

# Greece: The program of Syriza

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The Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza) is currently playing a key role in Greek politics. In the May 6 elections, the organisation won 17 percent of the vote, becoming the second strongest party. The subsequent attempts to form a government failed due to Syriza's refusal to enter into a coalition with the former ruling parties, New Democracy (ND) and PASOK.

According to opinion polls, Syriza could come in first place in the new election set to be held on June 17. Under Greek electoral law, the largest party is awarded 50 additional seats, so it would be almost impossible to form a government without Syriza. Its leader, the 38-year-old Alexis Tsipras, could become the next prime minister of Greece.

Syriza's electoral success rests on its rejection of the austerity measures that have driven the country into a deep recession and plunged its people into unemployment and poverty. The party is demanding that cuts in pensions and wages, the sale of state property and the repayment of government debt agreed with the EU and the IMF be temporarily halted and renegotiated.

Syriza parliamentary deputy Despoina Charalambidou told *Spiegel Online*: “The agreements with the troika must be lifted immediately. The rescue plan condemns the Greek people to poverty, unemployment and forces people to emigrate. The debts were not incurred by the ordinary workers, so they should not be paid back by them.”

However, Syriza does not question the European Union and its institutions, nor the Greek state and its capitalist foundations. Syriza's goal is not the socialist transformation of society in the interests of the working class, but to create better conditions for the upper-middle class and those parts of the Greek bourgeoisie which are hit particularly hard by the effects of the austerity measures.

Tsipras stresses at every opportunity that he does not

want to break with the EU and the euro under any conditions. On Wednesday, he told CNN: “We will do whatever we could do in this direction, to keep Greece inside the euro zone and inside Europe.”

However, Tsipras believes that PASOK and ND, which also are eager to remain in the EU and the euro zone, have paid too high a price for this. He believes that Athens still has some cards up its sleeves to get a better deal with Brussels and Berlin.

First, he relies on the support of financially weak EU countries and social democratic politicians—especially the newly elected French President François Hollande—to replace the deflationary fiscal policies of the EU, insisted upon above all by Germany, by an inflationary policy. Second, he is attempting to put the EU under pressure by threatening Greek national bankruptcy, which could plunge other countries and the euro into the abyss.

Tsipras has elaborated this strategy in the previously cited interview with CNN chief international correspondent Christiane Amanpour and in further discussions with the *Wall Street Journal* and the BBC.

The crisis is not only a Greek one, but represents a European problem, he told CNN. Therefore, the memorandum must be canceled and be renegotiated at the European level. To this end, he would “look for partners in southern as well as in central Europe.” He accused Chancellor Angela Merkel of “playing poker with the lives of people” and of “putting the euro zone at risk”.

Tsipras told the *Wall Street Journal*: “Our first choice is to convince our European partners that, in their own interest, financing must not be stopped.” But if this happens, Greece will no longer service its debt. A financial collapse in Greece would drag the rest of the euro zone along.

Also on the BBC, Tsipras threatened, “If the austerity disease destroys Greece, it will spread throughout

Europe.”

Tsipras' policy—a mixture of threats and entreaties to Brussels—is based on pipe dreams and illusions. Like every middle-class politician, he completely underestimates the extent of the international capitalist crisis.

The austerity measures in Greece are part of an international offensive of finance capital against the social gains of the working class, which has escalated dramatically since the financial crisis in 2008 and affects all capitalist countries—from the United States, England, Spain and Italy to France and Germany.

An inflationary policy—as now called for by the US and British governments—would merely continue such attacks in another form. The “Growth Pact” currently being discussed in the EU, and on which Tsipras is clearly setting his hopes, consists of providing additional funds for ailing banks and “structural reforms” to improve competitiveness, i.e., flexible working conditions and lower wages. Cuts in public spending would continue unabated.

Should Syriza actually win the Greek election, it would play an important role in the enforcement of such attacks. Looking at Syriza's European sister parties—Communist Refoundation in Italy, the Left Party in Germany, the Left Front in France—one sees that they have all participated in the attacks on the working class whenever they have participated in government.

Tsipras is also capable of this. Reuters has reported some as saying, “Tsipras can make the transition from hothead to a responsible politician.”

The German newspaper *taz*, which is close to the Green Party and which understands this issue well, commented that it was “not an obstacle that Tsipras is now campaigning with impossible promises and is telling the Greeks that they can have it all at the same time, the euro, new transfer payments and their old client state. Because he embodies their interests and desires, they will accept him, when as the new head of government he concedes that reforms are necessary, unfortunately.”



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