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The radical left coalition is due to come out ahead in the general elections programmed for 20th September in Greece.

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Abstract :

"The mandate I was given on 25th January has reached its limits. I feel a moral need and that it is my political responsibility to submit my achievements, both the successes and failures, to your opinion," declared the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras (Radical Left Coalition, SYRIZA) on 20th August last as he spoke on television announcing his resignation after seven months in office.

He is asking the Greeks to vote in early elections and indicate whether the agreement achieved by the government in July with Greece's creditors *"will help overcome the present problems and lead to recovery,"* on the one hand and *"to appoint the person who will implement the reforms that the country requires,"* on the other. *"I will leave it to you to decide but my conscience is clear in terms of having withstood pressure and blackmail,"* said Alex Tsipras who admitted that the agreement was not the one that he wanted prior to being elected in January but that it was the best one possible however.

He also expressed his satisfaction at having achieved a reprieve of three years for his country. *"The difficult period that started five years ago is not yet over but we can fight end it and reduce the negative effects of the agreement. We shall do what is required to win back our sovereignty from our creditors,"* he said.

As a result of the Prime Minister's decision the Greeks are now being called to ballot on 20th September next to choose the 300 members of the Vouli, the only chamber in parliament. This vote will be the country's fifth in six years and the third in 2015.

ALEXIS TSIPRAS'S STRATEGY

On 13th August last the Greek parliament approved the country's 9th austerity plan 229 votes in support

64 against. Only 118 of the 162 MPs in the government majority, allying SYRIZA and the Independent Greek Party (ANEL) approved it. After the loss of his majority the Prime Minister decided to convene early elections. Alexis Tsipras knows that he absolutely needs a majority in order to gain approval of the measures included in budgetary adjustment programme before the end of the year, notably in terms of taxation, labour law, competition, social security and pensions. *"The Prime Minister is in an extreme hurry. He knows that time will play against him. He does not want to leave the rebels on the far left of his party time to organise themselves,"* explains Georges Prevelakis, a professor of geography at the University Paris I.

By convening early elections (although his resignation was not a surprise, it was not expected quite as quickly as this), Alexis Tsipras is also demonstrating that he is still in charge. His decision has certainly caused division within his political party but the division was ultimately unavoidable and is not due to affect SYRIZA that much. The Prime Minister knows that he will lose some voters, those lying most to the left, but he intends to make up for this loss by winning on his right.

He is also aware of the provisions of the Greek Constitution which states that if elections are organised less than 18 months after the previous ones the electorate votes according to closed lists comprising the parties and therefore they cannot choose between candidates. Hence

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Alexis Tsipras can put a list together that leans more to the centre than that put forward by SYRIZA in January and get rid of the most extreme elements in his party.

In line with the Constitution the President of the Republic, Prokopis Pavlopoulos launched the so-called exploratory mandate procedure which obliges him to ask the leaders of the three parties that have the most seats (apart from the head of government's party) to form a coalition government. Each of these has three days to do this.

This action that was impossible without the SYRIZA and ANEL failed and on 27th August the President of the Republic appointed the President of the Supreme Court, Vassiliki Thanou-Christophilou as interim Prime Minister. On 28th August the general election was set for 20th September.

REVIEW OF SYRIZA'S SEVEN MONTHS IN OFFICE

On 25th January last SYRIZA won the general elections with 36.34% of the vote. The next day Alexis Tsipras who had promised to bring austerity and the country's budgetary supervision to an end and to achieve a reduction of the debt (whilst remaining a euro zone member) became Prime Minister. Just over six months later he was forced to accept the demands made by the international creditors and to sign Greece's third rescue plan.

On 27th February Alexis Tsipras achieved an extension of the 2nd aid programme to the country until 30th June on condition that he put forward new reforms. Those that he presented at the end of March were deemed insufficient by the Finance Ministers of the euro zone (Eurogroup).

Three months later the European Commission submitted a list of reforms that the Greek government should adopt in order to achieve a new rescue plan (raising of the age of retirement to 67, increase in VAT, abolition of solidarity allowances for low pensions etc ...). Alexis Tsipras deemed the creditors' proposals unacceptable and announced on 27th June that he would submit them to referendum. On 5th July 61.3% of the Greeks answered "no" to the question *"Do you accept the agreement submitted by the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF during the Eurogroup on 25th June?"* Fewer than four voters in ten (38.60%) answered "yes". Turnout totalled 62.50%.

The Prime Minister therefore won the referendum. He called on the Greeks "to say a loud "no" to the creditors'

ultimatum and a clear "yes" to European solidarity," which, in his opinion, would help Athens to achieve a better agreement.

In spite of his electoral success on 13th July Alexis Tsipras signed an agreement with his European partners which replicated almost completely everything he had refused previously and to which the Greek people had voted "no" on 5th July. The Prime Minister maintains that he signed the document "to prevent a catastrophe" and indicated that it would help him renegotiate his country's debt as of the autumn. The signature of this agreement was in part Alex Tsipras's first failure since he believed that via the referendum he could assert his will in the ongoing negotiations, but the Europeans' resolve was further strengthened.

A month later on 13th August the Greek parliament approved the 9th austerity plan adopted by Athens to bring into effect the reforms demanded of the country by its creditors. With SYRIZA, now divided, the plan was adopted thanks to the votes of New Democracy, PASOK and To Potami.

The text dated 13th July provides Greece with a new rescue plan of 86€ billion over three years; it is the third of its kind following those of 2020 and 2012 that totalled 240 billion € in exchange for structural reforms and further, stricter austerity measures than those initially planned, such as an increase in VAT, a reduction in the minimum pension from 450 to 382€ (this will only be provided as of 67 years of age), the liberalisation of several markets and the creation of a privatisation fund as of March 2016 which will be controlled by the international creditors for the release of 50 billion €.

The privatisations have now started: 14 Greek airports including Thessaloniki, Corfu, Rhodes, Santorini and Kos have just been purchased by German companies. The freezing of the sale of these airports was one of the first things that Alex Tsipras did when he took office, having committed to relinquish no public good.

A first tranche of assistance to Greece totalling 26 billion € was released on 20th August the day the Prime Minister presented his resignation. This money should enable Athens to recapitalise its banks (10 billion €), and it helped the country reimburse the ECB – 3.4€ billion and the bridging loan granted by the creditors last

month (7.2 billion €). The rest of the sum will be used to reimburse 1.5 billion € to the IMF in September. The remaining 3 billion € will be paid to Athens at the end of November once the Europeans have undertaken an audit of the implementation of the reforms.

Many economic analysts question the effectiveness of the measures demanded of Greece. The rescue plan does not include any public debt relief, which now totals 177% of the GDP and the sustainability of which is still a key issue. "I am still resolutely convinced that the debt has become unsustainable," declared the IMF General Director Christine Lagarde on 14th August. The IMF indicated that it would confirm its participation in the rescue plan only if the Europeans put debt relief on the agenda.

Alexis Tsipras said he wanted the European Parliament "the only European institution that is mandated directly by the public" to be represented amongst the group of creditors. "I want the European Parliament to be directly involved as a fifth player in what we call "the creditors' quartet", notably in the process to assess the implementation of the agreement regarding the 3rd rescue plan granted to the country," he said as he addressed the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz (S&D) on 19th August.

WHO WILL GOVERN GREECE?

According to the polls SYRIZA will retain office after the election on 20th September. After 7 months as head of government Alexis Tsipras is still a popular figure: his rating amongst the public totals 61% according to a poll taken in July by Metron Analysis. According to a survey undertaken by the same establishment the same share (63%) believes that he was right to sign the agreement on 13th July.

Alexis Tsipras stills embodies the break with the old political class that has been totally rejected by the population. "For the time being the Greeks believe that Alexis Tsipras has done his utmost in the negotiations, that he was the victim of blackmail on the part of the Europeans. Moreover they do not want the old, corrupted political class, the present opposition does not represent an alternative path," indicates Giorgos Contogeorgis, a professor of political science. "He still enjoys the sentimental image of being a "good boy", who is doing

what he can in a difficult situation. And he especially has no credible challenger before him. The Greeks remain hostile to the traditional political class, Alexis Tsipras is still a new comer," maintains Georges Sefertzis, a political analyst.

It was however with the federation of the different trends within his party that he succeeded in winning the elections on 25th January last. Now his party is divided. On 21st August 25 SYRIZA members split from the party and founded "Popular Unity" (Laiki Enotita LE), the name of the party led by Salvador Allende, President of Chile between 1970 and 1973, and who was assassinated during a coup d'état. The new party, which comprises the 3rd parliamentary group, is led by former Minister for Restructuring, Production, Environment and Energy (January-July 2015), Panayotis Lafazanis. The latter is against the austerity policy and wants to honour SYRIZA's initial promises, i.e. the cancellation of the rescue plans, the cancellation of most of the debt, the nationalisation of the banks etc. Panayotis Lafazanis supports Greece's exit from the euro.

"SYRIZA is adopting an illogical doctrine which I have been against for the last five years: extending the crisis even further and pretending that it is solved whilst maintaining an unpayable debt. The dilemma is simple: either we put an end to the rescue plans or they will destroy the country. We shall follow through to the bitter end, even if this means leaving the euro zone," declared the former minister on 21st August. "We shall try and embody the spirit of the "no" in the referendum, organised by Alexis Tsipras's government on 5th July," he added. Panayotis Lafazanis accuses the Prime Minister of having capitulated in the face of the creditors, of having resigned himself, thereby "revealing his fear, inertia and his panic."

In all, 53 MPs, member of SYRIZA's central committee left the party, including MEPs Nikos Chountis and Tasos Koronakis. Moreover the deputy ministers for immigration policy, Tasia Christodouloupoulou, and her husband, the deputy minister for Maritime Affairs and the Aegean Sea, Thodoris Dritsas, said that they would not be standing with SYRIZA in the next general election.

Popular Unity will probably not have enough time to organise its campaign to be able to stand in the election on 20th September. "SYRIZA is due to win the election but Popular Unity might prevent it winning an absolute

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majority," indicated Giorgos Contogeorgis. "And if SYRIZA does not win an absolute majority everything will be more complicated. ANEL may not win more than 3% and as a result not take any seats. Then what kind of coalition will we have? PASOK and To Potami are far too liberal for SYRIZA," he added.

Former Finance Minister (January-July) Yanis Varoufakis and the leader of parliament Zoe Konstantopoulou, feature amongst Alexis Tsipras's opponents. The former, whom many criticise for his inertia over the six months he spent at the ministry, says that he entered politics to remain there. He announced that he would not be standing for election and that he wanted to create a new political movement "in order to re-establish democracy across Europe."

Zoé Konstantopoulou qualified the procedure that led to the new election as "undemocratic and anti-constitutional."

New Democracy and PASOK are in a poor position with relatively unknown leaders (Evangelos Meimarakis for ND and Fofi Gennimata for PASOK) and without any real alternative programme to put forward! Moreover these two parties, notably PASOK are still rejected by most of the Greeks.

"The early general elections serve no real purpose," declared Evangelos Meimarakis after the resignation of the Prime Minister, indicating that he wanted to "avoid all of the negative effects that this election might cause for a long time to come." Fofi Gennimata qualified the elections as "catastrophic for the country" and criticised "Alexis Tsipras's lack of responsibility."

If the Prime Minister wins on 20th September he might however find himself leading a country that is difficult to govern. Surprises cannot be ruled out. "Why three months after the referendum would voters, 61% of whom voted against austerity on 5th July, opt for a coalition formed solely to undertake an austerity policy?" wonders Dimitri Thanassekos, political analyst and economist.

Whatever happens declared Alexis Tsipras, "he will not govern with New Democracy, To Potami and PASOK." "We are not going to bring back the people the Greeks sent packing," he stressed.

THE GREEK POLITICAL SYSTEM

Parliament comprises a single chamber (Vouli Ton Ellinon) with 300 members elected for four years within 56 constituencies according to a "reinforced" proportional vote. The electorate votes for a list on which they can mark their preference. However since the early elections on 20th September are being organised less than 18 months after the last election voters will not be able to choose amongst candidates on the lists. 51 constituencies appoint 288 MPs; the 12 remaining seats, called national seats represent Greece as a whole – an honorary position – are appointed based on the results of each of the political parties on a national level. The party that comes out ahead achieves a bonus of 50 seats. Candidates must be aged 25 minimum. It is obligatory to vote in Greece until the age of 70. Abstention is officially punished by a prison sentence ranging from one month to a year coupled with dismissal from one's job but these sanctions are not implemented.

Seven political parties are represented in parliament at present:

- The Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA), far left party created in 2004 and an off-shoot of the former Synaspismos party and several radical left organisations of communists and ecologists. Led by Alexis Tsipras, it has 149 seats;
- New Democracy (ND) founded in 1974 by former President of the Republic (1980-1995) and former Prime Minister (1955-1963 and 1974-1980), Constantin Caramanlis. Led by Vangelis Meimarakis, with 76 seats;
- Golden Dawn (XA), a far right party created in 1980 led by Nikolaos Michaloliakos, with 17 seats;
- To Potami (The River), a centrist party led by Stavros Theodorakis, with 17 seats;
- The Communist Party (KKE), founded in 1918 and led by Dimitris Koutsoumbas, with 15 seats;
- The Party of Independent Greeks (ANEL), a populist right-wing party created on 12th February 2012 and led by Panos Kammenos. A member of the outgoing government with 13 seat;
- The PanHellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), a party created in 1974 by former Prime Minister (1981-1989 and 1993-1996) Andreas Papandreou, and led by Fofi Gennimata, with 13 seats.

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Reminder of the election results on 25th January 2015 in Greece

Turnout : 63,87%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats
Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA)	2 246 064	36.34	149
New Democracy (ND)	1 718 815	27,81	76
Golden Dawn (XA)	388 447	6,28	17
To Potami (The River)	373 868	6,05	17
Communist Party (KKE)	338 138	5,47	15
Independent Greek Party (ANEL)	293 371	4,75	13
Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)	289 482	4,68	13
Others	682 601	8,20	0

THE POLLS

According to a poll by Interview SYRIZA is due to win 28.70% of the vote, New Democracy 26.03%, Golden Dawn 7.20%, To Potami, 6.60%, the Communist Party and Popular Unity 5.40% each, PASOK 4.20%.

SYRIZA is credited with 25% of the voting intentions against 22% for the ND according to a study by the University of Macedonia published by the daily Kathimerini on 29th August. Alexis Tsipras is still the most popular politician in Greece (29.5%) in comparison with New Democracy leader, Vanguélis Méimarakis (26%).

According to a poll by Metron Analysis published on 29th August by the newspaper Parapolitika, there is only a one point difference between the two rivals, 22.2% for SYRIZA and 21.2% for ND. Golden Dawn is due to come third with 6.5%. But this position might go to the Communist Party KKE (6%) or To Potami (6%). PASOK is only due to win 4.1%-4.5%. The Independent Greeks (ANEL), a party that joined forces with Syriza to enable the latter to form a government in January, might not achieve the obligatory 3% mark to be eligible to enter Parliament. However the SYRIZA rebels in the Popular Unity party are credited with between 3.1% and 5%. There is still a total 20% who are undecided.

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