

Minister from Independent Greeks appointed by Tsipras forced to resign from Syriza-led coalition

Robert Stevens
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Dimitris Kammenos, a deputy minister for the Independent Greeks (ANEL) in the new Syriza-led government, was forced to resign Wednesday following protests over anti-Semitic, racist and homophobic comments he made on social media.

Syriza won the election last Sunday, but was unable to secure an overall majority in the 300-seat parliament. Party leader Alexis Tsipras immediately reprised the coalition government with ANEL that ruled from January to August. He has claimed re-election as a mandate to impose the mass austerity programme demanded by the European Union and global financial elite.

The right-wing xenophobic ANEL has no popular base of support, securing just 200,000 votes in the latest election. But this translated into 10 seats in the parliament (down from 13 in January), giving the new coalition a slender majority.

Tsipras again handed the critical position of defence minister to ANEL leader Panos Kammenos.

Dimitris Kammenos (no relation to Panos Kammenos) was handed the post of deputy minister for infrastructure and transport. Three other Independent Greeks members were also given cabinet positions.

The Independent Greeks were formed in February 2012 as a right-wing split from the conservative New Democracy (ND), which led a pro-austerity government at the time. Dimitris Kammenos was a founding member of ANEL and was voted into parliament for the first time in January.

Syriza justified its alliance with ANEL on the basis that they were consistent opponents of austerity. This lie crumbled along with Syriza's own anti-austerity pose when Tsipras agreed first to extend the existing troika austerity programme in February and then signed the much harsher third austerity programme in July with

ANEL's full backing.

A central reason Syriza chose to govern with ANEL was due to its close ties with the military. In October 2014, even before entering the first coalition with Syriza, Panos Kammenos, an opponent of civilian control over the armed forces, visited the Ministry of Defence (MoD). According to the MoD's web site, he was "briefed by the Minister of National Defence Dimitris Avramopoulos and the military leadership on the operational structure and operation of the Armed Forces."

Syriza's former Left Platform faction played a key role in ensuring that the alliance with the Independent Greeks was established. As well as taking up other senior cabinet positions in the Syriza-ANEL government, Costas Isychos, a leading Left Platform figure, served as deputy to Panos Kammenos at the Defence Ministry.

Dimitris Kammenos is a reserve captain in the Greek Special Forces. He also has numerous connections to the banks and big business. According to his party biography, "He currently holds the position of President and Managing Director of the Group of Companies 'Think Big', whose headquarters are in Athens and which has offices in Malta, Tirana, London, Cyprus, Dubai and Doha."

Previously he "also served as an executive manager for American Express International and has also collaborated in international funding projects as well as in the issuing of specialised financial instruments with international banks Calyon, Berenberg, Standard Chartered and the financing house Tradition/Geneva."

Among the numerous filthy social media postings of Kammenos were suggestions that the State of Israel was behind the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center. In a Tweet, Kammenos alleged that Jewish employees were warned in advance to skip work on

September 11.

In a response to a Tweet by *Russia Today* noting the surge of anti-Semitism in Europe, Kammenos asked, “Have you recorded the attacks of Jews against all of us?”

He recently published a Facebook posting which including a doctored photo of the gates of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The words above the gate “Arbeit macht frei” (Work makes you free) had been changed to, “We’re staying in Europe.” The latter slogan was used by pro-EU supporters during July’s referendum on austerity in Greece.

In June, the *To Vima* noted that Kammenos mocked the Athens Gay Pride parade as “pathetic”.

He was handed the post despite his views being well known.

According to a source from Tsipras’s office, the prime minister asked ANEL to investigate the attributed comments and said that Dimitris Kammenos should consider resigning, as such comments “cannot be consistent with the values and ethics of the coalition government.”

After resigning, Kammenos issued a pro forma apology and played down the postings. He claimed that 15 people managed his social media accounts, and said his profile had been hacked repeatedly in the past.

Tsipras’s statements are rank hypocrisy. He is well aware of the reactionary character of the Independent Greeks.

ANEL MP Stavroula Xoulidou wrote an essay titled, “Philhellenes, Greek-haters, Anti-Hellenes—Kissinger and the World Zionist Movement threaten our nation with total dehellenization.” In it she asserts, “The anti-Greek feelings of the British and the Americans are directed by the World Zionist Movement.”

She cites as supposed “proof”, “For example, the Cyprus issue is inaugurated by the English-Jewish Benjamin Disraeli (son of Isaac Disraeli),” before adding that the Turkish invasion of the island of Cyprus “happened under the blessing of the Patriarch of the World Zionist Movement, the American-Jewish FM of the USA Kissinger...”

Party leader Panos Kammenos is a self-declared opponent of multiculturalism, and the party stresses the primacy of “Greek history and culture”. 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 December 2014, he suggested on TV that only the

Orthodox Church pays taxes in Greece, not Buddhists, Jews and Muslims. In February, one of his first acts as defence minister was to provocatively fly over the islets of Imia, whose ownership Greece disputes with Turkey, to drop wreaths in memory of three Greek officers killed nearby in a helicopter crash 19 years ago. In 1996, Greece came close to war over the islets. Kammenos’s provocation resulted in Turkish fighter jets being scrambled and entering Greek airspace.

During the annual March 25 Greek Independence Day parade in Athens, a Greek Navy Seals (OYK) detachment marched shouting extreme right-wing slogans. The defence minister Kammenos denied that the OYK forces chanted the slogans, and claimed that footage showing this was from the previous year’s parade.

Commenting on Dimitris Kammenos’s resignation, a Syriza official continued to defend the coalition with ANEL, stating. “There is not an issue with Tsipras’s judgment... It is about keeping a balance with your partner in government.”

For the sections of the Greek ruling elite and affluent middle class that Syriza represents, the episode is a temporary embarrassment that must not interfere with the task of imposing billions in spending cuts and even greater reductions in the living standards of millions of people.

However, for *Financial Times* Europe Editor and Associate Editor Tony Barber, the tensions created by the resignation would “probably be manageable, for the moment, but troubling questions about the competence of the ruling coalition are already being asked.”

Barber noted, “All this indicates that Mr. Tsipras has a problem with his peculiar choice of coalition partner... what does this episode say about the new government’s ability to implement the very strict and unpopular reform measures demanded by Greece’s creditors in return for the latest international bailout?”



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