

Fighting austerity in Greece and beyond

A historic moment for the European Left

Introduction

Greece has been at the centre of the Euro crisis for years. Nowhere else in the Eurozone is the economic crisis deeper and the social situation worse. The austerity measures imposed by the government and the Troika are aiming to fundamentally change the distribution of wealth and the relations of power within Greek society, especially between labour and capital. These policies have reflected back on the rest of the Eurozone, e.g. through the Fiscal compact in 2012 or the Competitiveness pact discussed since early 2013. Greece can therefore be seen as the laboratory for the neoliberal restructuring for Europe as a whole. The political experiments Greek society is put through may be more radical than elsewhere, but at least indirectly affect everyone in the Eurozone and the EU.

At the same time, Greece is the country where the chances for a party of the Left, SYRIZA, to get into power are biggest. Five years ago, SYRIZA barely managed to pass the threshold of votes required to enter parliament. Today they are the main opposition force, leading the polls by a large gap. A SYRIZA government would be the first and only one in the Eurozone to openly oppose the austerity policies and the neoliberal restructuring described above. The elections which could make this possible will be held in 2016 at the latest, but are widely expected to take place in late 2014 or early 2015. These prospects have made Greece the major place of hope for leftists and those fighting austerity across Europe. In this sense, the importance of SYRIZA's struggle goes beyond Greece: If they manage to get into power and implement their policies, this will open spaces for left alternatives all over Europe. If they should fail, the Left in Europe may lose credibility and hope for a long time. Thus, the question of how we can contribute to a political change in Greece and in extension Europe is the main focus of this paper.

First, we give an overview of SYRIZA's history and discuss their characterization as a new kind of party, closely connected to the social movements created by crisis protests. Second, we analyse the challenges SYRIZA will face in the near future, especially on the European level. We distinguish between three phases: the electoral campaign; the process of forming a government after the elections; the first months of a possible SYRIZA government. Third, we present a strategic approach and concrete ideas leftists and austerity critics outside Greece could use to support SYRIZA in this crucial period. We think that if a left government in Greece is to have a chance, this is not possible without serious and coordinated support from other parts of Europe. We will try to initiate a solidarity campaign in Austria, on which we also make some remarks in the last chapter.

Our paper is based on a series of interviews with politicians and activists from SYRIZA, the broader Greek Left and other experts from Austria and Germany. The interviews were conducted in Athens in early September or via the internet. In the case of Giorgos Chondros, Ioanna Meitani, John Milios, Eva Völpel, Walter Baier and Haris Triandafilidou, we translated the quotes from German. We thank our interviewees for their time and openness and wish them all the best. Their struggle is crucial not only for the people in Greece, but the whole of Europe.

I. SYRIZA

History

As an electoral coalition, SYRIZA was founded in 2004 by a large number of parties and organisations from diverse Left traditions, including Communist, Trotskyist, Maoist, Green and Feminist groups. The strongest group within SYRIZA was and is until today Synaspismos. It developed from various splits of the Communist party since 1968. Synaspismos was itself an umbrella group, coming from a eurocommunist tradition. In the years leading up to the foundation of SYRIZA, its members had gained experiences in mobilisations like against the G8 summit in Genoa 2001, opening the party to the topics and practices of social movements. The first years of SYRIZA were marked by conflicts over strategic perspectives and disappointing electoral results, for example 4,6 per cent at the general election in 2009. In 2010, the right wing of Synaspismos, which advocated a more government-oriented strategy and coalition with PASOK, split from the party. They went on to become the moderate left party DIMAR which later supported the austerity government under Samaras. Following its support of the December 2008 revolt and the split of the right wing, SYRIZA took a left turn and re-assured their strategic orientation towards the movements. In spring 2012, SYRIZA announced that they were seeking to form the next Greek government. (Candeias/Völpel 2014: 171; Laskos/Tsakalotos 2013: 128)

SYRIZA received 16,8% of the votes in the election of May 2012 and as no government could be formed, an election was called again in June. The campaign culminated in a confrontation between SYRIZA and the conservative ND and ended with SYRIZA coming second with 26,9%. ND won with a slight margin (29,7%) and formed a government with PASOK and DIMAR. Ever since, SYRIZA has concentrated on developing a left government programme, building European networks and strengthening their relationship with the movements. In July 2013, SYRIZA, up to then still an electoral coalition, became a party. In terms of electoral support the party stabilised, coming first with 26,5% in the European elections of 2014. The simultaneous local elections yielded mixed results as SYRIZA is traditionally weaker on the local level, but the country's largest region Attica now has a SYRIZA governor.

Characteristics

A pluralistic party

The 2013 political resolution of SYRIZA says: „SYRIZA has been established as a unified, democratic, multi-tendency, mass party of the contemporary Left for the strengthening of an already powerful popular movement of subversion with the aim of cancelling the memoranda, erasing most of the debt and implementing a program of social and productive reconstruction.“ (left.gr 2013) From the beginning of the electoral coalition in the early 2000s until today, SYRIZA unites leftists from diverse backgrounds and generations. Many were strongly influenced by the anti-war and altermondialist movements, and they are united by a commitment to a transformative path to Socialism. (Candeias/Völpel 2014: 171; Laskos/Tsakalotos 2013: 128) Dissent from within the party is prominently voiced by the so-called Left Platform. It demands a stronger focus on movements and social struggles to attach larger parts of the population to the party. Also, it is more favourable of an exit from the Eurozone than the party majority and leadership. (Dericquebourg 2013) The Left Platform has considerable strength within SYRIZA: At the 2013 party convention, its motions received between 25 and 40 per cent of votes. Around a dozen of the party's 70 MPs support the Left Platform. (Kouvelakis 2013) So far, the different groups and factions have managed to deal with their differences in a productive way, not endangering the party's ascent.

Commitment to the movements

The most central and noted feature of SYRIZA lies in their relationship to and understanding of the importance of political movements. The party's general understanding of politics is built on the indispensable relationship of left parties and a possible government with movements.

SYRIZA was active in and in solidarity with movements even before the recent crisis. They have supported the diverse struggles of refugees, students and others and voiced their support of the December 2008 riots despite massive political and public pressure. Since 2010, SYRIZA has been strongly involved in the anti-austerity protests, movements and the developing solidarity initiatives since 2010. Members, activists and MPs took part, provided support and put forward left analyses and proposals. This commitment to equal participation in and cooperation with the movements is voiced throughout the party. For Alexandros Bistis, SYRIZA's main campaign coordinator, the attitude is clear: "We need your participation and actions and we need to be with you, every day. Whatever happens there, we will try to do it together." Through this organic participation, SYRIZA's rejection of the memorandum and traditional clientelistic politics became credible to large parts of the movements. When SYRIZA announced their claim for a left government in 2012, "it was possible for the party to transport the protest and social struggles into the bourgeois state, to sharpen existing political conflicts, and to deepen the crisis of bourgeois hegemony" (Milios/Triandafilidou 2013; Völpe 2014: 149; Laskos/Tsakalotos 2013: 119)

The party's commitment to the movements becomes clear in the way the platform Solidarity4All was set up. Funded by a share of SYRIZA's MPs' salaries, it supports solidarity initiatives throughout Greece like solidarity clinics, community gardens, social centres and others. The platform does not interfere or coordinate, but tries to support the decentralised efforts of local groups by providing information and infrastructure.

SYRIZA's left government project is also based on the idea that the state is only one of many important political battlegrounds for radical change. Milios/Triandafilidou (2013) express this attitude the following way: "Social struggles in civil society and social struggles inside the state have to strengthen one another. Seeking government power is not the goal but an indispensable intermediate step. We all know that winning government does not mean winning state power and even less means winning back structural economic and social power. But it can help to change power relations."

While this understanding is shared throughout the party, some believe that SYRIZA does not do enough to support social struggles. Christos Giovanopoulos from Solidarity4All argues: "My critique to SYRIZA and the radical Left is that while they try to prepare a viable alternative for after the elections, not much has been done to organise people from below. It is good to respect their [the movements'] autonomy, but SYRIZA should work as a provider of the political glue", i.e. a common cause that connects the diverse struggles.

From connective to strategic party

A recent theoretical debate has identified SYRIZA as what Porcaro calls a connective party. (Porcaro 2013) Rather than the old mass parties, which meant to organise and lead its members and followers, a connective party is a coalition of parties, unions, movements or other organisations. While the mass parties were representations of the old, relatively homogenous classes of the 19th and 20th century, the connective party organises today's more fragmented society. Among its main characteristics is the practice of "explicitly making the social and cultural divisions within the subaltern classes and their overcoming an issue of political analysis and strategic planning." (Rehmann 2013) The traditional party, which is just one part of the connective party, does not seek to dominate the other organisations. Rather, depending on the situation of struggles, a different part of the coalition takes the lead temporarily. When street

mobilisations dominate, movements direct the action. If parliament becomes the arena of the common struggle, the party does. The same goes for unions in case of strikes. In many cases, the diverse partners of the connective party are linked by individuals being active in more than just one of them. SYRIZA, given its pluralistic character and its relationship to the movements, seems to come close to the definition.

However, the connective party faces at least three limits (Porcaro 2013): First, it depends on its ability to organise a very large part of the population. Second, it is most effective when there are many and regularly changing social issues, rather than the need to focus on one task. Third, it does not solve the problematic relationship the modern Left has with the state and political power – even though real change seems to be impossible without them. According to Porcaro, if the connective party wants to overcome these limits, it must transform into a strategic party. The strategic party retains the plurality of its parts and functions, but manages to “condense them into a common, yet flexible policy.” (Candeias/Völpel 217) The questions this poses in the Greek case is: Can SYRIZA turn the struggle against the memoranda and for a political alternative to austerity into the unifying purpose the formation of a strategic party needs? Will the party be able to provide the “glue” Christos Giovanopoulos mentioned above?

In any case, the characteristics that make SYRIZA a new kind of party have made them an inspiration to leftists all over Europe.

SYRIZA's strengths and weaknesses

Factors for success

The main structural factor for the fundamental changes in the Greek political system is of course the deep economic crisis and the political choices of the ruling classes. Under the regular conditions of neoliberal capitalism, its consequences like unemployment and poverty are usually attributed to individual shortcomings of those affected. Left parties find it increasingly difficult to address them as structural problems. In the Greek case, the rapid acceleration of the crisis and its effect on huge parts of the population made this individualisation of social problems impossible and opened up a space for left interpretations and demands. However, as history shows, this can also work in favour of the extreme right.

The reasons why SYRIZA still emerged as the main political beneficiary are manifold and there is an on-going debate about them. For the purpose of this paper we highlight three factors we consider relevant for further strategies.

Mass movements against austerity

It was not primarily the harshness of the austerity measures, but the massive popular resistance against them that provided the basis for the shift to the left. “The movement was a big catalyst for change”, Panagiotis Sotiris, sociologist and activist with Antarsya, says. “There is no automatic link between social crisis and far right rise. If there is a movement, it can also lead to solidarity, collective aspiration, belief in the possibility of collective change and democracy.” Especially when the protests were met with brutal repression and did not lead to any political changes, people turned away from the traditional parties which they perceived as corrupt and detached from the population. Haris Triandafilidou describes the dynamic as follows: “There was a radicalisation in all of society. This does not mean that they all became leftists at once, but you could very intensely feel the rupture of the hegemonic discourse. And this anger resonated in the 2012 elections.” This radicalisation opened up the space for SYRIZA, which had consolidated as a party and strengthened their ties with the movements in the previous years. They had chosen to fight the crisis policies both inside parliament and out in the streets. Their organic participation in the protests and struggles provided them with credibility in representing a different political programme as well as a different way of politics altogether.

Claim to power at the right moment

Another reason that proved essential for SYRIZA's quick rise was their strategic choice to make a claim to power. When the party announced that they wanted to lead the next Greek government ahead of the elections in spring 2012, they were a party of 5 per cent and neither politically nor organisationally prepared for government. However, by promising to take the struggle to the level of the state, they provided a new vision after the disillusionment with the mainstream parties and the slowing mobilisations. After the election of May 2012, SYRIZA was asked to join a government of "national salvation" with ND, PASOK and others. They refused, stating the other parties' attachment to the memoranda and austerity as the reason. When the mandate to form a government moved on to SYRIZA, "our answer was not to talk to the big parties, which we knew would achieve nothing, but to the trade unions and organisations of the left. This earned us their respect," says Haris Triandafilidou. SYRIZA's firm political attitude and their – albeit symbolic – inclusion of the broader left in the post-election process further helped to establish them as a credible alternative to the traditional parties.

Weakness of other left parties

Why was it SYRIZA who profited from the situation – and not another party of the Left? Before the crisis erupted in 2010, social democratic PASOK had a strong base throughout the country and had just won national elections. After the PASOK government signed the memoranda and enforced austerity, their support collapsed spectacularly. The third established parliamentary party of the left, KKE, is an orthodox communist party which distances itself from most other parties and movements. Their dogmatic views and refusal to support a left government alienated parts of their base. DIMAR, which started out as a right-wing split from SYRIZA and was later joined by former PASOK MPs, lost its credibility as a left alternative when they joined the austerity government in 2012. Smaller, non-parliamentary left parties like ANTARSYA only benefitted a little from the shift to the left due to the polarisation of the political confrontation. In this political landscape, people turned to SYRIZA, who stood out as pluralist, honestly opposing austerity and proposing a real alternative.

Remaining weaknesses

Targeting new voters

SYRIZA have been leading the nationwide polls since fall 2013. In 2014, they came first in the European elections. With national elections expected soon, one of the challenges will be to expand and strengthen their electoral base. Recent analyses show an increase of class polarisation: SYRIZA are strong in large and medium cities, where the crisis and the consequences of austerity have hit hardest. They also have strong results in working and lower middle class areas, with young voters and public employees, while they are weak with pensioners and private sector employees. The 2014 elections also emphasized the party's need to build and strengthen local structures, as SYRIZA's results in the European elections were better than in the simultaneous local elections. (The Press Project 2014; Laskos/Tsakalotos 2013: 127)

Expanding the party base

While elections are on everyone's agenda, SYRIZA officials are also concerned about the weak connection to their base. While their presence in movements and electoral results are strong, the number of people who are actively involved with the party is considered much too low. Alexandros Bistis, SYRIZA campaign coordinator, explains his view: "We have offices all over Greece and we have activists, but not enough to say that we represent 30% of the Greek people. A big proportion of the vote we got was without real contact with us. So only few of them are really aware of our ideology and programme. Most choose us because they cannot stand the way things are any more. They shift from one party to another, hoping that our party is not going to disappoint them like previous parties did. But there is no solid connection between our ideology and their vote – that's a big problem." This lack of connection with the base and real adoption of

SYRIZA's programme by voters brings about several problems. It endangers the stability of their electoral results as people are more likely to move away when they don't feel connected to the party and their programme. More fundamentally, if their voters don't share SYRIZA's conviction, any left government project and steps towards radical changes are endangered. It will be essential for the people to withstand the uncertainty of a confrontation with European elites and possible future hardship in context with social transformation. And as many in SYRIZA have told us: A left government will need determined people and strong movements to push it forward. Furthermore, if a party of 30 per cent still has the structures and number of activists of a party of 5 per cent, it is harder to defend against opportunists who might just want a share of SYRIZA's success.

The left government project

The political programme

Since 2012, SYRIZA has been preparing intensely for a left government project. The reversal of the memorandum policies is the most immediate aim. It is however usually linked in the debates to the party's ambition to start a process of fundamental social and political transformation. In September 2014, Alexis Tsipras presented the cornerstones of a government plan for reconstruction (Macropolis 2014):

- **Debt:** SYRIZA will demand the cancellation of a large part of the Greek debt and to tie future repayment to growth rates. A central idea that John Milios and other have repeated to us is a European debt conference, where the sovereign debt of all European countries should be debated and partly cancelled. SYRIZA will also push for a European public investment programme and for the ECB to directly buy sovereign bonds.
- **Humanitarian crisis:** With a 2 billion package, including free electricity and food subsidies for 300,000 households, SYRIZA wants to support those hit hardest by the crisis. They will re-establish free access to health care, increase the lowest pensions and introduce rent subsidies. These measures will be non-negotiable.
- **Growth:** The most important aspect of the plan for growth is the restoration of the minimum wage to the pre-crisis level of 751 euros and the increase of the tax-free threshold. The widely criticised general property tax should be replaced by a tax on large real estates. The biggest Greek banks, which the state nationalised to a large part but left in the hands of their former owners, should be restructured. Also, newly founded special purpose banks should administer the reconstruction of certain sectors of the economy. Regarding the private debt problem, there should be a haircut for all below the poverty line and the establishment of a special board to negotiate loan settlements between debtors and banks.
- **Employment:** The labour rights framework will be restored to its pre-crisis situation, re-establishing collective bargaining and job protection. SYRIZA's plans also include a job creation programme for 300,000 jobs in the private sector and local governments within two years.
- **Memorandum:** Another one of SYRIZA's major demands is the cancellation of the memoranda. This aim might prove even more difficult to reach than others. "Where the struggle really lies and where we will really need allies is in abolishing the memorandum and regarding labour relations", Haris Golemis, director of Nicos Poulantzas Institute, says. What this cancellation would mean for future visits by the Troika remains unclear to us.

An impossible task?

There are concerns among critics and members of SYRIZA alike whether the party will manage the seemingly impossible: to push measures for immediate relief, renegotiate with the European Institutions and creditors and pursue a radical programme of transforming the state. These are serious and relevant concerns. A left government programme can go wrong in many different ways. Pushing for a rupture with EU actors too strongly or soon could quickly alienate the Greek people and deprive the party of the possibility to govern further. Not pushing hard enough and accepting too many compromises can lead to the feared social-democratisation of SYRIZA, pulling it away from its political ideals and goals. However, all of our interviewees were very much aware of these dangers and showed a strong will to try and make it work. There is a strong consensus that small measures of relief and renegotiation and more radical changes will not be possible apart from one another. First, every increase in social rights or wages should be considered radical in the current situation. Second, because there will simply be no turning back to the period and social arrangements of the pre-2008 era. Many within SYRIZA are aware that there will not be an in-between, or as two of their prominent officials put it: "The most likely resolution to the crisis will be either in the direction of a far more authoritarian capitalism or moves to transcend capitalism in some important dimensions." (Laskos/Tsakalotos 2013: 9)

II. Challenges

Phase 1: Winning the election

The next election: 2015 or 2016?

In order to form a government, SYRIZA needs to win the next general election which has to be held in June 2016 at the latest. However, our interviewees unanimously expect a snap election to take place either in late 2014 or early 2015. On the one hand, the government of ND and PASOK is getting weaker by the day and both parties suffered huge losses at the European elections in May 2014. In October 2014, the coalition had to resort to a vote of confidence in parliament to keep their MPs in line. (Kathimerini 2014) On the other hand, the Greek opposition will have the chance to force a snap election in early 2015. In February, the current president Karolos Papoulias will leave office and his successor has to be elected by parliament. The candidate needs 200 out of 300 votes in the first two ballots and 180 votes in a third and last ballot. If there is no such majority, the Greek constitution demands the dissolution of parliament and a snap election. (Kadritzke 2014) Since the coalition is only backed by 155 votes, it would need the support of at least two of the smaller opposition parties and/or most of the 23 independent MPs. Private talks with those groups have been initiated by government representatives as early as summer 2014. However, all opposition parties have publicly declared not to support any government candidate. If the election of a new president really should fail, parliament will dissolve in February or March next year and the election has to be held within 40 days. (Constitution of Greece: Art. 32) To our interviewees, it is unlikely that ND and PASOK will wait for a certain defeat in parliament but might rather stop negotiating at some point and call for a snap election themselves. In our opinion, the most likely scenario is for the government to wait for the official exit from the memoranda in December 2014 before calling the election, so they can use this political success in their campaigns.

Looking back: The 2012 elections

Looking back at the last general elections gives us an idea of some of the challenges SYRIZA will be facing on the European front. The two ballots of 2012 saw SYRIZA jumping from 5 to 17 and finally 27 per cent of votes against almost everyone's expectations. This triggered a wave of propaganda (against SYRIZA) and blackmail (against the Greek sovereign) without precedent in the history of the EU:

The most direct intervention took place when the Troika held back part of a credit disbursement a few days after the May elections. (Al Jazeera 2012) This can be interpreted as an attempt to put pressure both on the Greek political establishment and the voters. Other interventions were intended to influence or rather blackmail the Greek electorate more directly. Before the first election, German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble threatened Greek voters by saying that if the result was a majority against the memoranda, "Greece will have to bear the consequences of that." (Digital Journal 2012) In another interview he called SYRIZA "demagogues". (Mannheimer Morgen 2012) French president François Hollande "warned" Greeks on their national television that "if the impression is given that the Greeks want to move away from commitments that were taken [...], there will be countries in the Eurozone that will want to end the presence of Greece in the Eurozone." (Guardian 2012a) Austrian finance minister Maria Fekter stated that "Greece will not receive any more economic aid if the election on 17 June results in a government that refuses to keep to the terms of the memorandum." The Institute of International Finance, the largest global association of the financial industry, published a report stating that a coalition between ND and PASOK was needed. If the new parliament was too fragmented to allow for that, an unelected government of technocrats should be installed. (Kathimerini 2012) Leading media outlets, especially in Germany, assisted in the propaganda. Three days before the second election in June 2012, Financial Times Deutschland used its editorial article to issue a letter to the Greek electorate. In Greek and German, it demanded that they "resist the demagogues" of SYRIZA and

vote for ND instead. (Financial Times Deutschland 2012) One day before the election, Germany's major tabloid newspaper BILD followed the example and published their own letter titled "Dear Greeks, make no mistake right now". It went on that Greeks could vote for "every clown from the left or right they wanted" if they didn't need Germany's billions. The letter closed by saying that Greeks in fact didn't have any choice, because "your only choice is between painful sanity or total doom."

As intended, this propaganda and blackmail spread fear and uncertainty among Greeks. According to SYRIZA's campaign manager Alexandros Bistis, their main problem was the notion that a SYRIZA win would mean the exit from the Eurozone or even the EU. "The cultivation of fear and our lack of self-confidence was our main opponent", Bistis says in retrospect. He knows of company executives who warned their employees not to vote for SYRIZA. In case of a SYRIZA win, the company would move abroad and all jobs would be lost. Bistis: "The fear exists on all levels of life, public and personal."

Looking ahead: The 2015/6 election, national level

In the upcoming electoral campaign, SYRIZA will face numerous challenges on the national level. Since our focus is on the European level, we only name some of them. First, finding and keeping the balance between SYRIZA's two roles, i.e. representing a credible alternative to the establishment and preparing for government, will become even more difficult as elections approach. With each step, the party risks either alienating its leftist base or losing its appeal to mainstream voters. At the same time, SYRIZA needs to foster a stronger connection to as many people as possible to ensure that the prospect of a left government is accepted among them. Also, the Greek media are very hostile towards SYRIZA, using the whole spectrum of anti-left demonisation. "They say we are anti-religious communists, will confiscate private property. Also, we are called friends of terrorism and anarchism", Karitzis says. This shows that fear will be among SYRIZA's main problems again – but this time it will mostly be spread by the national government, not European protagonists. "They will say: You have lost much, so keep what you have left. SYRIZA will come and take it from you, too", Kostas Isychos from the party's foreign relations department expects. Similar arguments might be used in regards to Greece's geographical proximity to Ukraine and the Middle East, using people's wish for peace to make voting for the Left seem dangerous. SYRIZA plans to counter government campaigns based on fear by emphasizing that it is possible to change current policies and that people have the right to demand this. "The main idea is to support society's self-confidence, to fight the idea that we are totally dependent on somebody else and that we cannot make our own plans as a people", Bistis says. European societies were in danger of accepting that they wouldn't be free to decide on issues like economic policy and that democracy must not affect markets, Karitzis adds. "There are historic times where you have to fight for your values, like democracy, liberty, dignity. We should try to give hope to people. We have to say: Things are not easy, we have to be prepared to fight – but that's not SYRIZA's fault, that's our historic predicament."

Looking ahead: The 2015/6 election, European level

On the European level, however, our interviewees expect less open hostility than in 2012. "They won't do us the favour to openly oppose us. This time, if they are hostile it would be a good thing for us", Karitzis says. According to this point of view, European elites have accepted the prospect of a SYRIZA government and made plans for that scenario. It was the lack of such a plan in 2012 that caused their resort to propaganda and blackmail. This time, European elites might take a more patient approach and quietly try to make a SYRIZA government fail, relying on the austerity regime established in Europe through new institutions and contracts during the last years. "They will accept us, negotiate with us at the beginning. They will say: 'Let's see what you can do. There are rules you cannot violate, there are agreements you should respect.' They are confident they created a situation since 2012 no government can change." However, Karitzis adds: "This doesn't affect what they are going to say to European societies." Outside Greece, anti-SYRIZA-propaganda will still be strong, especially in Germany. Recent electoral successes by chauvinist Alternative für Deutschland could push the public debate on the Greek election even

further to the right – unless the Left intervenes. German author and activist Eva Völpel expects public interventions by Jens Weidman, president of the Bundesbank, other neoliberal economists and key media.

General sentiment: Optimism

Despite all these challenges, the general sentiment among SYRIZA officials and activists is that they will win the election and form the next government. This optimism is based on several arguments: First, SYRIZA won the European election in May 2014 and achieved some significant wins at the regional elections taking place at the same time. Second, they have been leading nation-wide polls for months, scoring 36 per cent in late September 2014. (Greek Reporter 2014) Third, the majority-friendly electoral law allows for an absolute majority at 35 to 40 per cent of votes, depending on the number of parties passing the threshold. The poll cited above gives SYRIZA 146 out of 300 seats in parliament.

Phase 2: Forming a government

If SYRIZA wins the next general election but fails to gain an absolute majority, it is not certain that they will be able to form a government.

Looking back: The technocratic government

Again, looking back on the near past sheds light on possible scenarios. In November 2011, prime minister Giorgos Papandreou resigned and was followed by central banker Lucas Papademos. His technocratic government was backed by Papandreou's PASOK, then-oppositional ND and the extreme right LAOS. It enforced austerity measures and concluded the negotiations for a second memorandum before giving way to the two rounds of elections of 2012. All key steps in that process – Papandreou's resignation, ND's support for the technocratic government and the choice of Papademos as prime minister – were orchestrated by Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the EU commission. (Financial Times 2014) A scenario based on this experience is that EU elites might exert pressure on all non-SYRIZA parties – probably except Golden Dawn and KKE – to form a so-called government of national unity against SYRIZA. We consider this to be possible yet unlikely.

Looking ahead: Securing a majority after the next election

If SYRIZA fails to gain an absolute majority, there will be no likely partner to form a coalition. KKE, who campaigned with the slogan "Don't trust SYRIZA" in 2012, has ruled out any form of cooperation. (Candeias/Völpel 2014: 176, 198) DIMAR is split over whether to support SYRIZA, but they will probably not pass the 3 per cent threshold needed to enter parliament. PASOK is in a deep crisis too, losing many of its voters to SYRIZA and thus attacking them fiercely. Some in SYRIZA see PASOK as a possible coalition partner, potentially after a split. "The radical left used to reject any participation in a government", SYRIZA youth activist Haris Triandafilidou says. "But now that we have hegemony, the conditions for cooperation with social democracy have changed." However, the general attitude among our interviewees is that thinking through all these scenarios is not essential. The Greek party system is highly unstable and still in realignment. It is unclear which and how many parties will still make it into the next parliament.

Phase 3: Breaking with austerity

If SYRIZA succeeds in forming a government, they will face a huge number of challenges on the domestic and European level. The domestic challenges for SYRIZA will be related to opposition by business and the austerity parties, as well as to the relationship with their supporters and the dynamic within the party (see chapter II). We focus on the European challenges, as we will then look at Left strategies of support for Greece. In our opinion, European elites will probably choose one of two strategies: The first option is trying to topple the left government project as soon as

possible by exerting the maximum amount of pressure. The aim would be to replace it with another obedient government, technocratic or ND-led. The second and more likely option is that European elites will attempt to corrupt SYRIZA. This would ensure the continuation of the austerity and competitiveness agenda, but also prevent leftists and movements from around Europe from rallying behind SYRIZA and Greece. While the first strategy would be more brutal and direct, the second one is more dangerous for the Greek and European Left, doing long-term damage to their plans and hopes. Below we will discuss ways how European elites might try to influence a SYRIZA government, though their form will depend on the chosen strategy.

Negotiating with EU partners

One of the first actions of a SYRIZA government will be to demand a reduction of public debt in Greece and Europe through an international debt conference (see chapter II). It is likely that the European governments and institutions will enter negotiations, but without making any concessions. The main opponents are seen to be the German government and the EU commission. Andreas Karitzis says that “they are convinced that we will eventually compromise, that time is against us, so they won’t be too hostile in the beginning.” Giorgos Chondros, director of SYRIZA’s department for environmental policy, expects negotiations to drag on for a while. “We will not only have to fight the Greek elites, but also the European ones. This makes our situation much more difficult. We’ll need the support of movements in the whole of Europe.” John Milios, professor of political economy and SYRIZA MP is anticipating “psychological warfare” on behalf of EU elites and creditors. However, he and others argue that the European Union cannot afford to kick Greece out of the Eurozone for economic reasons. (Candeias/Völpel 2014: 196)

Pressure by European elites

The ways European elites can use to exert pressure on a SYRIZA government are manifold. A general climate of hostility at EU summits and during negotiations can be expected and will influence all other factors. More concretely, Greece will most likely violate some of the provisions of the EU’s economic governance, e.g. the deficit rules. “There is no doubt that the numbers we see about Greek government accounts, the [nationalised] banks, their assetbooks, are all forged”, Yanis Varoufakis professor of economics and SYRIZA advisor, suspects. The true state of public finances will probably come to the surface soon after the new government is instated. Also, Greek economic elites might use the EU’s legal framework to work against SYRIZA, e.g. bank owners filing lawsuits at the European Court of Justice against the restructuring of the banking sector. These procedures and trials will take a certain amount of time before they effectively interfere with SYRIZA’s government.

There are however several other, more short-term ways of pressure European elites could use.

- They could “create an extremely nasty picture of Greece for European tourists”, Yanis Varoufakis says. Tourism has been one of the very few sectors of the Greek economy to grow during the last years, generating much needed tax revenues. Sabotaging tourism would severely hurt the economy and thereby a left government’s ability to fund their projects.
- A bank run inside Greece could be triggered by statements of European elites and financial market actors.
- The ECB might stop returning its profits from interest on Greek government bonds. As with sabotaging tourism, this would harm the state budget. (Varoufakis 2013),
- Less structural funds might be awarded to Greece. Yanis Varoufakis tells us that the rules concerning these funds have been loosened in the past to support the current Greek government: “According to European rules, there has to be co-financing for these funds. If there is a road to be built, the EU pays 50 per cent and the Greek government pays the other 50 per cent. If they can’t come up with that money, they need banks or other investors to jump in. Our banks are bankrupt and investors won’t touch Greek projects. So what they did was that Brussels ignores its own rules. They give the money without co-financing. That only happened because Germany and Brussels had an interest in

supporting the current government. If there is a new one, they can simply switch this off.”

- Berlin and Brussels might agitate investors against Greece. Greece has started long-term borrowing from financial markets again this year. As the Greek state is today even more heavily indebted than before its “rescue” and the economy is still in recession, this was only possible through an implicit guarantee. According to Yanis Varoufakis, Berlin and the ECB “winked at investors ‘Look, buy these bonds. If the Greeks can’t repay you, we will.’” If Draghi’s and Merkel’s winks and comments have enabled Greece to sell government bonds again, they might as well do the opposite to increase financial pressure on a left government.
- The possibly worst strategy would be for the ECB to threaten to stop providing liquidity to Greek banks. Yanis Varoufakis describes this instrument as a “nuclear weapon”, which could bring the Greek banking sector down almost immediately. The prospect of the ECB doing this might seem extreme and unlikely, but it would not be news: In 2011, the ECB threatened to cut off Irish banks from its lending activities, unless the government took over all debt of insolvent banks. Varoufakis is convinced that the government could indeed fall quickly just over the possible external pressures.

What remains unclear at this point is how SYRIZA will deal with the Troika. After the memoranda have expired, controls by the Commission and the ECB are scheduled every six months until 75 per cent of the loans are paid back. At the moment, this would mean 25 years of Troika visits. Even more years would be added in case the loans are stretched, which is currently being discussed. In any case, the Commission can always just extend the monitoring unless the Council vetoes. The controls might also lead to sanctions, which are only vaguely described as “corrective measures”. (Kathimerini 2013)

General sentiment: Careful optimism

Despite all those challenges, the people we spoke to show a certain optimism regarding the negotiations on the EU level. Although many consider it possible that their government could last only for a few weeks, they say their chances are better today than they would have been in 2012. They see fractions within the neoliberal block that SYRIZA could try to exploit, like the ECB’s fear of deflation, the position of Italy’s prime minister Matteo Renzi and the recent conflicts within the French government. Haris Golemis, director of SYRIZA’s Poulantzas Institute, says about Alexis Tsipras recent meeting with ECB president Mario Draghi: “Of course he is not ‘with Greece’, but he is against the obvious fallacies of the beliefs of the German government.” By getting into government and implementing first measures, SYRIZA hopes to accelerate existing debates, especially within European social democracy and the trade unions. Yanis Varoufakis expects SYRIZA’s behaviour in the Council to trigger conflicts currently repressed. He told us of a conversation he had with the finance minister of a large Eurozone country, who agreed with Varoufakis’ positions but didn’t voice them in the ECOFIN because that would only mean the end of his political career without changing anything. “But what if your minister of finance speaks out and vetoes the existing policies? If he does so, people like myself could chip into the conversation”, the minister told Varoufakis.

III. STRATEGIES

Solidarity: A task for the European Left

After decades of weakness of the Left in Europe, after years of austerity and millions rising up against it, we are in dire need of going further. With SYRIZA and the Greek movements, there is now the real possibility of a left government with a radical programme of social transformation. The struggles in Greece and in Spain already provide us with important lessons and inspiration.

A left government that tries to do things differently, to break with austerity and to follow a different vision of society could create a momentum for the Left outside Greece, too. While neoliberal hegemony might not be as strong as it used to be, the political situation in most of Europe is still hopelessly hostile. In some areas public debate has become so narrow that the most basic left concepts and policies are perceived as utopian or naive. Furthermore, decades of political changes have only known one direction: cuts to welfare, education and health care, pressure on wages, deregulation of labour markets and tax cuts for corporations and the rich. A left government project in Greece can break with this logic and increase minimum wages and social expenditure while following a more radical vision. Through this, a space for left ideas and debates can open up. What is being done in Greece might suddenly seem imaginable in other places, too.

If this moment comes, the task for the European left is not only to support Greece, but to use it as best as we can to strengthen struggles, ignite new ones and shift existing power relations. Getting there and doing that is a tremendous task and brings about difficult strategic questions. We have chosen to focus on the first part of this task: To support SYRIZA and the broader Greek left in winning the next election, forming a left government project and starting to fight austerity. Their struggles are European and their opposition will be European, so it is our struggle, too. In the rest of this chapter we will outline ideas for this strategy. We believe that this is the precondition for planning further ahead, i.e. on how to use the momentum generated by SYRIZA for a change outside Greece. We also hope that some of our ideas will support thinking in this direction.

Attitude: Our common struggle

If parts of the Left in Europe decide to support the Greek struggles more actively, we need a common understanding of why and how we are doing it. Being in solidarity with and supporting SYRIZA is not the same as blind adoration or uncritical believing. We can and need to question their positions and the choices they make. In case they form a government, it is essential that we critically examine where they are going. But we need to do this with an attitude of respect and support.

Furthermore, supporting SYRIZA and the Greek left is not about “helping Greece”, but about advancing our common struggle. We should not be motivated by guilt because our governments are responsible – this would mean reproducing nationalist splits between people. We should also not be acting out of compassion – this would mean depoliticising the issue. Instead, we need to link SYRIZA's struggles to our own and develop ways to promote mutuality. The fights of SYRIZA, the Greek movements and solidarity initiatives, the cleaners, the workers of ERT and the people of Chalkidiki are not Greek problems to be overcome, but parts of what needs to be a united fight against oppression.

A solidarity campaign should aim at opposing the pressure that European elites will exert on SYRIZA. It has to push political protagonists like governments and trade unions to change their stand towards Greece and at least not fight what the left government is trying to do. It should

intervene in public debates to make the reality of Greek austerity and what SYRIZA stands for visible to people in other countries. It has to try and reveal the political programme and class character behind austerity in Greece. And it should aim to get people in other parts of Europe in touch with the struggles of the Greek people.

Structure: Organising a European campaign

In our opinion, both an Austrian and a European campaign will work best if they combine decentralised activities with coordinating efforts. Different aspects of a solidarity campaign can attract different parts of the Left: while some might want to support the struggles of SYRIZA as a party, others might want to focus on the work of the solidarity initiatives, the fight against austerity or other parts of broader public mobilisations. For some, the prospect of a left government project will be the most interesting part, while others might want to focus on opposing the threat to Greek democracy.

In organising a decentralised campaign in Austria, we propose a coordinating team. Its members should participate in certain activities themselves, but also actively involve other groups and provides ideas and support for them to get involved.

Measures: What a campaign could look like

A campaign should cover all of the phases described in chapter II: the time between now and the next elections, the phase of forming a government and, most importantly, the start of a left government project. The ideas are developed for the Austrian context, but if there is a coordinated campaign in several countries, there can be common and separate activities. We will propose a series of campaign ideas, of which only a few are targeted at a specific phase. The ideas are structured by target groups we think will be essential to address.

Target group: Journalists and media

Aim: Change the way news about Greece and SYRIZA are reported. Break up problematic narratives like the equalisation of left and right as extremism and anti-Europeanism. Debunk the attempts of the current Greek government and the troika to sell Greece as a success story.

- Public debate panels and journalistic background talks with critical Greek economists like Yanis Varoufakis, Marica Frangakis or John Milios. Besides criticism of current policies and input on the Greek situation, some of SYRIZA's main demands can be introduced this way (see below). Preferably, these events and the accompanying press work will be done in cooperation with different partner organisations.
- A series of opinion pieces on the "theory of extremism" in newspapers and special interest magazines for journalists. This could include a theoretical perspective on its non-validity by a political scientist, a historical analysis of the defamation of progressive struggles in the past, and other approaches voicing a different facet of critique but all in connection with current political debates.

Target group: Political organisations, activists and supporters

Aim: Heighten awareness on the issues and debate the connection between Greek and local struggles. Mobilise activists for the support of the Greek Left in their political contexts (parties, trade unions, youth organisations, student groups, church organisations, etc.).

- Speakers tour with activists of SYRIZA and/or Solidarity4All, for example Haris Triandafilidou or Giorgos Chondros. A number of events could be hosted all over the country in cooperation with various local groups who want to work on the issue.
- A solidarity trip to Greece with representatives of the organisations mentioned above. An exchange trip like they are already happening in the trade unions and other contexts can bring people of various organisational background in touch with the Greek struggles and with opportunities to connect them to their own. They could then carry their experiences to their political contexts.
- Discuss SYRIZA's main demands and policies (see above) with relevant stakeholders before the election to make central political groups familiar with the issues that will be raised. Possibilities to do this include:
 - Articles by Greek economists in progressive publications or blogs, trade union/chamber of labour magazines, etc.
 - Seeking background talks with members of the Social Democratic and the Green party to discuss SYRIZA's plans and their positions towards them.

Target Group: The political public

Aim: Shift the public debate on Greece. Make the drastic economic and social situation visible.

Present SYRIZA and the left government project as a realistic alternative for Greece and other parts of Europe.

- Bail Out – The final verdict: This would be an update of the Attac project of 2013, where calculations showed how most of the bailout money went back to the financial sector. The calculations could be updated and presented for the (probably) official end of the programme in December 2014.
- Opinion pieces in Austrian newspapers to discuss various aspects:
 - Opinion pieces in newspapers in fall 2014 to make activists of the solidarity campaign known to media as experts on various aspects of the Greek crisis. This would be in preparation of the moment when reporting on Greece starts again.
 - Opinion pieces countering the success stories of the Greek government and European elites, with economic, political, social and other aspects. Different aspects could be covered by people from different fields and they should be connected to the broader European austerity and competitiveness agenda.
 - A satirical opinion piece about the misjudged results and great success of the memoranda, which succeeded perfectly in making the rich richer, increasing the exploitation of labour and free corporations from the burden of environmental regulations and taxes.
- Social Media actions at crucial moments, for example after interventions from European politicians or other European actors. Messages could be along the lines of “let them vote” or “save Greek democracy” and activities should involve online participation.
- Social media campaign: “Kreisky would vote for SYRIZA”
Images of famous leftists or left social democrats like Bruno Kreisky or Willy Brandt, combined with elements of their political programme which resemble SYRIZA's plans.
- A solidarity delegation of progressive intellectuals to Greece after a SYRIZA government takes office, sending the message that the left project in Greece is not alone.

Target group: General and cultural public

Aim: Reach people who are not very interested in politics through cultural channels. Get people in touch with the social and political reality in Greece. Support affection and feelings of mutuality.

- Book presentation and debate with Marlene Streeruwitz, a well-known Austrian author who just published a novel called "The travels of a young anarchist through Greece". Her book is widely covered in Austrian media, so a political presentation and debate of it could attract an audience interested in literature as well as media.
- A photo exhibition of the Greek crisis and Greek resistance. There are several collections by Greek photographers which have already been shown in exhibitions in Greece. They could be brought over to Austria and shown in galleries in Vienna and/or other cities.
- Translation and publication of a Greek crisis novel: In these turbulent times, there is a large number of Greek novels dealing with life during the crisis and with the political struggles surrounding it. A solidarity campaign could create the link between selected publications and Austrian/German publishing houses. The aim would be a translated novel which is reviewed in newspapers, sold in bookstores and attractive to readers and people who travel to Greece.
- "Humans of Greece"
"Humans of Greece" would be a social media campaign modelled after the very successful "Humans of New York", which daily publishes a photo and a quote by a New Yorker, sometimes explicitly political, sometimes not. "Humans of Greece", could be a light and popular way of communicating the reality of life in Greece.
- Artistic expression: Animate Austrian actors, performers or comedians to work on the Greek crisis

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