

The European election in Greece

Christoph Dreier
29 May 2014

The outcome of the European election in Greece reflects the population's resolute opposition to the Greek government and the European Union's austerity drive. Support for the ruling New Democracy (ND) and its social democratic coalition partner PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) fell to an all-time low. For the first time, the United Social Front (SYRIZA EKM) emerged as the strongest contender. Third place was taken by the fascist Golden Dawn.

Compared to the Greek parliamentary election of two years ago, the two governing parties lost more than 10 percentage points. The ND garnered only 22.7 percent of the vote (compared to 29.7 percent two years ago). Although PASOK had affiliated with other parties in the Olive Tree coalition, the grouping received only 8.0 percent (as compared to 12.3 percent for PASOK in 2012). Compared to the last European election five years ago, the governing parties lost almost 40 percentage points, losing considerably more than half of their erstwhile voters.

The SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) breakaway organisation, the Democratic Left (DIMAR), which was part of the coalition government until a year ago, also collapsed. Two years ago, it won 6.3 percent of the vote. In this election, it obtained only 1.2 percent of the votes cast, well below the 3.0 percent parliamentary threshold requirement.

SYRIZA is now the strongest party electorally. It was able to match its result in the previous national election with only slight losses (26.6 percent compared to 26.7 percent). However, its success in concurrent local elections was more limited. SYRIZA was the winner on the Ionian Islands and in the region of Attica, where more than a third of the Greek population lives. Contenders from the ruling parties were able to prevail in seven regions, but four other regions elected independent candidates.

The fascists of Golden Dawn were able to increase

their share of the vote in the European election as compared to the Greek parliamentary election two years ago from 6.9 percent to 9.4 percent. They are now the third strongest party.

Golden Dawn, which has carried out repeated attacks on political opponents, immigrants and homosexuals, has been promoted by the state apparatus and is closely connected with the ruling ND. Election analyses revealed that over 50 percent of the police voted for Golden Dawn.

For the first time, the new liberal Potami (the River) group gained 6.6 percent of the vote and will send two deputies to Brussels. The arch-Stalinist Communist Party (KKE) received 6.1 percent, slightly improving its result from the last parliamentary election (4.5 percent). The right-wing populists of the Independent Greeks (ANEL) dropped from 7.5 percent to 3.5 percent.

The election result places the coalition government under heavy pressure. Over the last two years, the coalition's once comfortable majority has declined by some 27 deputies. Currently, it is based on only 152 of the 300 deputies. If the European election results were repeated in a national parliamentary election, the ruling coalition parties would lose 94 seats.

Despite the disastrous result for the ruling coalition, Prime Minister Antonis Samaras ruled out any prospect of early elections. "Those who tried to turn the EU into a plebiscite election failed," Samaras said in a brief televised address. "They failed to create conditions of instability, uncertainty and political ungovernability."

The premier said he knew what he had to do. "We will proceed as quickly as possible," he said, without being more specific. According to press reports, Samaras is planning a radical reshuffle of his government. On Thursday, he will meet with President Karolos Papoulias to discuss the future course. This will be followed by planned coalition talks.

At noon on Monday, SYRIZA Chairman Alexis Tsipras met with the president, who has a purely symbolic role in Greece. Afterwards, Tsipras said: “We should move to national elections as soon as possible in an organised and calm manner to restore democratic normality.” He added that Samaras had lost moral legitimacy to lead new negotiations with the European Union and impose new austerity measures.

The election result signifies a clear rejection of the policy of the Greek government, which has been imposing Brussels’ austerity dictates on the population for the past two years. During this period, wages have fallen by up to 60 percent, general taxation has increased, and unemployment has risen to over 27 percent. The health and education systems are on the brink of collapse. Approximately 40 percent of workers are already excluded from health care because they are unable to afford treatment.

Workers are overwhelmingly opposed to this policy. Since 2010, some 6,300 demonstrations and protests have been held in Athens alone. That amounts to 14 per day. It includes as many as 36 general strikes, which have sometimes been attended by hundreds of thousands of workers. On Tuesday, May 20, teachers demonstrated outside the Ministry of Education against the government’s plans to cut jobs and merge or close more schools.

This popular opposition is expressed in the election results for the ruling parties, which in recent weeks have once again been openly supported by the German government and EU officials. In light of the turnout of around 60 percent, only about a fifth of the electorate actually voted for one of the governing parties.

Samaras’s intention to continue the government’s policy unchanged is a clear warning to the working class. In the last elections, only the undemocratic electoral system enabled the coalition to maintain its majority. Since then, the coalition has systematically curtailed workers’ democratic rights. Striking workers have been placed under martial law, demonstrations have been outlawed and fascist gangs encouraged. The social attacks that have been launched in Greece cannot be imposed by democratic means.

The opposition of the workers, however, finds no expression in the program of the main opposition party, SYRIZA. Although the party uses its election campaigns to pose as an opponent of the austerity

policy, it actively supports the EU and its brutal program of social reaction.

Only two weeks ago, Tsipras declared at a congress of the German Left Party that a SYRIZA government would in principle recognise Greece’s debt and sit down with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to negotiate the terms of new loan agreements.

Last year, Tsipras made several trips to the US and other European countries to meet with representatives of the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and various governments. Each time, he assured his hosts they had nothing to fear from a SYRIZA government. On the contrary, Tsipras claimed, a government under his leadership would bring more stability to the country.

A SYRIZA government would be a thoroughly right-wing regime. It would continue the course of the Samaras government and follow the dictates of Brussels. As is the case in France under the Socialist Party government of François Hollande, the right-wing policies of an ostensibly left-wing government in Greece would strengthen the fascists. SYRIZA has already collaborated with the right-wing populists of ANEL on a number of occasions.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact