

Mass demonstrations in Greece follow vote against EU austerity

Robert Stevens, Christoph Dreier
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Thousands gathered on Syntagma Square in Athens on Sunday evening following a resounding rejection of the austerity proposals of the European Union and International Monetary Fund. More than 61 percent of the electorate voted “no.”

This followed Friday’s huge turnout in the square, including many thousands of young people, who declared their intention to vote “Oxi” (“No”) in the referendum.

Young people, having borne the brunt of some of the most brutal austerity measures ever carried out against a European population in peacetime, were critical to the success of the “no” vote, rejecting the proposals by two to one. After more than five years of austerity, 50 percent of Greece’s youth remain unemployed, with no prospect of a future.

Chants of “Oxi!, Oxi! Oxi!” [“No!, No! No!”] rang around Athens Sunday night. Sitting on the steps leading to the Parliament, with an overview of the celebratory scene, Athina, a 20-year-old student from Athens, said, “We think it is the best result that we could have. Now other countries can see the Greek people saying we can’t take any more of this.”

Athina was in Syntagma with three of her student friends. Describing the terrible plight of young people, she said, “It is so difficult for us as students. We have to work all the time.” Her friend Afroditi interjected, “We are paid four euros an hour!”

Athina continued, “We are now 20 years old. We live with our parents and they have no money at all. They can’t live and can’t survive. It was about time this happened. It is clear. It is 60 percent. No!”

Asked what they thought about austerity being the EU’s policy throughout the continent, Afroditi said, “The ones who are bringing this to all the countries, it’s about time for them to pay. We won’t help the rich

minority. They are a minority. We are the majority.”

Greek youth were not alone in celebrating the rejection of austerity. David and Ines from the northern Spanish city of Palencia said they felt they had to come to the square to express their solidarity with the Greek people. Both are studying architecture in Athens as part of an exchange program.

“The vote tonight is very important not only for Greece but for the whole continent”, David told us. “We have a very similar situation in Spain,” Ines added. “We are having to pay for the mistakes of the government and for the richest one percent of society.” Their friend Alexia from Paris, also an exchange student, added that in France an increasing number of austerity measures have been passed.

Despite the celebratory mood, some present were also concerned about the future. One young man told the WSW, “I voted ‘no’ but I am not celebrating because I also know the risks of this decision.”

Millions of workers and youth in Greece have made clear their hostility to the onslaught of the global financial oligarchy. The working class opposition embodied in the “no” vote was politically inchoate, with many voters expressing illusions in the Syriza government. However, the vote was also an implicit rejection of Syriza’s continued attempts to seal an agreement with the EU and European Central Bank (ECB) based on an almost identical program of cuts, to be implemented over a slightly delayed timetable.

The *Guardian* posted a snapshot from the island of Evia, where there was a strong “no” vote. It cited the comments of Athina Vlahogiorgou, a single parent with two children, who is one of many long-term unemployed workers. She said, “After the last five years, whoever wants to ignore what’s been done to us has something wrong in their head. This is not about

the Drachma or the Euro. This is a class issue.”

The WSWS reporting team from Athens heard these sentiments repeated with ever growing fervour this week.

As news of the decisive rejection of austerity in Greece became clear, the representatives of the European financial oligarchy were unable to conceal their resentment and hostility at the result.

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the head of the Eurogroup could not hide his contempt, declaring: “This result is very regrettable for the future of Greece...” Ignoring the repudiation by the Greek people of the measures the Eurogroup was demanding, he said: “For recovery of the Greek economy, difficult measures and reforms are inevitable. We will now wait for the initiatives of the Greek authorities.”

Germany’s economy minister and Social Democratic Party leader Sigmar Gabriel declared the result was a “rejection of the rules of the euro zone,” and that “negotiations about a programme worth billions are barely conceivable.”

Slovakia’s Finance Minister Peter Kažimír bluntly warned, “We will not go gently into this good night.”

Following the result, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande spoke by telephone and agreed to convene a meeting of the euro zone’s leaders, to be held Tuesday afternoon.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker is to hold a conference call today with ECB President Mario Draghi, Dijsselbloem, and European Council President Donald Tusk.

Britain’s right-wing *Daily Mail* summed up the class hostility of the ruling elite to a decisive rejection of its cuts programme with the headline, “Meltdown! EU in crisis as Greece voted ‘No’ to crippling cuts and heads for eurozone exit.”

Speaking to the *Financial Times*, Mujtaba Rahman, head of European analysis at the Eurasia Group risk consultancy, declared, “Greece has just signed its own suicide note.”

The Syriza government called the referendum as a ploy, hoping to use it as a means to conclude an agreement with the EU, the ECB and the IMF, whatever the result. However, the referendum only served to galvanise the opposition of the population to the hated austerity memorandums imposed by successive Greek governments.

With the exit polls showing a sizable “no” vote, Syriza Labour Minister Panos Skourletis stated, “The negotiations which will start must be concluded very soon, even after 48 hours.”

In response to Sunday’s vote, Tsipras and other leading Syriza officials stated that they intended to utilise the vote not as a means to put an end to austerity, but to redouble their efforts to reach an agreement with the institutions of the European financial elite. Tsipras claimed, “[T]he mandate you’ve given me does not call for a break with Europe, but rather gives me greater negotiating strength,” adding that “tomorrow the hard work begins.”

With the “no” campaign victory confirmed, Tsipras immediately made overtures to the same EU leaders who have repeatedly refused to make a single concession to Syriza over the past five months. His first call was to France’s Hollande.

Today Tsipras will reportedly meet with the leaders of Greece’s main political parties to canvass their views. These include the leaders of the pro-austerity PASOK and To Potami (The River) parties. Following the vote, the de facto leader of the “yes” campaign, Antonis Samaras of the conservative New Democracy party, tendered his resignation as party leader.



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