

THE GREEK PRIME MINISTER IN BERLIN AND PARIS

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Abstract

All heads of the political arena were turned towards Berlin and Paris between 24 and 25 of August when the Greek Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras, visited Angela Merkel and François Hollande in their countries to discuss for the future of Greece. The World Press was in turmoil and many articles were written during and after these dates. The Greek Press has adopted a positive opinion about the outcome of the discussions but that was not the case for the International Press. The American Press was more objective without expressing any opinion in the matter but English Press was stricter and their optimism was reluctant. The French Press, on the other hand, was divided. The voice of the articles was mainly positive but there were many austere critics. Samaras asked for more time but the two leaders asked for more actions. The time is pressing them and a solution is needed.

Keywords: Antonis Samaras, Berlin, Angela Merkel, Paris, François Hollande, Greek Press, World Press

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Introduction

Only two months after his victory, the Prime Minister of Greece, *Antonis Samaras*, has already started discussions and negotiations with the rest of the Europe in order to save the country from a catastrophe. To face the growing recession, he asked from his partners more time to put the country back on the track of development and the last week he completed a three-day visit (program) to Berlin and Paris. More specifically, he visited the Chancellor of Germany, *Angela Merkel*, in Berlin on 24 August and the day after that he arrived to Paris to meet with the President of France, *François Hollande*. The World Press reported these meetings and the outcome of the discussions.

Greek Press

The visit of Antonis Samaras in Berlin was the first step of the negotiations and a chance to restore the wounded relationship between Greece and Germany. The Greek Prime Minister was welcomed with honors and Angela Merkel suggested a private discussion without their collaborators in the room. The discussion was fruitful and as Aris Ravanos wrote in a newspaper called *Vima*: <<Angela Merkel's confession that *I want Greece to remain a part of Eurozone* was a positive sign but Samaras was demanded to present real results in a short time >>. In the same article he also wrote that Samaras asked for more time in order to let Greece <<breathe>> but by no means does he want the German taxpayers to be burdened. The article ended with a short extract of the direct discussion between the two politicians: Angela Merkel saying that <<You need to convince us>> and Antonis Samaras answering <<We will do whatever it takes to make Greece reliable>> (Aris Ravanos: A.Merkel: <<Act first and then we may talk...>>, *Vima*, August 26 2012).¹

In another newspaper, *TA NEA*, George Pappas from Berlin wrote: <<Elongation, according to information, was not a subject of thorough discussion. [...] The Prime Minister repeated that he does not ask for more money but more time... >>. The article did not focus on the Samaras' intention to convince Europe? that his government will proceed steadily in order to help Greece emerge from paralysis and produce work, but also at the obstacles the German Chancellor has to face given that her decisions will mark

¹ Άρης Ραβανός: Α. Μέρκελ: <<Κάντε τα και τα λέμε...>>, *Το Βήμα*, 26 Αυγούστου 2012

the course of history. There are many voices that want Greece out of the Euro zone but as we live in democracy they cannot be stopped only dashed when Greece meets its commitments (George Pappas: Athens and Berlin have come one step closer, *TA NEA*, August 25 2012)².

On 25 August Antonis Samaras visited Paris, where he met the French President, François Hollande. With optimism after the meeting with Angela Merkel, Samaras was warmly welcomed by Hollande at the Élysée Palace on an anniversary celebrating the liberation of France from German occupation in 1944. Hollande agreed with Angela Merkel that Greece must remain in Euro zone and the sacrifices of the Greek people should be recognized. As Aris Ravanos wrote the same day in *Vima*, Samaras said to the French President: << Some bet that Greece will not make it. I am here to tell the President that Greece will do everything to succeed. We are confident that the success of Greece will play a broader role. It will show that Europe can overcome its problems. [...] The Greeks are proud people, we do not like to borrow, and we have all the preconditions to make it >> (Aris Ravanos: Fr. Hollande: Greece is and has to remain in euro, *Vima*, August 25 2012)³.

The general attitude of the Greek Press is that of a small victory. Everyone anticipates what will happen next but they cannot help but to think that now they have two allies, Angela Merkel and François Hollande. In many cases, though, the opinion of the press is not converging with that of the Greek people.

International Press

The American Press, more distant than the others, recorded objectively the visits of the Greek Prime Minister. Recording what has been said between the three leaders, they focused to the fact that Merkel and Hollande want Greece to remain in Eurozone. More specifically, Melissa Eddy wrote in *New York Times* <<With Spain waiting for help from Europe's bailout funds and Italy facing an election in the spring, European leaders are stressing the importance of meeting strict conditions in exchange for aid>>. That is why the German Chancellor kept asking for results and not words. In the article it was also mentioned that Samaras together with Merkel fight those voices who want Greece out of the euro (Melissa Eddy: Merkel vows to help Greeks stay in Eurozone, *The New York Times*, August 24 2012). In the same newspaper, Steven Erlanger wrote about the visit in Paris that although Hollande agrees with Merkel, he is unhappy with the austerity measures and wants more economic reforms than the population can tolerate. Samaras also promised that Greece will fulfill its commitments and he actually said : <<I want to switch from being a country of red tape to one of a red carpet for investors>> (Steven Erlanger: French leader hails Greeks for 'painful efforts' in crisis, *The New York Times*, August 25 2012).

The English Press, stricter than hopeful, adopted the characterization of Deutschland Radio that Antonis Samaras visited <<the lion's den>>, with Angela Merkel playing the role of the lion. She did not give any answers to Samaras' demands for time and said she wants to wait for the report by the troika. However, she reassured Samaras saying that Greece will remain part of the euro because euro is not just a currency, it is <<an idea of a united Europe, an irreversible Europe, and that is why this is so important>> (Kate Connolly: Angela Merkel and Antonis Samaras put on display of friendly diplomacy, *The Guardian*, August 24 2012). Another author wrote in the same newspaper that : <<Angela Merkel has rejected the pleas of her Greek counterpart for a two year repayment extension after receiving backing from the French President, François Hollande, for her hardline stance >>. In the article it was also mentioned that a bailout package was denied to the Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, making the future of the euro even more uncertain (Phillip Inman: Angela Merkel rejects Greek pleas for extra two years to repay loans, *The Guardian*, August 24 2012). The same strict line was also followed for the visit to Paris focusing on the fact that François Hollande refused more time to Samaras and instead he suggested more painful reforms. He is waiting for the financial report that will be presented on a Eurogroup summit in October and says that they are out of time, <<the sooner, the better>>, they have to make decisions and fast (Jo Adetunji: France refuses to back Greece's call for more time to enact reforms, *The Guardian*, August 25 2012).

Lastly, the French Press has the same style as the Greek Press, being optimistic and offering hope. Newspapers like *Liberation* focused on the time that Samaras asked and the results that Merkel demanded.

² Γιώργος Παππάς: Αθήνα και Βερολίνο ήρθαν ένα βήμα πιο κοντά, *Τα Νέα*, 25 Αυγούστου 2012

³ Άρης Ραβανός: Φρ. Ολάντ: Η Ελλάδα είναι και πρέπει να παραμείνει στο ευρώ, *Το Βήμα*, 25 Αυγούστου 2012

As it was expected, there were more articles about the Greek Prime Minister visiting François Hollande in Paris. *Liberation* and *Le Monde*, the two of the best known newspapers in France, mentioned that Hollande wants to speed up the decisions as the crisis is being discussed for two and a half years now. He reassured Samaras that Greece will remain a part of the Eurozone but he asked for more financial reforms. However, Sabine Arnaud Syfuss wrote in *Le Nouvel Observateur* that the Greek Prime Minister was not very talkative at his meeting with François Hollande and in their joint statement in the Élysée he was in the shade while the French President was under the sun. Samaras said that Greeks are proud and the author added <<proud but ruined>>⁴. Samaras, though, was welcomed and he started his speech with, as they said, very good French to come to the conclusion that Greece is a part of euro and will remain so, but Samaras' government, that many believe is the one to save Greece, must fulfill its commitments (Sabine Arnaud Syfuss: The Greeks are proud, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, August 25 2012)⁵.

Conclusion

To conclude, it seems that except from the Greek Press which was hopeful and optimistic, the world Press is more reluctant as they expect actions and not words. The crisis is almost three years old today and the people are tired of promises. That was the message given to Antonis Samaras during his visits. The leaders acknowledged the sacrifices of the Greek people but that did not stop them to ask for more reforms. Samaras' purpose was to gain more time but he did not get any, although no one denied it solemnly. The point was that Europe needs a solution and a fast one.

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Μαρία Κουτουλάκου (Maria Koutoulakou): The Greek Prime Minister in Berlin and Paris. *Délkelet Európa - South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 3. No.2. (Summer 2012) 3 p.

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

⁴ <<Fiers mais ruinés>>

⁵ Sabine Syfuss-Arnaud: Les Grecs sont fiers, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 août 2012