

‘New Democracy’ and the new pro-European Greek government

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Abstract: The party New Democracy was the big winner in the second round of elections held on June 17 in Greece, fulfilling the expectations of Europe. The prevalence was universal and the president of the party, Antonis Samaras, stated after the win that Greek people chose the road of Europe. They claim that the main beliefs of the party are the principles of social justice, freedom, equality before the law, meritocracy and competitiveness. The Greek press speaks positively about the outcome, though they are still quite skeptical, unlike the international press that regarded the result as a ‘breath’ for the Greeks.

Keywords: New Democracy, Antonis Samaras, Greek press, International press

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Introduction

The 18th of June was the day that *Antonis Samaras*,¹ the president of *New Democracy* (*Νέα Δημοκρατία*), was announced winner of the elections with a total percentage of 29, 66%². He stated that: ‘*The Greek people voted our stay in the euro and voted for those policies that will bring jobs, development, justice and security for them*’. He also called all the political forces to engage the government of national salvation saying that ‘*Greece must be ruled and governed*’. He pointed out: ‘*There will be no new adventures that will bring Greece into question, fear will not dominate and the sacrifices of the people will not go to waste*’. Samaras made it clear that his intention is to fulfill the commitments undertaken, noting: ‘*We certainly respect the signature and the country’s obligation. Greece has subsequence, consistency and dignity*’.

*The political program of New Democracy*³

The main points of the electoral program of New Democracy are about illegal immigration, security, policing and of course measures in order to exit the crisis, such as serious changes in economy and politics. Economic measures include the speeding up of the EEZ⁴ proclamation, so that they can utilize the wealth of offshore energy, as well as the promotion of privatization (even beyond the predictions of the loan agreement), so that the deficit will be reduced and further reductions in salaries and pensions will be avoided. In addition, an important measure is the application of the necessary and fair settlement of debts from and to the state which will give money to the market. Also, they have predicted direct legislative initiatives for the release of government property and enhancing the market liquidity via recapitalization of banks and secure liquidity to the real economy, particularly in small businesses that create 70% of jobs. Other measures are the easing of borrowers, time expansion of public spending cuts, reduction of all tax rates, replacement of the infamous hike, gradual increase of the untaxed to 10.000 €, no more reduction of wages and finally the increase of lower pensions and large family benefits.

¹ Antonis Samaras was born on 23 May 1951 in Athens. He studied at *Athens College* and graduated at *Amhrest College* with a degree in economics and then from *Harvard* with an MBA. He was elected member of Parliament in 1977 and in 1989 he became Finance Minister, then Minister of Foreign Affairs and then he created his own party ‘Political Spring’. In 2004 he resolved the party and rejoined the New Democracy. In 2009 he was appointed Minister of Culture, when he inaugurated the new Acropolis Museum. On 30 November 2009 he was elected leader of the New Democracy and in 2012 he won the elections and became Prime Minister of Greece.

² (A’ Athens 30, 92%, A’ Piraeus 29, 68%, Thessaloniki 31, 91%, Rhodes 33,89%, Arta 35,53% but in B’ Piraeus 18,62%, Chania 20,43%, Corfu 24,37%)

³ All the information about the election program of New Democracy was found on the official site of the party (www.nd.gr).

⁴ Exclusive Economic Zone

Another big issue in New Democracy's electoral program is security. They raise the issue of decongestion of prisons with deportation of foreign convicts, immediate operation of prisons and change of prison code. They also address 'low crime' and propose removal of drug users from the urban centers and the adoption of the doctrine of national security that is used in Europe. They claim that for the guard of the borders the natural barriers (fences) and the use of European cooperation and jurisdiction of FRONTEX are necessary. Moreover, they suggest the creation of a center outside the urban web of cities where illegal immigrants will be kept. They point out the importance of hitting the illegal traffic that destroys legitimate trade. Lastly, they intend to create a single asylum policy and unified policy of mass repatriation of illegal immigrants and for this purpose they will contact the leaders of all the countries of southern Europe to reach a single European policy.

Mr. Samaras has set as a target to change the model of the government. He also pointed out the need for revising the Constitution, changing the law on ministerial responsibility and the establishment of incompatibility between minister and MP. He urges the people to turn towards the future and not the past, believes that Greece is a rich country and intends to take advantage of that. He said that New Democracy believes in Greek people, in their spite and the unstoppable power that hides inside them.

The Greek Press about the new government

Greek press is positive about the fact that Greece has finally formed a government, but as to how New Democracy will govern they are still waiting to see the results. Nikos Vatopoulos wrote a day after the elections in *Kathimerini*, a known newspaper, that '*Greeks should be ruled*'. He insists that Greek people should now worry about political stability and pay special attention to tourism and culture that are now sinking. '*The sense of insecurity which our country constantly emits to millions of people around the world is not easily reversed*', he continues insinuating that Greeks have a gem in their hands that they let go to waste. Difficulties for Greek people will remain for years whether there is a stable government or not, but what matters is the need for social peace that parties ought to secure. He finishes his article saying that '*Greeks are entitled to hope, they deserved it and they are tired of the vilification of their homeland. [...] Work should begin today.*' (Nikos Vatopoulos: The work must begin now, *Kathimerini*, June 18 2012)⁵

In the same newspaper Babis Papadimitriou wrote that the new government needs 'educated' ministers and he refers to the responsibility that they have to be fully informed for the agreements they sign. He also said: '*Just remove the partisan blinders and apply the adjustment program. The message comes from all sides, with the same frequency and the same intonation. Hurry, now make it clear that the policy pending. Show everyone that you are able to quickly activate your economy. Distinguish the important and put them first, with determination and without any renegotiation*'. (Babis Papadimitriou: Measures, ready and important, *Kathimerini*, June 19 2012)⁶ Alexis Arvanitis, who is a researcher at Panteion University and a lecturer at College of Economics of Athens, also wrote in the newspaper that with this government the road for negotiations is open, he accused those who are against the Memorandum for being outdated, fearful and dangerous for the interest of Greece and he finished saying it will be more beneficial to consider Europe as a partner and not as an enemy. (Alexis Arvanitis: The renegotiation time has come, *Kathimerini*, June 19 2012)⁷.

In another newspaper *To Vima* (Το Βήμα) Aris Ravanos wrote: '*With surprises and extra-parliamentary entities, both from the center right and from the broader left, but also with technocrats Antonis Samaras attempted to win the next day's bet, while the key point is that the finance minister will have national color by representing government partners, with a minister from the side of ND*'. He points out that the main intention that Samaras has is the composition of a new government scheme where ND will be the body but everything will be arranged according to the proportions of the voting percentages of the seats. Mr. Ravanos continues saying that the president of ND is determined to show in practice the national efforts by collaborating with the presidents of the other parties such as Mr. Venizelos, Mr. Kouvelis and Ms. Bakoyanni. Another big issue is the Ministry of Finance and who will be the one that will occupy the seat as a minister. (Aris Ravanos: The next day's bet of Antonis Samaras, *To Vima*, June 18 2012)⁸

The same writer wrote a week after the elections that Samaras is now trying to keep his word and show that Greece will honor the commitments towards the foreign partners. That was a promise that was also read

⁵ Νίκος Βατόπουλος: Η δουλειά πρέπει να αρχίσει σήμερα, *Η Καθημερινή*, 18 Ιουνίου 2012

⁶ Μπάμπης Παπαδημητρίου: Μέτρα, έτοιμα και σημαντικά, *Η Καθημερινή*, 19 Ιουνίου 2012

⁷ Αλέξης Αρβανίτης: Ήρθε η ώρα της επαναδιαπραγμάτευσης, *Η Καθημερινή*, 19 Ιουνίου 2012

⁸ Άρης Ραβανός: Το στοίχημα της επόμενης ημέρας του Αντώνη Σαμαρά, *Το Βήμα*, 18 Ιουνίου 2012

in the European Council because Samaras could not be there himself due to an illness. Mr. Ravanos also mentioned another speech of Samaras that said: *'the government accepts the ownership of the Stabilization Program and is fully committed to the goals, objectives and all the main policies of the Program'*. Samaras though acknowledged that there are some points in the Program that should be changed or rearranged so that the recession in Greece will at least ease. (Aris Ravanos: Samaras' commitments to Europeans that he will keep the economic plan, *To Vima*, June 28 2012)⁹.

Foreign Press about the new government

In Europe as well as the rest of the world all the media paid great attention to the outcome of the elections in Greece and to what the new government will be like. The French newspaper *Le Monde* referred to the win of a right wing party and noticed: *'The Greeks - they are not the only ones – have chosen to capture the benefits of the euro [...] It seems that with the elections on June 17, Greek voters paved the way for a coalition around the New Democracy of Antonis Samaras, designed to anchor Greece in the euro area, albeit at the price of sacrifices imposed by the Memorandum Europe, adopted in exchange for using European currency'*. The article continues with the conditions in Greece and the dilemma of the Greek people about euro or drachmas and the sacrifices they are forced to make in order to survive. (Alain Fabre: European Greece or Greek Europe, *Le Monde*, June 20, 2012)¹⁰ This newspaper also mentioned that Europe as well as the TROIKA is satisfied with the outcome of the elections and the win of New Democracy.

The New York Times, a very important newspaper both globally and in America, also wrote about Greece's elections and seemed more skeptical than Europe's newspapers. *'Antonis Samaras has worked his entire life to become prime minister of Greece. But now that he has achieved his dream job, the biggest question among both his friends and his enemies is how long he will be able to hold on to it'* is what is written three days after the elections. In the same article Rachel Donadio also wrote: *'But with Greece's economy at a standstill and European leaders still uncertain about the country's fate, Mr. Samaras, a pro-European nationalist known for his stubbornness as well as his tactical shrewdness, comes into power with little room for maneuvering and scant chance of comforting Greeks'*. The overall feel is that the result from the elections may have brought certain stability but they expect actions and not promises. (Rachel Donadio: Samaras Takes Office as Greece's Prime Minister, Facing Major Challenges, *The New York Times*, June 20 2012).

Generally, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* exists a sense of incredibility towards Greece and there are many articles that show doubts towards Greece's new government as the one called 'Political Captivity'. *Bild*, a German tabloid, is very positive towards New Democracy and thinks of it as a hope and a win for the pro-European parties as it mentioned in one of its article: *'The world takes a breath'*. However another German newspaper *Der Spiegel* in the article 'Little hope' mentioned that the outcome of the elections is only a small break, Greece is already torn apart and divided and the situation is already too difficult. There will be chaos if Greek people are not united and New Democracy cannot change that fact or evade disaster. Italy and Turkey express controversial opinions with Italy being more positive and Turkey fearing that the new government will set Greece's EEZ and that is why they are very precautious.

Greece's new government

A week or so after the elections Antonis Samaras has started to design the scheme of the government. It was a very complicated procedure as the other parties had a say in the matter and also a right to put their own Mp in a seat as a minister. The final 'national team' has been elected and the most important elements are: Prime Minister is Antonis Samaras, Minister of Foreign Affairs is Dimitris Avramopoulos (Δημήτρης Αβραμόπουλος), Minister of Finance is Yiannis Stournaras (Γιάννης Στουρνάρας), Minister of Defense is Panos Panayiotopoulos (Πάνος Παναγιωτόπουλος), Minister of Interior is Euripides Stylianidis (Ευριπίδης Στυλιανίδης), Minister of Development is Costis Hatzidakis (Κωστής Χατζηδάκης) and Minister of Health is Andreas Lukourezos (Ανδρέας Λυκουρέζος). This government was composed after the elections and is based on programmatic convergence of the other three parties that support New Democracy (ΝΔ, Πασοκ, Δημαρ)¹¹. It will be based on the *Constitution* and the *Declaration of Cooperation*, which drew the six-

⁹ Άρης Ραβανός: Δέσμευση Σαμαρά στους Ευρωπαίους ότι θα τηρήσει το οικονομικό πρόγραμμα, *To Βήμα*, 28 Ιουνίου 2012

¹⁰ Alain Fabre: La Grèce européenne ou l'Europe grecque ?, *Le Monde*, 20 juin 2012

¹¹ Νέα Δημοκρατία, Πασόκ (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κόμμα), Δημάρ (Δημοκρατική Αριστερά)

member committee of the three parties that were mentioned before.¹² In that Declaration of Cooperation was also included: ‘Finally, at the initiative of the new government and the Bureau of Parliament, the *Rule of Procedure* will be changed to adjust the exercise of legislative work and parliamentary control to the new conditions of government cooperation. This will upgrade the role of Parliament’.

Conclusion

To conclude, the fact that a new government is elected is something positive but considering the situation in Greece it is a small step towards the solution. No matter how positive an opinion is, the sense of disaster being close still remains. What everybody now awaits is that the new pro-European government, New Democracy, and its representative Antonis Samaras will negotiate both with Europe and the Greek people who are now enraged. Greece has sank deep and so have the Greeks, but the solution can only be found in a capable politician and his acts and everybody expects that Antonis Samaras will prove to be the one.

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Thank you for your kind collaboration. *Editor-in-Chief*

¹² The six-member committee consisted of Meimarakis and Lazarides from *ND*, Skandalidis and Aggeloudis from *Panhellenic Social Movement* (Πασοκ), Chatzisokratis and Papathanassiou from *Democratic Left* (Δημαρ), started as an informal cross-party body which would work alongside the Cabinet but now it has been an effective instrument in order to combine the common ground of the three main parties and prevent any conflicts between them.