

Former Greek finance minister Varoufakis facing calls for criminal prosecution

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The witch-hunt against former Syriza finance minister Yanis Varoufakis by various right-wing forces has intensified after Greece's senior state prosecutor, Efterpi Koutzamani, ordered parliament to examine a swathe of complaints against him.

Five separate lawsuits have been brought against Varoufakis. He faces a series of charges that could lead to his imprisonment, including treason and participating in a criminal organisation.

He is under attack after revealing that he carried out "Plan B" contingency planning when he was finance minister, including looking at setting up a parallel payments system that could be rolled out overnight in the event that Greece's banks were forced to close. (See: Conflicts erupt over Syriza's contingency planning for Greek euro exit)

In transcripts of a private teleconference, leaked at the weekend by the right-wing *Kathemerini*, Varoufakis said that at one stage he enlisted a close friend of his, Michalis Hatzitheodorou, to hack into the public revenues system within the finance ministry.

The attacks against Varoufakis bear the hallmarks of a well-prepared operation. The first set of complaints were brought last week, with *Kathemerini's* release of the transcripts then used to ratchet up the campaign.

The first was brought by Apostolos Gletsos, an actor who is the head of the pro-EU Teleia (Full Stop) Party and the mayor of Stylida in central Greece. Teleia, a nationalist formation, was founded last year with Gletsos saying, "I support any and all views with a national concern whatever democratic party" they derived from and "honour and respect the people of our armed forces and our security forces who guarantee our safety."

The second case was brought by lawyer Panagiotis Giannopoulos. His complaint accuses Varoufakis of

high treason and causing "incalculable damage to the interests of the country."

Koutzamani also authorised a colleague to establish whether any "non-political" figures should face criminal charges in connection with the affair.

This followed the decisions of a group of five lawyers who are seeking an investigation into the actions of Varoufakis and his associates. According to *Kathemerini*, the "charges would involve violation of privacy data, breach of duty, violation of currency laws and belonging to a criminal organization."

Speculation emerged Wednesday that among the "non-political" figures who could face criminal charges is the US-based economist James K. Galbraith, with whom Varoufakis worked closely while finance minister.

The attempt to railroad Varoufakis takes place as representatives of the European Union (EU) led "troika" return to Athens in order to oversee the imposition of the £12 billion austerity package it finalised with the government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras this month. This would lay the basis for a third "bailout", in which up to €86 billion would be released to Greece.

As with the previous loans, this would go straight back to paying off Greece's creditors and would be contingent on even deeper cuts and a further decimation of democratic rights.

So despised are the troika that its "technical" team, who returned to Athens in the last few days, is being guarded around the clock at the city's Hilton hotel by more than 250 police officers.

The lawsuit of Gletsos reveals the openly pro-EU bias of the campaign against Varoufakis. It states Varoufakis, "either through malice or extreme negligence," exposed Greece and its citizens to

negative reactions by third countries. The actions of Varoufakis “upset the friendly relations of the Greek state with our partners in the European Union” and caused “massive damage to the Greek economy.”

The witch-hunt testifies to the reactionary character of the EU. Even the consideration of any contingency plans, not overseen by the troika, is now treated as serious criminal activity.

Under Greek law, Varoufakis, as a sitting deputy, is immune from prosecution. Only parliament, by a ballot, can decide if immunity can be lifted so he can stand trial.

Four deputies from the main conservative opposition New Democracy (ND), have submitted a request that Varoufakis be forced to testify before a parliamentary commission. Their letter also threatens Tsipras’ position asking, “if the Prime Minister and the government were aware of the actions of the former Minister of Finance and to what extent.”

Varoufakis and his team, the deputies say, wanted to establish a parallel banking system, “which would operate with euro first but had the potential of becoming a harbinger of the drachma.”

ND deputy and shadow finance minister Anna Asimakopoulou told the *Guardian* Wednesday, “I would not want to be in Varoufakis’ shoes. I think that it is highly likely he will end up in a courtroom.”

In response, Varoufakis said he would have been “remiss” not to have formulated alternative plans. In an article published in the *Financial Times* on Tuesday he noted the dictatorial powers imposed by the troika in Greece over the last five years in which basic democratic norms have been torn up.

Varoufakis said he was forced to take the measures outlined in the transcripts as there is “a hideous restriction of national sovereignty imposed by the ‘troika’ of lenders on Greek ministers, who are denied access to departments of their ministries pivotal in implementing innovative policies.”

He followed this up with a tweet to US columnist Paul Krugman, Wednesday, reading, “Have you not heard Paul? Drawing up contingency plans vs the troika unapproved by the troika = High Treason.”

Such is the scale of Tsipras’s capitulation to the troika that it has forced a section of his party, the Left Platform, headed by the Stalinist Panagiotis Lafazanis, to register their opposition.

On Monday evening, the Left Platform held a rally in Athens addressed by Lafazanis, in which he outlined his faction’s policies, including a Greek withdrawal from the euro zone on a nationalist basis. Describing the event the *GreekReporter* website said it “looked suspiciously like an election campaign.”

Speculation intensified this week that Tsipras will split with the Left Platform, which would necessitate him calling new elections, in order to secure a parliamentary majority and pass the savage cuts demanded by the troika.

On Wednesday, Tsipras threatened the Left Platform with expulsion if they did not support the agreement he signed. Speaking to Sto Kokkino radio station he said, “Regardless of whether or not we agree or disagree with these conventional obligations, we will implement them. But nothing beyond that.”

“You can’t say you disagree with government decisions but that you back the government,” adding that those who opposed him in parliament should “give up their seats.”

“I’m the last person who would want elections. If I don’t have a parliamentary majority, though, we will be forced to head to a snap vote.”

Referring to the various pseudo-left outfits that make up Syriza, Tsipras warned, “Syriza’s problems are not going to become the country’s problems... We must admit that Syriza never became a unified party. The effort to move from a party of many factions to a unified one didn’t bring the desired results.”

Syriza’s central committee is to meet today, with the Left Platform demanding that an emergency party congress be called immediately. Tsipras told the party’s political secretariat Monday he favoured a congress in September, i.e., in the aftermath of a new loan agreement with the troika, expected to be reached by August 20.



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