

New far-right party in Greece

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Panayiotis Baltakos, Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras' former Cabinet Secretary, has announced his intention to form a new far-right party called *Rizes* (Roots).

He said on December 1 that the party “will have features related to our traditions, the Orthodox Church, the Security Services and the Armed Forces.”

Baltakos has close relations to the fascist Golden Dawn party. Alongside the armed forces and security services, such a formation, as part of a governing coalition or with tacit government approval, would act as a battering ram to crush the opposition of Greek workers and youth to entrenched austerity.

Baltakos hailed the army in an interview with *onalert.gr* in September.

Speaking of his overtures towards the armed forces through his meetings with Fragkoulis Fragkos and Konstantinos Ziazias, both of whom successively held the post of Chief of the Hellenic Army General Staff, he said, “In a decaying society in crisis and moral decay [the army] has dogma, hierarchy, discipline, purpose and aims. It is an organised grouping that is ideologically defined.”

Baltakos was forced to resign from the government in April after a video was leaked showing him briefing Golden Dawn MP Ilias Kasidiaris regarding the government's clampdown on the neo-Nazi party. This took place after one of its members murdered rapper Pavlos Fyssas in September 2013.

A series of text messages leaked in September revealed that he routinely attempted to mobilise Golden Dawn's votes in parliament in order to ensure that key pieces of government legislation passed.

Speaking in an interview with *Star Channel*, Baltakos stressed the party would be formally set up to contest an election only in the event that New Democracy (ND) was unable to gain an overall majority against SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left). “It is necessary to win

back the 16.5 percent of people that voted for parties to the right of New Democracy (ND) in the May European elections,” he said, adding that if ND had this proportion of voters it would not need to be in coalition with the social democratic PASOK.

Baltakos, who is still an ND member, was previously Samaras' number two. He implied that Samaras has given tacit approval to his move to found a new party. Asked by *Star Channel* about his relationship with Samaras, Baltakos responded, “We understand each other and there is no need for anything else.” The announcement took place prior to Samaras announcing a snap vote in parliament to replace incumbent President Karolos Papoulias, bringing the election forward from February to December 17, with further polls on December 23 and 29. Samaras needs 180 votes, but his governing coalition has only 155 MPs. If he fails to find another 25 votes, he will be forced to call a general election, with recent opinion polls placing SYRIZA ahead of ND.

Golden Dawn has seen its popularity steadily decline following the clampdown after Fyssas' murder, resulting in the imprisonment of a sizeable number of its MPs. Right-wing ND splinter Independent Greeks has also seen its fortunes dwindle, with a number of its MPs defecting to other parties or declaring themselves independent. The latest opinion poll gave Golden Dawn a 4.3 percent share of the vote and the Independent Greeks 1.7 percent, which is below the minimum 2 percent required for entry into parliament.

Alluding to this state of affairs, Baltakos said, “There are people who are or used to be with [New Democracy] and because they do not want to vote for this or that party they are thinking of voting for SYRIZA. We don't like this.”

He added that MP Vasilis Kapernaros has confirmed that he would be part of *Rizes* if it is formed. Kapernaros was elected an MP in 2012 with the

Independent Greeks. In May this year he left the Independent Greeks and is currently an Independent.

Baltakos confirmed he has also spoken to former ND MP Christos Zois, who was expelled from ND in February 2012 after voting against a package of austerity measures. He joined the Independent Greeks, but failed to get elected in the June 2012 elections. Since March 2013 he has led Nea MERA (New Reforming Radical Reconstitution), a splinter from the Independent Greeks. In an interview on *crashonline.gr*, Zois welcomed Baltakos' move, stating that the country needs "a reforming and radical current." However, he said that he will not be joining Baltakos' party given that he leads his own.

Baltakos' contacts with Zois and Kapernaros have been known since July. At the time the press reported that the three met in a restaurant in the upscale Athens suburb of Glyfada.

From the moment he left the government Baltakos publicly discussed establishing a new political party. In an interview he gave to *Real News* shortly after his resignation he said, "I've been approached by ministers and MPs, *I've been approached by people in uniform* and I have been asked to found a new party, saying to me 'go to the fore we're with you'." [emphasis added]

Two of those "people in uniform" were Fragkoulis Fragkos and Konstantinos Ziazias. Fragkos was hastily removed from his post in November 2011 by the Papandreou PASOK government along with the rest of the armed forces top brass. This occurred amid rumours that a coup was being planned in response to Papandreou's plan to call for a referendum on the austerity measures imposed by the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund—collectively known as the troika.

Fragkos later served as defence secretary in the caretaker government between the May and June 2012 elections, after talks to form a coalition government in May 2012 failed. After replacing Fragkos, Ziazias resigned in July 2012, after he refused to sanction promotions and discharges in the Army demanded by the government.

Both men reportedly declined to join Baltakos' initiative, but heard what he had to say with interest. Fragkos is tactically closer to Baltakos. According to online defence news website *onalert.gr*, Fragkos is in favour of the creation of a political party that "will

begin from ND's fence and approach Golden Dawn's fence."

Ziazias is reportedly in favour of a broad patriotic party that will also encompass sections of the pseudo-left. According to *onalert.gr*, he was invited by SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras to stand as a candidate in the May 2014 elections but declined.

Speaking to *newsit.gr* on December 4, Baltakos stated that the preference is for "Rizes" to be led by a high-ranking military official. In a TV interview with *Kontra Channel* a week later (December 11), he confirmed that in the coming days the leadership committee of "Rizes" would be announced. Baltakos added that "Rizes" has the "spiritual blessing" of leading figures in the Greek Orthodox Church, namely the Metropolitan of Piraeus, Seraphim, and the Metropolitan of Sinai, Damianos.

Asked whether "Rizes" will contest the elections if parliament fails to elect a new president, he said this would not be logistically possible. But it would contest the ones after that, which in his opinion would not be far off. Baltakos calculates that SYRIZA will not gain an overall majority and that any resulting coalition will be short-lived.

He accused Samaras of being too soft in his current negotiations with the troika, stressing that "we can't concede a rationale, which we believe to be correct, to the Left [i.e., SYRIZA]. Why? So that [New Democracy] will be sidelined for decades?"

SYRIZA has no intention of antagonising the financial aristocracy. Last month, leading SYRIZA figures Yiannis Milios and Yiorgos Stathakis were in the City of London, where they met representatives from financial institutions including Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch and Nomura.



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