

# European elections: Greek vote reflects widespread hostility to NATO bombing

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16 June 1999

Results of the European parliamentary elections in Greece have confirmed the widespread public hostility to the government's support for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

Three left parties, all of which opposed the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) support for the war, made the biggest gains. The Communist Party captured 8.5 percent of the vote. *Dikiki*, formed recently by a former PASOK finance minister and standing for the first time in a European election, won 6.9 percent. The ex-Stalinist Left Coalition won 5 percent, giving the three left parties a total of seven seats in the European parliament. As a result, PASOK were pushed into second place with 32.9 percent of the vote, behind the right-wing New Democracy, which polled 36.3 percent. Each of these parties will take nine seats in Strasbourg.

At 70.1 percent, turnout was below average in a country where voting is obligatory.

Protests taking place throughout the war continued as the first NATO troops landed in the country. US marines heading for Kosovo were greeted with a huge banner reading "US killers go home" when they landed in Greece last Thursday.

Nervous over the impact of NATO troops passing through the country during the elections, the government blocked the arrival of 2,200 marines for several days, saying they could only cross Greek territory when it was certain they would enter Kosovo as "peacekeepers". Troops were kept waiting aboard three US ships off the port of Thessaloniki from the previous Sunday. Finally, Greek riot police had to push back hundreds of demonstrators in order to clear Litohoro beach for the landing of the marines. Protestors chanted "Yankees go home" and "American murderers" as they were cleared from the area.

With over 80 percent of the population opposed to the war, the government attempted to carry out a delicate balancing act between support for NATO and demands for more diplomatic efforts. At the height of US and British talk of a ground invasion, it was widely predicted that the government would fall if Greece were used as a corridor for NATO troops.

Even prior to the NATO bombing there was growing hostility among workers to the PASOK government. Greece had failed to meet the criteria for entry into the euro currency zone. The government has since embarked on a programme of slashing public spending and pensions in an attempt to meet the grade in the near future.

Prime Minister Costas Simitis tried to minimise the PASOK defeat, calling it "acceptable wear and tear". He said the government's tight fiscal policies would remain in place as Greece intensified its effort to qualify for membership of the euro this year.

Domestic politics is not the only area where PASOK confronts difficulties. Tensions between Greece and neighbouring European Union applicant Turkey are greater than ever. There are frequent disputes over islands situated between these two long-standing enemies. In February this year the government faced political problems over Greece's role in the kidnapping of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan. Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangolos resigned amid accusations that he had colluded in the capture of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) chief. As NATO embarks on a new carve-up of the Balkans, the so-called "peace" is likely to have a no less politically tumultuous effect on Greece than the Yugoslav war.



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