

# Syriza leader Tsipras meets with Left Party leaders in Berlin

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The first official visit by Alexis Tsipras in Berlin since the election of Syriza has exposed the right-wing trajectory of the party and its German allies. Following his Monday meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to pledge new austerity measures and reforms, the Greek prime minister and leader of Syriza met on Tuesday with leaders of the Left Party.

After the one-hour meeting in Berlin's luxury Marriott Hotel, Left Party leaders Katja Kipping and Gregor Gysi said it was "a conversation among friends." Both expressly supported Tsipras' meeting with Merkel, thereby endorsing Germany's austerity policy for Greece and Europe as a whole. This policy is now to be intensified by Syriza, in close cooperation with the government in Berlin. Tsipras was "a godsend for Europe," said Gysi, in his typically cynical manner. The "climate" during Tsipras' dinner with the chancellor, and five hours of talks with Merkel, had "not been unpleasant," he added.

Kipping praised the "very confidential exchange" between Tsipras and Merkel, which had contributed to "a little more understanding of the situation in Greece". She went on to express her firm support for the cuts proposed by Syriza. "It is simply false that Greece has not made concrete reform proposals," she stressed. The Greek government is responding but under "difficult circumstances". She said that the solution to the country's liquidity problems is of great importance not only for Greece, but also for the stability of the euro and Germany.

The German media hailed Syriza's anti-working class measures in the run-up to the meeting between Merkel and Tsipras. The Greek party planned among other measures "to revive the odious privatization program of the previous government," noted *Spiegel Online*. Further measures include the introduction of

retirement at 67 and far-reaching structural reforms—i.e., the further liberalization of the Greek economy and the labor market. Previous social democratic and conservative governments had been unable to implement these measures.

On Tuesday, the German and Greek press commented on the meeting between Merkel and Tsipras. The liberal *Die Zeit* wrote: "Tsipras talked for hours with Angela Merkel into the early hours of Tuesday. He has negotiated reforms he flatly rejected during the Greek election campaign: an increase in the retirement age and an increase in VAT [value added tax] for Greek holiday islands."

The Greek daily *Ta Nea*, which is close to the social democratic PASOK, wrote: "Merkel had rolled out the red carpet," and Tsipras had "revealed his realpolitik". He had made it clear that "a different policy mix" was needed, but had agreed that "the reforms in Greece imposed by donors had also created positive consequences". This should "not be discounted". The fact that the Left Party firmly backs Tsipras precisely at the point when he uncritically accepts the line of the German government and the austerity policy of the troika—a policy which has plunged millions of Greek workers into poverty during the past five years—comes as no surprise. At the end of February, the vast majority of Left Party deputies voted in parliament for the extension of the so-called aid program for Greece and thus publicly backed the austerity measures demanded by the banks.

The Left Party functions directly as a consultant to the government and as the extended arm of German imperialism. It is now working closely with the new Greek government to to enforce the economic and political interests of the German ruling class.

In advance of Tsipras' visit to Berlin, the deputy

leader of the Left Party, Dietmar Bartsch, called upon the German government to tone down its language towards Greece in order not to harm the German economy. “The speculation every day, whether there could be an accidental or deliberate ‘exit’ [Grexit], are not at all helpful, because it deters investors from investing in Greece.” He therefore advised “de-escalation because the more you escalate in political and media circles, the less likelihood of any solution.”

Although the German government and the German media obviously took this criticism to heart, Gysi warned again after meeting Tsipras: “If the euro really breaks apart, then the German economy would suffer most. Then our exports would collapse to such an extent that we cannot afford to play the game.”

Even if the Left Party in Germany is not (yet) directly part of the government, the Tsipras visit once again makes very clear: In common with its fraternal Greek party, the German Left Party stands not on the side of workers, but rather defends the interests of big business, the European Union and the banks.



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