

Greek election: SYRIZA leader calls for “new patriotic alliance”

Our reporters
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In his final main rally before Sunday’s election, SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) leader Alexis Tsipras addressed a crowd of around ten thousand in Athens to call for “a new patriotic alliance.” He promised that, should his party come to power, it would guarantee the existing political and social order.

Tsipras was the main speaker in Omonia Square in central Athens. Prior to the rally, rousing pop music blared out of speakers on a stage containing a single speaker’s podium prepared for Tsipras’s speech. Large screens left and right of the podium enabled those at the back of the crowd to see the speaker. Film cameras zoomed overhead to record the crowd, in what was a professionally orchestrated and expensive event. A large platform was dedicated to the many representatives of the national and international media.

SYRIZA flags, with one prominently also sporting the national flag, dominated at the front of the crowd.

In a 45-minute speech bristling with lies, evasions and nationalist appeals, Tsipras began by calling on “all Greek men and women for a new national harmony, a new social and patriotic alliance...to put into practice the new liberation.”

He appealed to supporters from all political parties to vote for SYRIZA on Sunday, and called for cooperation with all political camps. “On Sunday we are not just turning a page, we are changing an era, we are all moving forward together irrespective of how we voted yesterday,” he said.

Declaring that a SYRIZA-led government would end corruption, partisanship and patronage, Tsipras again banged the nationalist drum, stating, “On Monday the party is over and we are returning to legality for everyone without distinctions... On Monday, national humiliation will be over.”

Later in his speech, Tsipras made clear that his

definition of “legality” involved not only the maintenance of the state apparatus, but its strengthening. The SYRIZA leader is well aware that these forces will be needed in the future to repress working-class opposition to his policies.

In a special appeal to the forces of the state, he declared, “We will give to people in uniform the ability to do their jobs in harmony with citizens and on dignified terms, to enable policemen to protect citizens from criminality and be on their side when needed, but also to people in the army serving the homeland away from their families.”

Tsipras hypocritically denounced German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the bankers’ representatives, from the European Union, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who have imposed a series of austerity measures known as the “memorandums.”

“We make absolutely clear, we will not have people in leading positions who represent the opinions of Ms. Merkel,” he declared. “We have no intention to co-govern with representatives of the memorandums.”

In fact SYRIZA’s leadership contains former leading members of the social democratic PASOK who were in government imposing austerity just a few years ago.

Just one day prior to the Omonia rally, Odysseas Voudouris addressed a party meeting in the Athens district of Maroussi. He explicitly appealed for New Democracy supporters to vote for SYRIZA. As a former MP for PASOK, Voudouris voted for austerity in 2010 as part of the government of George Papandreou. In December 2011 Voudouris’s team visited Kalamata in his Messenia constituency and was confronted by protesters who chanted, “Collaborators leave our town.”

The rally on Friday finally concluded with applause

from the crowd to the sounds of the Leonard Cohen song, “First We Take Manhattan.”

At this point Tsipras was joined on stage by the leader of the Spanish pseudo-left Podemos movement, Pablo Iglesias. Declaring their mutual solidarity and embracing on stage, Iglesias took the microphone to repeat the song’s lyric, “First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin.”

While banging the nationalist drum for his domestic audience, Tsipras addressed a second audience in his speech—the international financial and business elite. At one point he boasted that his proposals for a reduction in Greek debt had won support from “the European press, economists and experts of international renown.”

Tsipras was referring to the vigorous promotion of SYRIZA in recent weeks by the financial and business press.

For weeks, leading columnists have expressed their support for SYRIZA’s proposals for selective debt relief, for the ECB’s program of quantitative easing and, in particular, breaking the stranglehold of a handful of oligarchs and their families over the Greek economy in order to give global investors freer access to its markets and resources.

On Thursday, 18 leading international economists and professors led by Columbia University’s Joseph Stiglitz published a letter in the *Financial Times* backing SYRIZA’s plan for debt relief. These forces favour a more selective implementation of austerity policies, combined with a massive boost to the financial markets via the ECB.

Both policy measures are opposed by the German government, which insists on austerity while refusing to share any losses in the event of a cut in Greece’s debt burden. This explains the barbed comments by both Tsipras and Iglesias directed at Merkel and the government in Berlin.

Two days before the Athens rally, in a comment published in the *Financial Times*, Tsipras reassured the financial elite that a SYRIZA government would guarantee “political stability and economic security.” A SYRIZA victory would “strengthen the euro zone and make the European project attractive to citizens across the continent,” he declared.

In the article, Tsipras stressed that a SYRIZA government would respect Greece’s obligations as a euro zone member, maintain a balanced budget, and

commit itself to the terms laid down by the ECB. He urged the ECB to “launch a full-blooded programme of quantitative easing.”

On the day of the Tsipras rally, *Financial Times* commentator Wolfgang Munchau offered his own endorsement in a video, in which he declared, “Debt restructuring is something that is needed and SYRIZA is right about that.”

On Thursday, as Tsipras anticipated, the ECB introduced a massive program of quantitative easing, but with the explicit proviso that Greece would be excluded from any funds from the program for at least six months. ECB head Mario Draghi stated that under the terms of the QE program, countries subject to bailout programs would face “stricter conditions,” i.e., more austerity and punishing structural reforms to labour markets.

Despite this, SYRIZA duly and enthusiastically greeted the new plan. A SYRIZA statement on Friday, one day after the Athens rally, declared, “It is an important decision which the next Greek government will make use of for the good of the country.”

Far from ending austerity in Greece, the rally in Omonia Square on Thursday and subsequent statements by the party made clear that a SYRIZA government would continue such policies. In order to do this, Tsipras may need to form a coalition embracing several other bourgeois parties. But to impose these measures on a restive population, the appeal to the police and military makes clear that he is prepared to use the full force of the state.



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