

2007 GREEK ELECTIONS:
SIGNS OF MAJOR POLITICAL
REALIGNMENT, CHALLENGES AND
HOPES FOR THE LEFT

Michalis Spourdalakis

In the 1990s, 13 out of the then 15 EU states were run by social democratic governments. Anthony Giddens' "third way" pompously influenced, if not hegemonized, the orientation and practices of both the Left and the Centre-Left political forces. Leaders the likes of L. Zospen, G. Schroeder, Tony Blair, and Bill Clinton were mobilized to draft plans for "progressive governance." Today, most EU countries are dominated by aggressive Right-wing governments, a trend continued with the mayoral elections of the former fascist Gianni Alemanno in Rome and the eccentric conservative Boris Johnson in London. Without great risk, one could argue that the practices of the reformist, governmental Left in office have contributed decisively to the triumphant comeback of Right-wing political forces in Europe. Although this trend presents a rather bleak future for the Left, it would be a mistake to think that it is a fixed situation without contradictions, antinomies, and many possibilities for the revamping of the Left.

The 2007 elections in Greece were no exception to the gloomy pattern of Right-wing dominance in Europe. New Democracy (ND) managed its second consecutive victory (41.3% and 152 seats in a 300-seat parliament) while the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), despite its revitalizing initiatives, performed even worse (38.1% and 102 seats). Moreover, the radical Right populist party of the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) managed a noteworthy 3.8% and achieved parliamentary representation. But the antinomies and possibilities in the present were also evident. The Left, both in its traditional orthodox version, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE),

and in its new radical version, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), made noteworthy electoral advances, gaining 8.1 and 5% of the vote, respectively.

This article traces these developments in Greece. It shows how PASOK sank into the murky waters of elitist and corrupt policies and practices during its long-lasting presence in government under the hegemonic banner of “modernization,” turned its back on its social base, and opened the way to the Right. This defined the internal dynamics of the Greek Socialists, who have great difficulty reconstructing a convincing new program for governing. In addition, this has led to a shift in the major cleavage in Greek politics from the traditional Centre-Right and Centre-Left division to a polarization between the Right and the Left. In this rapidly emerging new environment, the Left, and primarily SYRIZA, is making its mark and raising the possibility of changing the political alignments of the country.

The Fall of the Modernizing PASOK PASOK was established in the aftermath of the dictatorship (1974) of Andreas Papandreou, and until it gained office in 1981, its political discourse and practices reflected a radical movement with strong anti-imperialist (anti-US, anti-NATO, anti-EU) sentiments and vague socialist perceptions reminiscent of the Third-World radicals of the time. Its political coordinates were radical for Greek society and thus its “short march to power” had no historical precedent. PASOK dominated the country’s politics for some 23 years (with a less than three-year interruption) until 2004, when it lost the elections ND.

Despite its much criticized populist controversies, the radical years of the socialist party under the strong leadership of A. Papandreou¹ contributed significantly to the democratization of the Greek society and polity. Greece had just come out of a seven-year dictatorship that was, in fact, the culmination of a long-lasting post-civil-war regime of ailing democracy, and PASOK’s policies and organizational/mobilizing practices were crucial to consolidating much needed democratization. It not only opened up the country’s social and political representation system but also introduced a number of serious social, political, and administrative reforms. PASOK’s socialism was a mixture of populist radicalism and Keynesian reformism

and thus was far from class-based politics, without excluding those who subscribed to it. The primary difference between PASOK and mainstream social democracy was that its flamboyant leader, in response to the radicalized postdictatorship environment, always gave the impression that it was far to the Left of its European counterparts. Contrary to the expectations of observers of all stripes, its defeat in 1990, as a result of an unprecedented economic and political scandal, did not result in the dispersal of its social base. The reforms that the party made when in power, in combination with its innovative (by Greek standards) mobilizing practices, had deepened its societal roots. By 1993, it had managed a triumphant comeback to power.

By this time, PASOK had shed most of its once radical profile. Under the leadership of its founder, A. Papandreou, and continuing under Kostas Simitis (a genuinely aggressive modernizer) after Papandreou’s death in 1996, PASOK became a “realistic” governmental party, whose main goal was the efficient management of state affairs. Under the banner of modernization, which soon became hegemonic, PASOK managed to mobilize a social coalition including working people (skilled workers, professionals, and the self-employed in the most dynamic sectors of the economy) and the business world, who were looking for a more consistent governmental orientation removed from the populist extremities of its past. Modernization as a hegemonic project in the Greek context meant more or less adopting standard neoliberal reforms (i.e., deregulation, privatization, flexible labour markets, and so on) that were legitimized as part of the Simitis vision of a strong Greece, capable of competing globally. Key to implementing this modernizing project were the country’s needs to respond to the requirements of the Maastricht Agreement and to fully comply with the processes of European integration. In fact, for the Simitis governments, these EU-related dynamics were the basis on which the government functioned and through which it promoted, and legitimized, its policies.

The new modernizing project of PASOK was based on the general antipopulist sentiments that the media, intellectuals, and political elites had managed to construct as the dominant, hegemonic discourse of Greek society. This discourse was presented as the sole solution to the country’s problems, which were portrayed as a conflict between the old and the new,

and even between the modernizing and “underdog” cultures. The dominance of such a discourse had two primary effects: it created the best possible conditions for the implementation of PASOK’s modernizing program, and it moved PASOK away from its traditional popular social base. Indeed, the PASOK government under the leadership of Simitis, who became the longest serving Prime Minister in the country’s history (1996–2004), was quite successful in introducing modernizing reforms and in meeting the requirements for the country to enter the core of the EU economic integration process. This “success” was based on the mobilization of a network of primarily state-based technocrats and on the demobilization of its own party in the context of the overall conducive conditions created by the impending 2004 Olympic Games. In turn, however, this success made PASOK a state or a cartel-like political party, which had forgotten that behind the old populist practices it fought against lay the genuine demands of the popular classes it represented.²

By the end of Simitis’ second term in power, the new PASOK was faced with the contradictions of its policies and overall practices. Working class and lower income people were in worse shape than ever. The minimum wage as a percentage of the average wage had dropped dramatically (from 54 percent in 1994 to 45 percent in 2004), and the percentage of the population living below the poverty line had risen to an unprecedented 22 percent while in the 14 countries of the Euro Monetary Zone the same figure was 15 to 17 percent.³ In addition, bureaucratization, frequent instances of corruption, cavalier attitudes towards popular demands, and the like contributed to widespread political fatigue and stimulated popular discontent. Almost two years before the 2004 spring elections, it had become clear that the new PASOK’s days in government were numbered. Public opinion polls and even discrete statements of key figures from the economic elite indicated that the political climate of the country had changed.⁴

When Simitis stepped down from the party’s leadership in favour of George Papandreou — the son of PASOK’s founder and then minister of foreign affairs — some had the impression that the Greek socialists might recover, pointing to the participation of over one million party members as well as nonmembers in the mass American-style plebiscite the new leader

held to verify his leadership. This did create enthusiasm among the party’s rank and file, but soon evaporated. Furthermore, the inclusion on the party’s ticket of two well-known and aggressive neoliberal politicians who had served as cabinet ministers in ND governments, in combination with its unclear and often confusing political proposals and initiatives, killed the efforts aimed at the party’s political recovery. Thus, it was no surprise that PASOK fell behind ND by almost five percent in the 2004 spring elections (see Table 1).

Table 1. Greek Parliamentary Elections: 1993–2007

	10/10/1993		22/09/1996		09/04/2000		07/03/2004		16/09/2007	
<i>Party</i>	%	Seats								
ND	39.3	111	38.1	108	42.7	125	45.4	165	41.83	152
PASOK	46.8	170	41.5	162	43.8	158	40.5	117	38.10	102
POLAN	4.8	10	2.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
KKE	4.5	9	5.6	11	5.5	11	5.9	12	8.15	22
SYN	2.9	—	5.1	10	3.2	6	3.3	6	5.04	14
LAOS									3.80	10
Others	1.4	—	6.6	9	4.8	—	4.9	—	3.08	—
Total	100	300	100	300	100	300	100	300	100	300

Source: Greek Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization

The Remarkable Right-Wing Comeback The 2004 electoral victory of New Democracy signified an alteration of the main basis of contention of Greek politics. ND’s comeback under the leadership of Kostas Karamanlis was achieved not so much through its alterative program, but by questioning PASOK’s governmental practices and putting together a mainly moralist discourse. Quite skilfully, ND took advantage of the side effects of the technocratic, modernizing rule of PASOK (i.e., corruption, arrogance, etc.) to ally itself with the spreading popular antipolitical sentiments against both politics and politicians. With the party’s new slogan calling on its members and supporters to behave with “modesty and humility,” ND presented the image of a middle-of-the-road and centrist party, from which the average

Greek had nothing to fear, in terms of vengeful partisan practices in the public sector, when it achieved power.

The fact that ND's comeback tactics appeared to be, and were to a great extent, apolitical should not be taken to mean that the new government had no political program. In fact, ND had a detailed program of financial, administrative, and constitutional reforms, although during the campaign it confined itself to four general themes as much as possible. The actual implementation of the program started after the party had been in government for six months, that is, after the end of the 2004 Olympics. The main goals of the government's first term in office were to: put the public finances back into "order" by restoring "transparency and sincerity" through privatizations⁵ and eliminating the "nests of corruption"; aggressively improve the effectiveness of the public sector through a strategy of the "refounding of the state"⁶ that included streamlining the administration; introduce a new system of decisionmaking based on extensive networks of consensus-building institutions of social dialogue and deliberation; and initiate constitutional reform, which would entrench and secure the spirit of liberalization and privatization in the country's highest law. At the top of the government's list was amending Article 16, which prohibits the establishment of universities by the private sector, and Article 24, which protects the environment from aggressive land developers.

On the economic front, the Karamanlis government's policies revolved around reducing both the corporate tax rate (from 35 to 25 percent) and the tax rate for small business (from 25 to 20 percent), as well as privatizing state-controlled companies in the financial sector (e.g., the Commercial Bank of Greece, the Hellenic Postal Bank, the Athens Stock Exchange) and elsewhere (e.g., the Greek Petroleum Company). Over a three-year period, this raised almost 4.6 billion Euros, which went towards the financing of the public debt. In addition, following the example of Portugal, the new government requested an audit of the country's finances by the EU, which proved that the government's deficits were even worse (six percent of the GNP) than PASOK had let on. This led the country's public finances into the so-called regime of oversight which, along with the EU Commissioner's

report and the severe criticism from the head of European Central Bank E. Steuber and other EU officials, were used as an "objective" base for severe cuts to public spending.

In the field of public administration reforms, the government's policies were in a different if not contrary direction from its programmatic rhetoric. The new Municipal and Communal Code reduced the minimum votes required for election to local government (from 50 to 42 percent), which directly assisted the government party in electing and controlling local authorities. Restructuring the cabinet did not reduce the number of departments, but strengthened the Prime Minister's Office, which proved not only inefficient in everyday politics but in practice challenged the promise of "transparency and sincerity." Finally, ND gradually but steadily undermined the laws and institutions introduced by the modernizing PASOK, which had aimed to control clientalism in the civil service and monitor the overall functioning of the public sector. The highly partisan interventions of the ND government in the civil service strayed so far from its promises of meritocracy that accusations of a colonization of the state were well founded. Not surprisingly, the phenomena of corruption became more frequent, including a major financial scandal around the state-run pension funds, and the bodies of social dialogue proved to be an excuse and a legitimizing tool for policies that had been decided ahead of time, as evidenced by the complete failure of social dialogue during the attempted reform in the university system.

Meanwhile, the working population saw its income being eaten away by increased charges for public services, which were a side effect of the privatizations, while wage increases for public employees were systematically lower than the inflation rate. The farmers soon felt that the government had broken its promises for better product prices and reacted with extensive mobilizations. The proposed constitutional amendments also provoked widespread popular mobilizations led by the Left (and SYN in particular, discussed below). This led PASOK, whose leadership had initially supported the amendments, to change its position, thereby denying the government the parliamentary majority needed to pass them.

The Opposition and the Rise of the Left By mid-2007, these controversial governmental practices had changed the political atmosphere in the country and the much heralded moral superiority of ND had collapsed. However, PASOK was in no position to capitalize on the situation for reasons that go well beyond the weaknesses of George Papandreou's political personality, including his "foreign" style, which never quite rang true within Greek political culture. At one level, the Karamanlis government's political orientation and program were more or less within the main philosophical and political framework of PASOK's modernizing project. This should not be taken to mean that ND and PASOK had the same policies, but rather that their differences tend to be technical and thus politically difficult to manipulate. At another level, the party's functionaries had become more skilful in running the various government departments than in mobilizing the support needed to recapture power. Indeed, the party's long involvement in running state affairs and its statist orientation had created a gulf between itself and its founding and thus vital base among the lower social strata.⁷ This gulf could not be breached overnight, especially considering that the modernization necessary for the country's entrance into the European Monetary Union (EMU) had worsened the economic and social conditions of these strata.⁸

Consequently, the minor opposition parties were left with more space to mobilize against the government. In the 2004 elections, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the SYRIZA commanded 5.9% and 12 seats and 3.3% and six seats, respectively. Along with the radical Right populist party LAOS, which had failed by a small margin to enter parliament, these parties undertook the main task of opposing the Karamanlis government.

LAOS challenged the government from the Right and even capitalized upon it. Founded in 1999 by a former ND member of parliament, LAOS is a party with close affinities to the populist national parties established in Europe in the late 1990s. Although LAOS won no representation in the 2004 parliament, the election to the European Parliament of its cunning leader G. Karatzaferis and its effective use of the media (the party has a TV channel and weekly newspaper) have strengthened its political capacity. Without ever becoming an antisystemic party, although at times it has

allowed extreme elements in its ranks, LAOS appeals to the nationalist elements of both major parties (primarily ND) and to the lower and marginalized social strata in such a way that its discourse is often confused with that of the KKE. In this sense, its success in the 2007 elections did not come as a surprise.⁹

The KKE, with social support among the urban workers and the poor, articulates a discourse aimed at the consolidation of this base. A typical party of the Third International tradition, the KKE is heir to the glorious party that led the resistance during the Axis occupation of the country in the 1940s and was defeated during the civil war that followed. Subsequently outlawed, the party functioned through political front organizations and underwent a major crisis during the junta years, when it split into the KKE and the KKE Interior. Though initially a minority, the former dominated communist politics despite its continuing adherence to the orthodoxies of the Third International, while the latter developed as a small Euro-communist party that dared to adopt a number of new radical ideas that enriched the Left-wing perspective.

In 1988 these two parties, along with a number of independent socialists, formed SYN (at the time the Alliance of the Left and Progress). However, according to the majority of the KKE the symbiosis of the two communist cultures within SYN did not benefit the party, and thus it withdrew in 1991. In effect, this led to another split within the KKE as hundreds of party functionaries and thousands of members left the KKE and remained in SYN. The KKE maintains a strong stand against the country's membership in the EU and confronts all other parties as if they were identical, reflected in its slogan of "five parties but just two policies," with its own consisting of improbable proposals left to the distant future, to socialism. This strategy rules out any possibility of political alliances, even in the trade-union movement where the party has a segregationist stance. It is, moreover, expressed in a crude, anthropomorphic, and simplistic antiimperialist discourse that often gets sidetracked into populist xenophobia and nationalism. The social issues arising from the so-called illegal immigration, in combination with the country's numerous issues in the Balkans (such as the Macedonian question) and with Turkey, create an environment conducive to such a discourse.

SYRIZA is an alliance of parties, movements, organizations, and networks of the old and new Left. It was created in December 2003 on the initiative of SYN as a unifying alliance of the entire Left. For years, SYN was squeezed between the modernizing PASOK and the KKE, and it has often suffered from the departure of many of its members and functionaries, most of whom joined the ranks of PASOK. Especially after 1991 when the KKE withdrew its support, SYRIZA has struggled to break the three percent threshold and enter the Greek parliament. This began to change shortly after the elections in 2004 when Alekos Alavanos, a former member of the KKE and a member of the European Parliament for 20 years, took over the leadership of SYN. In order to strengthen the radical image of the party, Alavanos crafted a strategy that gave priority to the establishment of SYRIZA. In addition, through his tactics and discourse he promoted a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening SYN's ties with working people and various other social and political movements (such as the Greek Social Forum), particularly the university students movement that had just started to mobilize. The whole strategy was based on an "empowering of the powerless" and giving chances to the party's young members, which was unusual for the Left. The controversial choice of Alexis Tsipras, then a 32-year-old engineer, to stand as the party's candidate for mayor of Athens in the fall 2006 municipal elections exemplifies SYN's new spirit. The success of this initiative (Tsipras won an unprecedented 10.5% of the vote) strengthened and stabilized the party's new strategy.

Its real political impact, however, was demonstrated during the 2006–07 mobilization of students against the constitutional amendment allowing the establishment of universities by the private sector. SYN was pivotal in galvanizing public opinion to such an extent that PASOK was forced to withdraw its support for the proposal. More importantly, SYN's strategy on this and other issues seems to be breaking away from an instrumentalist perception of political power. Such a perception sees politics and state structures as a mere outcome of the dynamics of the functionaries who are involved in, or happen to operate them. It is a perception that often guides the strategy and tactics of the Left and measures political effectiveness in terms of its quantitative presence in public office. At the same time, this

instrumentalism is characterized by a preoccupation with presence in public office, which in effect leads to a separation of extra parliamentary mobilization from the Left's electoral strategy. By mid-2007, it was becoming clear that SYN, along with its front SYRIZA, was much more confident about its prospects in the next elections.

The Fiery Road to the 2007 Elections At the time, these elections were widely predicted to be held early, since PASOK was seen to be weak and handicapped by poor leadership while the ND was holding steady in the polls despite mounting opposition from some sectors of society. Then, two major developments appeared to call this electoral calculus into question. The first was the revelation of possibly the worst financial scandal in modern Greek history, in which security bonds of various pension plans controlled by the government were sold at very low prices. The second was the outbreak of extensive forest fires in the Western Peloponnese and the island of Evia, where 70 people lost their lives. The parliament set up an independent investigating committee led by a judge who was allegedly an ND supporter. The committee's various official and unofficial announcements strongly implied that the coordinated move with regards to the security bonds had worsened the financial condition of the ailing pension plans, and also that top government people were involved in bribery. In the case of the fires, the situation was a lot clearer — the calamity the flames left behind (with the destruction of more than 25 percent of the country's olive oil producing trees, hundreds of houses, and thousands of livestock) was seen by many as the result of the government's incompetence in coordinating rescue teams and the fire department.

Despite the obviously hostile atmosphere created by these developments, the government went ahead and elections were called for 16 September 2007. This was the shortest electoral campaign since 1974, allowing less than a month for parties to prepare and mobilize. ND ran a very skilful campaign that played upon the weaknesses of the opposition (primarily PASOK) and involved the blatant use of state funds to curry support (i.e., cash payments to anyone who claimed some loss from the fires). It was an electoral campaign that displayed the powerful and hegemonic position of

ND on the Greek political scene. Arrogantly, the party did not even feel it necessary to provide the electorate with a program; it was content to base its campaign on the claim that it was the only party trustworthy and capable enough to run the country's government. Arguments such as these were strengthened by the positive effects of ND's recent 7th Congress (July) and were sustained by a magnificent communicative strategy.

Post-Electoral Blues and the Hopes for Radical Political Realignment

Under these circumstances, the overall electoral result was not really a surprise (see Table 1). As already noted, the result was in tune with the all-powerful Right-wing dominance in other European countries. This is so despite the obvious advances made by the parties of the traditional Left: the KKE gained 2.25 % and SYN 1.74%, which some reliable studies suggest would have been greater¹⁰ if the campaign had been longer.

The electoral results had divergent effects on the country's political forces. ND's two-seat parliamentary majority did not provide its leadership with any security. Nonetheless, this did not stop the government from pursuing its aggressive reform program. Several new pieces of legislation concerning the functioning of the universities were passed, and the privatization programs were expanded to include the selling of the profitable and growing national telecommunications company. Extensive reforms were implemented in the pension schemes in the private sector, reducing the already very low pensions and making access to full pensions even more difficult, especially for women. Although these policies were often met with severe mass popular reactions, even from ND trade unionists, the government appears to be fearless, powerful, and efficient in the pursuit of its goals.

The reactions within PASOK were more dramatic. For the two months that followed the elections, the Greek Socialists became involved in a bitter leadership battle. Evangelos Venizelos, a law professor from Salonica, a cunning and shrewd politician with experience in cabinet, aggressively challenged Papandreou's leadership. The party became completely preoccupied with the issue and all its energy went towards the battle for the leadership. In the end, George Papandreou was reelected, but the party remained divided and still without enough steam to lead an effective opposition. In addition,

PASOK had to contend with the increasingly convincing argument that the socialists had initiated most of these antipopular policies. At the same time, the bitter internal leadership campaign alienated more of the party's social base, as it was revealed that PASOK's sole concern was to govern again and not to express the demands of the popular strata. PASOK's sagging fortunes have even become the subject of some concern among political, social, and media elites within and outside PASOK, sensing the danger to the political system from a drastic shrinkage of PASOK's political appeal and hence its systemic integrating capacities. In this context, there have been many efforts to bridge the gulf within the party and become more unified and politically articulate. The party's eighth Congress in March 2008 appeared to be one initiative in that direction, but its positive results were short lived.

By the end of 2007, it became more than apparent that support for what the Greeks call bipartism (the two-party system) was displaying signs of fatigue and even decay. Time and time again, opinion polls have shown a drastic fall in the total percentage of the popular vote's preference for the two major parties. While the combined vote of ND and PASOK in the last election was almost 80 percent of the electorate, no serious opinion poll since then has shown a combined percentage much above 60 percent. As ND, and primarily PASOK, stagger between incompetence, misuse of political power, and corruption, a new radical realignment of political forces appears to be a realistic possibility.

Under these conditions, SYN/SYRIZA is well placed to make serious gains. Since SYN's fifth Congress, all estimates concur that SYRIZA will triple its political influence. Most of these gains come from PASOK, to some extent from the KKE (almost all this party's losses), and from ND (a good 12 percent of its losses). This surprising development is not simply the result of the continued and deep-seated popular disenchantment with PASOK's governmentalist and often technocratic opposition, nor is it the outcome of the KKE's sterile and sectarian dogmatism. It is primarily, as suggested above, an expression of the worsening social conditions and the consequent tendencies towards a new political realignment. To this end, the SYRIZA /SYN strategy has so far proven pivotal. SYRIZA/ SYN is the

only political force in the country that raises challenging questions inside parliament and mobilizes outside parliament for the defence of social rights against the colonization of the public sphere by business, and that defends the unemployed, the underemployed, the victims of the spreading policies of “flexicurity,” the young working people (the so-called generation of the 700 euros), the environment, and so on. At the same time, it takes initiatives against the threat of growing nationalism over the issue of Macedonia (for example, its leader is the only Greek politician who has made an official visit to this neighbouring country and a delegation of its youth demonstrated in Skopje, the capital city).

This party’s political strategy is clear: to contribute to building a new Left-wing pole of the party system and a political system capable of defining the main political cleavage as one between the Right and the Left rather than between the Centre-Right and the Centre-Left. To this end, electoral bases of both PASOK and the KKE are seen to be of great potential, while the organizational expansion and the strengthening of both SYRIZA and SYN are seen as a key political requirement. This strategy has led to two different responses. On one hand, PASOK in frequent but inconsistent efforts, has tried to propose an antigovernment coalition. On the other hand, the KKE has resorted to systematic and acute polemics against SYRIZA/SYN, which it labels an “opportunistic and reheated social democratic political force.” So far, SYRIZA/SYN’s consistent response to PASOK is that its proposals represent a top-down perception of politics and reveal a severe governmentism on the part of the Greek Socialists. Its response to KKE attacks is characterized by an unprecedented forbearance. This clearly emerges from the expectation that, given the affinity of the two parties, SYRIZA/SYN could easily penetrate KKE’s base and undermine the KKE leadership’s resistance to unity. Of course this prospect is an open-ended one. It will depend on other parties’ ability to adapt to the changing social and political conditions and the overall climate in the region. But it will depend primarily upon SYRIZA/SYN’s capacity to continue to mobilize and provide innovative solutions to the growing crisis of representation. The latter will also depend on the organizational capacity of SYRIZA/SYN to deal with the internal tensions among the various partners. As one might

expect, there are serious challenges that SYRIZA faces every day. Most of these are all too characteristic of Left politics: friction between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activity; the question of tactics and sectarianism, a frequent trait of many partners in the Coalition; and, finally, the stand vis-à-vis foreign policy and national issues, which could be divisive. So far SYRIZA has dealt with these issues remarkably well and in a mature fashion. This should be attributed to the fact that it has adopted a democratic form of decisionmaking based on unanimity, which allows some autonomy to the parties involved while at the same time the whole organization can rely on the organizational capacities of SYN (by far the most powerful and which has a nation-wide political structure). On broader political and ideological issues, SYRIZA may be facing greater challenges. Although it is a political coalition committed to the “socialist transformation of the society,” its proposals on various issues, despite its efforts to be unconventional, remain within the confinements of Left-Keynesianism and radical reformism.

In any case, the political events of the last year and a half in Greece seem to have set the stage for a major new political alignment in which the Right will have an even stronger role, but the presence of the Left will not be marginal. In fact, as things appear right now and as many studies indicate, the political alignment in the country is being transformed from a bipolar scheme with PASOK and ND to a tripolar one in which SYRIZA/SYN is the new dynamic partner. One should remember, however, that all of this remains to be tested in real politics and actual elections, and a crash test is looming in the form of next year’s European elections.

Notes

1. See, for example, *West European Politics* 28/2 (2005), pp. 223–491 (special issue: K. Featherstone, (ed.), “The Challenge of Modernization: Politics and Policy in Greece”); M. Spourdalakis, (ed.), *PASOK Party-State-Society* (Athens: Patakis, 1998).
2. E. Tsakalotos, “Modernization and Centre-Left Dilemmas in Greece: The Revenge of the Underdogs” (mimeographed), pp. 1–30; M. Spourdalakis, “Greek Democracy in the Post-Euro Era,” *Relay* 15 (Jan-Feb 2007), pp. 42–45.
3. Greece, Institute of Labour/GSSE-ADEDY, *Report on the Greek Economy, 2006* (Athens).
4. G. Mavris and G. Symeonides, “The 2004 Elections: Predicting the Electoral Result and the Influences of the Pre-electoral Period,” in Institute VPRC, *Public Opinion in Greece 2004* (Athens: Savalas, 2005), pp. 17–57.

5. On the politics of privatization in Greece see G. Pagoulatos, "The Reform Agenda: State-Economy Relations," in Featherstone, *The Challenge of Modernization*, pp. 358–380.
6. A. Macridimitris, *State and the Civil Society* (Athens: Metamesonikties ekdoseis, 2002).
7. Tsakalotos, "Modernization and Centre-Left Dilemmas."
8. "We get paid in drachmas while we have consume in euros" has been a popular saying among the middle and lower social strata in the country. Although Greece's per capita income is 90 percent of the average of EMU countries, the country has very high unemployment (8.6 percent) and poverty (22 percent) rates. Institute of Greek Confederation of Labour, *Greek Economy and Employment* (Athens: 2007).
9. C. Vernadakis, "Social Alliances and Electoral Formations: The 2007 Electoral Results and the Long-term Effects Upon the Party System," in Institute VPRC, *Public Opinion in Greece 2007: Parliamentary Elections, Party System, Political Culture, Left-Right Today* (Athens: Savalas, 2008), pp. 15–40.
10. For analyses of recent elections, see articles in Institute VPRC, *Public Opinion in Greece 2007*.

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cseoffice@pop.gn.apc.org
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Tel & Fax: 020 7607 9615