

Tsipras expels critics of EU austerity deal from Greek cabinet

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17 July 2015

Late Friday night, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras announced a cabinet reshuffle, expelling critics of the new, devastating European Union (EU) austerity package that Syriza is imposing as it negotiates a third memorandum with the EU on a bailout of the Greek state.

The reshuffle came after 32 of the 149 deputies from the Left Platform within Tsipras' Syriza party voted against the EU austerity package in the Greek parliament on Wednesday. The new cabinet is due to be sworn in at noon today.

Nine ministerial portfolios changed hands in the reshuffle. One full minister and three deputy ministers were expelled from their posts. These included Energy Minister Panayiotis Lafazanis, a leading Left Platform member, deputy Labor Minister Dimitris Stratoulis and deputy Defense Minister Costas Isichos—all three of whom voted against the €13 billion EU austerity package in parliament.

Labor Minister Panos Skourletis, a close ally of Tsipras, has replaced Lafazanis at the energy ministry, where he will oversee the numerous privatizations of utilities and other Greek state assets dictated by the EU. Stratoulis was replaced by Pavlos Chaikalis, a comic actor from Syriza's far-right coalition partners, the Independent Greeks (Anel).

Former alternate Finance Minister Nadia Valavani, who resigned just ahead of Wednesday's vote on EU, was replaced by Tryfon Alexiadis, the head of the Athens and Piraeus tax inspectors' union.

Tsipras chose replacements from within the existing governing coalition of Syriza and Anel, quashing speculation that he would bring members of pro-EU opposition parties, such as New Democracy (ND), To Potami (The River) and the social-democratic PASOK, into his cabinet.

Nonetheless, Tsipras already effectively finds himself at the head of a national unity government, regrouping Syriza with parties dedicated to imposing more austerity, in direct violation of the landslide “no” vote in the July 5 referendum. Having lost support from the Left Platform deputies, Tsipras was forced to rely on the pro-EU opposition parties to secure passage of the new austerity package on Wednesday.

Tsipras' cabinet reshuffle sends a signal that he will tolerate no criticism of the reactionary policies Syriza has agreed upon with the Berlin and the EU. It came just after the German parliament voted yesterday to approve the new EU austerity package, which was largely drawn up by German officials and contains deep cuts in pensions, public sector wages, and fuel subsidies, as well as dictating an extensive privatization program.

The Left Platform's opposition to the deal had a cynical, symbolic character. Its members remained inside the government for months after it was clear that Syriza was repudiating its electoral pledge to end the EU austerity memorandum that brought it to power in January. They issued no more than pro forma criticisms of Syriza's decisions to continue the EU memorandum in February, to loot billions of euros from universities and local administrations to pay off Greece's creditors in the spring, and to implement devastating austerity this month, after the money ran out.

Nonetheless, after Syriza's brazen and monumental betrayal of the “no” vote in the Greek referendum on EU austerity, Tsipras was clearly concerned that even such symbolic opposition, aimed at providing window dressing for Syriza's abject capitulation, could destabilize his government.

On Wednesday, after Valavani's resignation, some 109 of the 201 members of Syriza's Central Committee

(CC) signed a joint declaration denouncing Tsipras' deal with the EU as a "coup." Their statement declared, "The agreement with the institutions was the result of a threat of an immediate financial strangling and is a new memorandum, with unbearable and humiliating conditions of oversight, which is catastrophic for our country and our people."

The statement did not threaten the Syriza government's pursuit of austerity, as few of the CC members who signed the declaration were members of parliament. Nonetheless, Tsipras is moving to whip these forces into line, at least while negotiations on a new memorandum proceed.

While Tsipras has ruled out immediate early elections before a deal with the EU is agreed, Interior Minister Nikos Voutsis has said that Syriza might call new elections in September or October.



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