

Who are the Independent Greeks?

Robert Stevens
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The formation of a government coalition between Syriza and the Independent Greeks (ANEL) refutes claims made by Syriza's many apologists that Syriza is a left-wing party.

During the coalition negotiations, ANEL leader Panos Kammenos set out a number of "red lines" that were accepted by Alexis Tsipras, Syriza's leader. One of these was that ANEL control the Ministry of Defence.

In the new cabinet named by Tsipras yesterday, Kammenos was handed control of the ministry. ANEL also received junior positions in the departments of the Macedonian Region, Tourism, Rural Development and government co-ordination.

Kammenos has close connections to the Greek armed forces. In the last parliament, he served on the Standing Committee on National Defence and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Committee on Armament Programs and Contracts. Last October, he visited the Ministry of Defence and, according to its web site, was "briefed by the Minister of National Defence Dimitris Avramopoulos and the military leadership on the operational structure and operation of the Armed Forces."

Kammenos is an opponent of civilian control over the armed forces. In an interview with *On Alert*, a defence news web site, in December last year he stated, "We say that the Minister of Defence should act as a political supervisor, but that he should never meddle in the running of the military. It shouldn't be possible for the office of the Minister of Defence to be in charge of appointment of officers [to various posts]."

He pledged to "[P]rotect the Armed Forces from some of the strange mentalities within Syriza."

The Independent Greeks were formed by Kammenos in February 2012, as a right-wing split from the conservative New Democracy (ND), which was running the government at the time. It has no mass base of support, polling just 4.68 percent and winning 13 seats in Sunday's election.

Kammenos had sat in parliament since 1993 as an ND deputy. He was expelled from the ND parliamentary

group and the party, because he did not vote for the second memorandum agreed with the European Union. He departed from ND with a small group of party deputies who also voted against the memorandum.

He has the closest connections to Greece's shipping magnates. From 2007 to 2009, as vice-minister of commerce and shipping, he was instrumental in developing Greece's burgeoning economic links with China, centred on the country's main port, Piraeus.

ANEL advocates a nationalist free market programme. At its December 2012 founding congress, Kammenos declared, "[T]he only ideology of our movement is patriotism."

Similar language was used by Tsipras just prior to the election, when declaring the need for a "new patriotic alliance."

One report of Kammenos' speech noted that he "called on supporters of the centre-right space, patriotic centre of PASOK and patriotic Left to join the planned patriotic centre."

He said, "To all who want to affiliate us to a political space, we would like to say that we belong to Greece."

Kammenos called for a non-partisan committee that would have emergency powers and control the fate of the country. What was needed was a "national awakening and uprising," he said. A self-declared opponent of multiculturalism, ANEL stresses the primacy of "Greek history and culture."

Its founding declaration states that members support the Greek Orthodox Church and believe in the "values and the timelessness of Orthodoxy."

Central to its programme is its anti-immigration platform. This demands the persecution and deportation of undocumented immigrants, which ANEL has declared an issue of "national security." In what amounts to a policy of forced repatriations, ANEL's manifesto calls for a maximum of 2.5 percent of the country's population to be comprised of immigrants, and then only as long as the number of migrants is "economically and socially sustainable".

ANEL proposes to ban the growing numbers of homeless people in Greece from sheltering in abandoned housing.

A right-wing nationalist party with political and personal ties to explicitly far-right forces, ANEL is a staging post for some of the most noxious layers in Greek society. Vasilis Kapernaros was elected as an ANEL deputy in 2012, and left it in May 2014 to serve as an independent. He has close connections to Panayiotis Baltakos, Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras' former Cabinet Secretary, who is seeking to establish a far-right party called *Rizes* (Roots) based on "the Orthodox Church, the Security Services and the Armed Forces."

In December of last year, Kapernaros confirmed that he would be part of *Rizes* if it was established.

Chrysoula Giatagana was elected with ANEL in 2012, and declared herself an independent in March 2014. In May 2014, during a parliamentary debate, she called for the death penalty to be restored. Capital punishment was abolished for peacetime crimes, other than treason during wartime, by the Constitution of 1975, following the fall of the 1967-1974 military junta, and then for all crimes in 2004. Last year, as an independent, Giatagana was approached by Tsipras to stand as a candidate for Syriza in the January general election. Earlier this month she declined the invitation on the basis that Syriza proposed she stand on its national slate as opposed to her Thessaloniki local constituency.

Kammenos has flaunted his own right-wing nostrums on a number of occasions. Just one month ago, he said the outgoing ND government "took most of its decisions against the Church of Greece—cremation, civil partnerships for homosexuals and taxation just for the Orthodox religion. Buddhists, Jews, Muslims are not taxed..."

This was described by the Board of Jewish Communities in Greece as a "serious anti-Semitic act".

ANEL's reactionary agenda is peppered with a few populist phrases against the austerity measures. But behind this verbiage, its aim is to establish the best conditions for the development of Greek capitalism, on the basis of economic alliances with China and Russia.

In a speech delivered at Germany's Schiller Institute in October last year, titled "Greece and the Silk Road Economic Belt," Kammenos stated: "Our membership in NATO and the [European Union] does not prevent us from maintaining close political, economic and cultural relations with other countries, especially those with which we have historical ties, such as Russia and China."

Like the far-right National Front in France, ANEL opposes EU-dictated austerity on the basis that it has undermined capitalism at the national level. Kammenos, who has previously denounced Germany for "not treating Greece as a partner but as its master", and for attempting "to turn a Europe of independent states into a Europe dominated by Germany", said in his speech, "The future of Greece would be better if a strategic orientation were taken to establish links with some of the most dynamic economies of the world, and to find thereby new sources of economic support. One of these countries, besides Russia, is China."

Declaring, "Today, we are witnessing the resurrection of the Silk Road, both on land and on sea," he added, "Greece is the most economical conduit for Chinese exports shipped to the rest of Europe, the Arab peninsula and North Africa."

Stressing that "I would like to inform you that China is already in Greece," he continued, "I signed, in November 2008, an agreement between the Piraeus Port Authority and the Chinese COSCO Group, for a 30 year concession of part of the container station in the port of Piraeus."

He noted ANEL's programme supports "opening up new markets and ... attracting ... investor interest through realistic and achievable economic incentives."

In exchange for a worthless pledge to employ the unemployed, "investors outside the EU" would be granted access to "inactive industrial areas ... based on low tax ratios."



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