

Greek Elections: On Verge of Victory, Europe's Ascendant Left Declares "Subservience is Over"

Joining together ahead of Greek elections, leaders of Syriza and Podemos signal their unified fight against austerity will extend beyond national borders

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Greek opposition leader and head of radical leftist Syriza party, Alexis Tsipras (L) and Spanish Podemos party Secretary General Pablo Iglesias wave to supporters following a campaign rally in central Athens January 22, 2015. Greek leftist leader Tsipras told thousands of people gathered in Athens that an end to "national humiliation" was near after opinion polls on Thursday showed his Syriza party pulling ahead three days before an election. (Photo: Reuters/Yannis Behrakis)

'History is knocking at our door,' declared Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the leftwing coalition party of Syriza in Greece, during a speech addressed to thousands of supporters in Athens on Thursday night as he stood next to his foreign compatriot Pablo Iglesias of the Spanish Podemos Party.

Syriza and Podemos have become the mouthpiece of the anti-austerity movement in southern Europe while Tsipras and Iglesias have emerged as key political leaders who emerged from the grassroots, street-level protest movements which rose in opposition to the severe economic policies imposed by elite forces following the financial crisis that began in 2008. In relatively short time, both Syriza and Podemos went from being non-existent political entities to standing on the doorstep of taking power.

With national elections in Greece just days away, and Syriza's [polling numbers only improving](#), Alexis Tsipras announced that his party is prepared to "overthrow" the status quo and vowed to implement swift changes to undo the austerity policies—imposed at the behest of foreign creditors and attached to a bailout package offered by the European Central Bank and the IMF—that have left the Greek economy in tatters. Standing before the large crowd, Tsipras [announced](#) that by Monday, "[Greece's] national humiliation will be over. We will finish with orders from abroad."

Syriza's answer to austerity, he continued, would be this: "The bailout is over. Blackmail is over. Subservience is over."

Watch this [report](#) from *Euronews*:

According to [reporting](#) by the *Irish Times*, Tsipras "received one of his biggest cheers of the night when he said that he will press for the repayment of a forced war loan from Greece to Germany during the second World War.

Taking the podium to address the thousands gathered, Iglesias indicated the fate of the Greek and Spanish people—both crushed by unemployment and the gutting of the public sector—were intimately tied. But, Iglesias declared, “The wind of democratic change is blowing in Europe.” Less than one year since its inception, Podemos is now polling ahead of Spain’s ruling party. Though national elections in Spain could happen later this year, they have not yet been scheduled.

A sampling of voices taken from the crowd in Athens reveal that those supporting what Podemos and Syriza represent are ecstatic for the hope the parties are now offering.

“I am voting for Tsipras because even my parents, after 40 years of work, don’t have money to pay for heating,” Maria Labridou, a 55-year-old teacher at the rally, [told Reuters](#). “He is our only hope, the only way out.”

[Speaking](#) with the *Irish Times*, a retiree named Babis, said, “We want change not only in Greece, but across Europe. The change will start from here, and then go through Spain, Portugal and Ireland. There has to be social justice.”

A continental view was not absent among the politicians on the stage either as Leonard Cohen’s famous protest song, ‘First We Take Manhattan,’ played from the loudspeakers and Iglesias at one point declared, “Then we take Berlin!”

Ahead of the Greek election on Sunday, the latest polling in the country shows Syriza has built on its previous lead over the ruling New Democracy party, now led by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras.

As Helena Smith [reports](#) for the *Guardian* on Friday:

Barely four weeks after the failure of parliament to elect a president, triggering the ballot, Greece’s fate now lies in the hands of 9.8 million voters. All the polls show, with growing conviction, that victory will go to Syriza. A poll released by GPO for Mega TV late on Thursday gave the far leftists a six-percentage-point lead over Samaras’s centre-right New Democracy, the dominant force in a coalition government that has held power since June 2012. A week earlier, GPO had the lead at four percentage points. [...]

Analysts maintain that Syriza’s ability to attain an outright majority will be difficult. With pressure mounting from the EU and IMF to “respect” the commitments made as the price of aid, speculation has been rife that the party might prefer to enter a coalition government that would enable it to forge ahead with the structural reforms and budget cuts demanded in exchange for the biggest financial assistance programme in global history.

But Tsipras put paid to that. The leftists, who have never held office in the near 200 years of the Modern Greek state – and who, after a bloody civil war, were hounded and imprisoned for decades – wanted to win an absolute majority that would allow them to govern unimpeded, he insisted.

“We are asking for a clear mandate, crystal clear, undiluted, indisputable,” he told the crowd. “The time of the left has come.”

Dr Eleni Panagiotarea, a research fellow at Greece’s leading thinktank Eliamep, said Syriza was on a roll.

“It’s now all about making a clean break with the past. The party has picked up

on the fatigue that people feel with the country. It has become a voice for the disgruntled middle class, unemployed, socially vulnerable, all those who want change.”

Though Prime Minister Samaras has tried to counter the rise of Syriza by telling Greek voters that its leftwing policies will lead the nation to ruin, experts and economists argue that it has been the austerity policies imposed across Europe, though most severely imposed in nations like Greece and Spain, that have been the clearest culprits of economic ruin.

As Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy research, [wrote](#) earlier this week:

Greece continues to face a dismal future under the current European program, with more than 18 percent unemployment even in 2017. This is according to IMF projections, which have been consistently over-optimistic in the past. Mass unemployment will also be the norm for the eurozone, with more than 10 percent unemployment in 2017, even if it the eurozone authorities’ program is “successful.” Not to mention all the other sacrifices in living standards, including cuts in health care spending, public pensions, minimum wages and government services.

This prolonged punishment and regressive social engineering from the European authorities is only [possible](#) because the electorate has had little or no influence over the most important economic policy-making. The Greeks are trying to win some of that back; hence the intimidation from on high.

And Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, in a recent column, called the commitment to austerity by European elites—namely the IMF, the ECB, the European Commission, and the powerful German government—a very cruel form of “economic madness” that betrays sound reasoning.

Stiglitz [wrote](#), “If Europe does not change its ways – if it does not reform the Eurozone and repeal austerity – a popular backlash will become inevitable.” Whatever happens in the Greek elections, he concluded, “this economic madness cannot continue forever. Democracy will not permit it. But how much more pain will Europe have to endure before reason is restored?”

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