

Dominoes of Democracy? Europe's Left Finds Hope in Anti-Austerity Vote

Irish observer says vote is 'potentially the most important political event since the collapse of the Berlin Wall'

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Thousands celebrated in Athens on Sunday night. (Photo: Getty)

While many in the mainstream media focus on the nitty-gritty economic implications of Sunday's landslide [anti-austerity vote](#) in Greece, leaders of Europe's left are hopeful that the outcome, a repudiation of harsh Troika-imposed policies, will start a long-awaited domino effect of democracy across the continent.

"Our deeply unequal global economy relies on ordinary people having no real voice over economic decisions, so this 'no' vote strengthens the battle for a fairer, more humane, people-centred Europe," Global Justice Now director Nick Dearden said on Sunday.

In a column for Ireland's *Journal Media*, anti-austerity activist Paul Murphy [described Sunday's vote](#) as "potentially the most important political event since the collapse of the Berlin Wall."

Noting that the win relied on an "overwhelming mobilization" of both the working class and young people, Murphy—who works with the Irish Anti-Austerity Alliance but was in Athens for the vote—said that "[d]epending on what happens next, it can represent a turning point towards a challenge to the rule of the 1% in Europe and the dominance of Thatcherite neo-liberalism."

Germany's democratic socialist Die Linke Party (Left Party) echoed that sentiment, with party chair Bernd Riexinger [declaring](#): "Democracy achieved a victory in Europe today. The Greek people fought back for a second time against the catastrophic policies of social cutbacks and economic devastation. They said 'No' to further austerity, 'No' to a false medicine that always worsens the illness."

Stating that Die Linke stands in solidarity with Greece's Syriza party, Riexinger continued: "The Greeks' vote of 'No' is evidence of a vibrant democracy that has ended the continued administering of a false medicine. The way for new methods of negotiation is now free."

For *HuffPo Italy*, journalist Angela Mauro [described](#) how leaders of "the sundry left of the Old Continent" gathered in Athens to watch the referendum results roll in:

Martina Anderson is a distinguished Irishwoman: tall, blond and a member of

the European Parliament who represents the Sinn Fein party. She is at Syriza's offices in Athens with the other representatives of the left from various European countries, including Podemos from Spain; Nichi Vendola and his followers from the Italian Left Ecology Freedom party; Stefano Fassina and Alfredo D'Attorre from the Italian Democratic Party; the left of the French Socialist Party; Paolo Ferrero of the Communist Refoundation Party; Marisa Matias, the Portuguese MEP of the Left Block; Raffaella Bolini, who represents ARCI (The Italian Cultural and Recreational Association); as well as Maurizio Landini's Social Coalition, and Luciana Castellina of the Communist party.

...This is the breaking point; everything will either start or end here, they say with their fingers crossed as they circle through the rooms of this seven-story palace located in the aptly named Liberty Square.

Referring to Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, Nichi Vendola of Italy's Left Ecology Freedom party told Mauro after the vote: "Renzi should come to Athens to learn two fundamental things: that there simply is no Europe without democracy, and that the left without social justice is nothing but a house of cards. The first major crack has appeared in the new Berlin Wall. A clear victory for the people who have refused the ordeal of austerity, and of a government that, singularly in Europe, showed its backbone when confronting political and financial oligarchies."

[According](#) to the French current affairs radio station *RFI*, Italy has the eurozone's second-highest public debt after Greece and is thought to be one of the country's most vulnerable to financial turmoil if Greece exits the euro.

Meanwhile, in Spain, left-wing, anti-austerity Podemos party leader Pablo Iglesias framed the referendum as a step forward for democracy: "It's good news for Europeans and Greek citizens. The people of Greece have said they want change, they support a government who says that things can be done in a different way."

Still—with polls showing that in the lead up to a general election slated the end of the year, Podemos is in a virtual tie with the governing People's party and opposition Socialists—observers note that Iglesias has been careful to differentiate between Greece and Spain.

The *Guardian* [reports](#):

Podemos must walk a fine line when it comes to Greece, said José Ignacio Torreblanca, the author of *Asaltar Los Cielos*, or *Storm the Heavens*, which explores the rise of Podemos. "On one hand it's good news for them, because the message of the people having voted against austerity strengthens their message. The frame for them is fantastic because it's the people against the troika, David against Goliath and the weak against the powerful," he said.

The challenge, however, is then to distance themselves from any bad news emerging from Greece. "This is where the space opens for the People's party and others to point to issues such as the queues for cash machine withdrawals. All of the parties have been trying to use Greece to their advantage."

The 'No' vote has undoubtedly raised the political stakes not just in Greece, but around Europe, Owen Jones [wrote](#) at the *Guardian* on Monday:

[T]his revolt was about something much bigger, and that is why Greece remains in great danger. This is about the very nature of the European Union itself. The European project was founded in the rubble of a war of annihilation, genocide and totalitarianism. It was intended to secure peace, prosperity and democracy for the people of Europe. This dream has become something of a nightmare for a growing number of Europeans. A democratic deficit is unaddressed. The Transatlantic Treaty Investment Partnership is [negotiated in secret with large corporations](#), conspiring to give them the power to sue elected governments in secret courts to try to stop policies they believe hit their profits. The EU treaty negotiated in 2011 effectively forbade any future eurozone government from [pursuing an expansionary fiscal policy](#). Other treaties and directives enshrine free-market dogma in law. Austerity is mindlessly implemented across the eurozone with terrible human consequences: in Spain, too, around half of young people are out of work.

“Syriza was a revolt against this Europe of austerity and corporate power, in favour of a democratic, socially progressive Europe,” Jones continued.

“Podemos in Spain is part of this revolt, as is Sinn Féin in Ireland,” he added. “If the referendum had produced a yes, then it would have represented a potentially terminal defeat for this gathering pan-European revolt. Instead, it has now been emboldened. Unfortunately the EU elites are not stupid, and realise this. They fear – justifiably – that if Syriza is seen to win concessions, the rebellion will spread.”

Meanwhile, Portuguese activists [reacted](#) to Sunday’s vote by placing a Greek flag on the Sao Jorge castle in Lisbon; in Belgium, Nicole Cahen of the Walloon Communist Party, [described](#) the vote on Facebook as the “first victory in our war on austerity”; and in the UK, supporters held a [celebratory rally](#) in London on Monday evening.

As Gabi Zimmer, from the European leftist coalition GUE/NGL, [said](#) on Sunday: “Our solidarity is now stronger than ever with the people of Greece, of southern Europe and of all those EU regions which have had to pay the price for those gambling and speculating on the banks and the financial markets.”

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