Brussels, 28 June 2012, 9.00-18.30

The Appeal “Another Road for Europe” invites civil society organisations, social movements, networks, trade unions and political forces to a one-day discussion at the European Parliament in Brussels on the ways out of the European crisis.

Many appeals, texts, proposals are being launched about the future of Europe and about the way out of the crisis. The aim of this event is to contribute to open

up a debate at the European level between activists, experts, political forces and policy makers on the viable actions that European and national institutions, political forces and social organisations can take to move beyond neoliberal policies, and towards a sustainable and democratic Europe, free from discriminations and inequalities. This initiative is part of a range of activities that are being organised at the European level on alternatives to the crisis. We propose to organise the meeting around three issues

(Macroeconomic policies and finance, Green New Deal and employment, Democracy) and to have a first, informal exchange of views on the most relevant policy proposals, in order to be able to understand which are those around which we could build a common approach and, if possible, future common or coordinated actions.

Each session will be introduced by speakers from civil society organisations and experts' networks who will summarise

rise the proposals that have emerged on each topic, opening up a discussion with activists, representatives of different political forces and Members of the European Parliament. The aim is to contribute to the emergence of shared proposals for alternative policies at the European and national levels. Participants will include a wide range of civil society organisations, networks, Trade Unions, experts and intellectuals, as well as the progressive political forces in the European Parliament.

Participant organisations

Active Citizenship Network, Arci, Attac France, Attac Germany, Attac Finland, Corporate Europe Observatory, Economistes Atterrés, Euromemorandum, European Alternatives, European Federalist Movement, Fiom-Cgil, Il Manifesto, Joint Social Conference, New Economics Foundation, OpenDemocracy.net, Red Pepper, Rete@sinistra, Sbilanciamoci!, Social Watch Italian coalition, Soundings, *transform!europe*, Transnational Institute, more to be added

Contact and information:

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Venue:

European Parliament, Brussels
Room ASP 3G3

PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

9.00

- Opening: Isabelle Durant, vice-president of the European Parliament (Greens/EFA), Rossana Rossanda (il Manifesto)

9.15-11.45

1. Taming finance – The Euro, financial markets, debt and fiscal policies

- Chair: Mario Pianta (Sbilanciamoci!)
- Opening and review of alternative proposals

- Introductory Remarks: Trevor Evans (Euromemorandum)
- Proposals from activists and experts: Dany Lang (Economistes atterrés), Ronald Janssen (ETUC), Andrea Della Vecchia (Joint Social Conference), Antonio Tricarico (Re:Common), Corporate Europe Observatory, Greek activist (tbc), Andrew Simms (New Economics Foundation), Andrea Baranes (Fondazione Responsabilità Etica), etc.
- Members of the European Parliament and political forces: Leonardo Dominici (Socialists and Democrats), Liem Hoang Ngoc (Socialists and Democrats, France), Jürgen Klute (European United Left, Germany), Philippe Lamberts (Greens/EFA, Belgium), Patrick Le Hyaric (European United Left, France), Gianni Pittella, vice-president of the European Parliament (Socialists and Democrats), etc.
- Discussion

11.45-13.00

2. Avoiding a great depression: A green new deal, employment, ecological conversion and common goods

- Chair: to be defined
- Opening and review of alternative proposals
- Introductory Remarks: Pascal Petit (Université Paris 13)
- Proposals from activists and experts: Philippe Pochet (ETUI), Etienne Lebeau (Joint Social Conference), Maurizio Landini (Fiom-Cgil), Thomas Coutrot (Attac France), Attac Germany, Mariya Ivanceva (European Alternatives Bulgaria), Tommaso Fattori (Water campaign), Jason Nardi (Social Watch Italian coalition), etc.
- Members of the European Parliament and political forces: Nikolas Chountis (European United Left, Greece), Stefano Fassina (Partito Democratico, Italy), Sven Gieglo (Greens/EFA,

Germany), Marisa Matias (European United Left, Portugal), etc.

- Discussion
- Lunch break

15.00-17.30

3. A democratic Europe – Participation and decision making at European level

- Chair: Monica Frassoni (European Greens)
- Opening and review of alternative proposals
- Introductory Remarks: Rossana Rossanda (Il Manifesto), Susan George (Attac France and Transnational Institute)
- Proposals from activists and experts: Rosemary Bechler (Open Democracy), Pier Virgilio Dastoli (Federalists), Giulio Marcon (Sbilanciamoci!), Hilary Wainwright (Red Pepper, UK), Sarah King (ETUC), Franco Carminati (Joint Social Conference), Massimo Torelli (Rete@sinistra), Daniel Seco (15M movement, Barcelona), Lorenzo Marsili (European Alternatives), Tamsin Murray-Leach/Sean Deel (London School of Economics), Rafaella Bolini (Arci), Luciana Castellina (former MEP), Roberto Musacchio (former MEP), Walter Baier (*transform!europe*).

- Members of the European Parliament: Isabelle Durant (Greens/EFA), Paul Murphy (European United Left Ireland), Rui Tavares (Greens/EFA), Gaby Zimmer (President, European United Left, Germany), etc.
- Discussion

17.30-18.30

Conclusions and proposals for action
with summaries of proposals from the Chairs and discussion on the ways ahead and on future European initiatives

Appeal

“Stand with the Greek Left for a Democratic Europe!”

An initiative by Etienne Balibar, Vicky Skoumbri, and Michel Vakaloulis

Sign at:

<http://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/les-invites-de-mediapart/article/080612/avec-la-gauche-grecque-pour-une-europe-democrat>

(The text is also available in English, German, and Greek.)

“Peoples of Europe, Unite!”

7th Summer University of European Left and transform! europe

Portaria/Greece, 17-22 July 2012

This year's Summer University of the European Left Party and *transform! europe* will take place in Portaria, near the city of Volos, in the region of Thessaly in Greece, from 17 to 22 July. In the epicentre of the crisis, this Summer University will have the crisis as its transversal theme.

General information: www.european-left.org/ and www.transform-network.net

Programme: <http://elsummeruniversity2012.wordpress.com/program/>

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