

As European Left Cheers, Syriza Vows to Move Swiftly To End Greek ‘Nightmare’

Ruling coalition is announced as Alexis Tsipras prepares to be sworn in as new Prime Minister

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Supporters of Alexis Tsipras leader of the radical left main opposition party Syriza celebrate after the initial election results for Greece general elections in Athens, Greece, 25 January 2015. (Photo: Elecciones, Grecia, Atenas)

Europe’s leftist parties and their supporters are cheering Monday.

Just hours after [claiming victory in national elections](#), Alexis Tsipras, head of the leftist Syriza party and the new Prime Minister-elect of Greece, has agreed to form a coalition government and repeated his vows to push swiftly ahead with the promised economic reforms that fueled his party’s historic win.

Tsipras is expected to be formally sworn-in as Prime Minister later on Monday.

Failing to win an outright majority in Parliament, winning 149 seats of the 151 needed, Tsipras early Monday held a meeting with Panos Kammenos, leader of the Greek Independent party. Following their discussion, Kammenos emerged and confirmed the coalition. According to media [reports](#), Kammenos said, “The Independent Greeks give our vote of confidence to the prime minister, Alexis Tsipras.”

“I want to say, simply, that from this moment, there is a government,” Kammenos added. “The prime minister will go to the president and ... the cabinet makeup will be announced by the prime minister. The aim for all Greeks is to embark on a new day, with full sovereignty.”

Known as a center-right party that espouses a virulent populism and a shared disgust towards the austerity imposed from without, the Greek Independents took approximately 4.7 percent of the national vote and their seats will allow Syriza to rule without bowing to other rival parties. As the *Washington Post* notes, the two parties “have virtually nothing in common beyond their shared antipathy for the stringent terms of the country’s \$284 billion bailouts.”

Though the reactions from across Europe were [predictably mixed](#), progressives from all quarters were found celebrating Syriza’s impressive showing at the polls.

“The result of the Greek election is a resounding rejection of the austerity policies that have had devastating economic and social consequences,” said Costas Panayotakis, professor of

sociology at the New York City College of Technology of the City University of New York. “Having received over 35 percent of the vote, Syriza, Greece’s leading party of the anti-austerity left, is poised to form a government in coalition with a smaller party of the anti-austerity right and to challenge the austerity policies imposed throughout the eurozone. In so doing, the Greek election could prove an important turning point, further fueling the rise of anti-austerity forces of the left in Spain, Ireland and beyond.”

Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman called the election results a “political earthquake” for Europe as he expressed hope it would help end the “nightmare” of austerity for the Greek people. He also urged Syriza to ignore those calling for the party to scale back its plan to re-negotiate the terms of its economic relationship with the so-called Troika—the IMF, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank.

[According](#) to Krugman:

So now that Mr. Tsipras has won, and won big, European officials would be well advised to skip the lectures calling on him to act responsibly and to go along with their program. The fact is they have no credibility; the program they imposed on Greece never made sense. It had no chance of working.

If anything, the problem with Syriza’s plans may be that they’re not radical enough. Debt relief and an easing of austerity would reduce the economic pain, but it’s doubtful whether they are sufficient to produce a strong recovery. On the other hand, it’s not clear what more any Greek government can do unless it’s prepared to abandon the euro, and the Greek public isn’t ready for that.

Still, in calling for a major change, Mr. Tsipras is being far more realistic than officials who want the beatings to continue until morale improves. The rest of Europe should give him a chance to end his country’s nightmare.

Reuters [reports](#):

Tsipras said he would cooperate with fellow euro zone leaders for “a fair and mutually beneficial solution” but said the Greek people came first. “Our priority from the very first day will be to deal with the big wounds left by the crisis,” he said. “Our foremost priority is that our country and our people regain their lost dignity.”

He has promised to keep Greece in the euro and has toned down some of his rhetoric but his arrival in power would mark the biggest challenge yet to the approach adopted to the crisis by euro zone governments.

Syriza’s victory is likely to encourage other anti-austerity parties which are winning support across Europe, such as the Podemos movement in Spain.

The idea that Syriza’s victory in Greece would create opportunity for other leftist parties on the continent was widely shared.

“The Greek people have clearly rejected the EU’s neoliberal economic experiments,” [said](#) Pernille Skipper, a policymaker and spokesperson for Green-Red Alliance in Denmark. “The Greeks have said no, that ordinary people should not have to foot the bill for the financial crisis. It should inspire people in other European countries.”

In Spain, Pablo Iglesias, a vocal ally of Tsipras and head of the nascent leftist Podemos Party, [said](#) the victory for Syriza in Greece portends more victories for those calling for a social and economic re-ordering. “Hope is coming, fear is fleeing,” he said of the shift in Greece. “We are hoping we will hear the same thing in Spain soon.”

And in France, Jean-Luc Melenchon, perhaps the nation’s most prominent far-left politician [described](#) his response to Syriza’s win as “pure happiness.”

“This is a new page for Europe. Maybe we can take the opportunity to rebuild Europe, which has become the federal Europe of the liberals,” Mélenchon told BFM TV. “The Greeks are trying to break out of this straight jacket and thanks to them, maybe we will be able to lay out all the figures on the table, that has made life hellish in Europe.”

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