

FRANCOIS HOLLANDE IN GREECE

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(Abstract) The French President, *Francois Hollande*, came to Greece on February 19 accepting the invitation of the Greek Prime Minister, *Antonis Samaras*. This visit was degraded by many political analysts, as they estimated that there were no tangible and immediate results. For others, the presence of Hollande in Greece had many symbolisms, which are very important in the current situation of the country that is still balanced between decay and indestructibility. Most significantly the arrival of the French President meant the support that Greece has in order to reintegrate in the global economic system. Hollande might not bring with him a multitude of French investments but he helped to end the peculiar economic blockade of Greece.

Keywords: Francois Hollande, Antonis Samaras, Greek Press, French Press, US. Press, investments.

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Introduction

On February 19, 2013 *Francois Hollande* visited Greece and he first met with the President of the Republic, *Carolos Papoulias* and then with the Greek Prime Minister, *Antonis Samaras*, in the Presidential Mansion. During the meeting both of them met with representatives of the Greek and French business community. Antonis Samaras welcomed Hollande in the airport, Eleutherios Venizelos, and then headed to the Maximou Mansion, where the press conference and the discussions started.

The Press Conference in Hilton

A press conference was held from both politicians in Hilton for the Greek and French business communities. Antonis Samaras started his speech saying that he feels honored that the President of the French Democracy came in Greece and shares the same agony with Greek people for this painful but successful course in order to steer the country through the crisis. He also said that the earlier discussions with Hollande will become true with the creation of the Greek-French business council and he hopes that there will be tangible results in the near future, as it will help with the extroversion of the Greek business world and the investments opportunities. This will help a more permanent contact between Greek and French businesses with mutual benefit. He called everyone to realize the importance of the meeting and gave the floor to the French President.

Francois Hollande after welcoming everyone in the room he said that he came to Greece as a friend, knowing that he came to a country with great history that is now in a turning point. He said the France has always been on the side of Greece and has demonstrated it by assuring that Greece will stay in the Eurozone. Greece has made a lot of necessary sacrifices for the past four years but now the European Union is out of the crisis and will work towards the restoration of the stability of the wounded countries, such as Greece. France has to show that it will work too for the economic stability by investing in Greece, as the situation is no more a matter of government, enterprises will have to take the floor. He said that now is a new phase, that

of the activity and employment. He pointed that today there are over 120 French enterprises that have facilities in Greece and this means over 30.000 employees and 2 billion turnover value. Some of them closed down due to crisis and that is why we have to re-attract them. He called French enterprises to invest in Greece without any favors or special conditions but through competitions. There will be projects in Greece in a lot of areas such as the road network, tourism and electricity. He also said that the Greek Prime Minister has submitted a request to create an investment fund, which will be set up with capitals from many countries, from various financial structures and France is ready to actively participate. He visited Greece to mark the passage to another phase and not to say to Greece what to do in order to develop. They can create a friendly environment and after that is upon the states and the businesses. 'In other words' he said finishing his speech 'what we need is friendship, solidarity, trust and confidence in enterprises'.

The Greek Press

Ta NEA one of the most important newspapers in Greece commented Francois Hollande's visit the very same day. Specifically, Dionisis Nasopoulos wrote that the government wagered alliance with the French President for community aid flows and attracting venture capital. He mentioned, as many acolytes of the Prime Minister pointed out, that the French President fully supports the unhindered financing of the country. Hollande expressed the need for Greece to enter as soon as possible to a growth trajectory and the need to re-examine certain aspects of the austerity that has essentially imposed on our country. He denies a Europe that condemns countries to austerity without end. His message was that the time when we were wondering whether Greece will stay in Eurozone is over and has started a new one of political growth. (Dionisis Nasopoulos: French key for funds and investments, *Ta NEA*, February 19, 2013)¹

The same journalist wrote two days later that for the government this eight hours presence of Francois Hollande in Athens is one of those visits that only bring profits. The French President pointed out the trust he has towards Greece, gave the green light for the establishment of the Greek EEZ and claimed that Greek community cannot afford any other austerity measures. The way for the further attraction of French enterprises is now open, especially with acceleration of the privatization program and the simplification of the investment process. 'The bilateral agenda covers energy, transportation, construction, water, tourism'². (Dionisis Nasopoulos: Steeped in the 'fund' of Hollande's visit, *Ta NEA*, February 21 2013)³

In *Vima*, another significant newspaper, Aris Ravanos and Kroustalli Dimitra wrote that Hollande commented the direct involvement of France in the privatization but also in numerous investments that will help the government's effort to develop and create new jobs. Reportedly, the French are interested in railways. In reference to the Greek EEZ Francois Hollande stated: 'If France is able to co-exploit the gas that Greece reserves, it will do it. I think that the international law and the law of the sea will prevail. [...]. The existence of gas field is an opportunity for Greece'⁴. (Aris Ravanos, Kroustalli Dimitra: Hollande's message for investments in Greece, *To Vima*, February 20, 2013)⁵

The overall feelings of Hollande's visit in Greece are positive, as shown from the Greek Press but Syriza, the opposition party in Greece, characterized it as 'Artificial picture of optimism that has nothing to do with reality' and continued saying that 'investment, development and the fight against unemployment cannot come through the continuation of the destructive policy of austerity that impoverish Greece and deconstructs that whole Europe'. It was also stated that what Antonis Samaras just did was to further the uncontrollable exploitation of Greece's natural resources. Golden dawn, the extreme nationalist party in Greece, claimed that 'All great powers claim privileged partnership with our country in the field of energy, while the memorandum coalition tries to convince us that we are a poor country'. The Greek Communist Party stated that 'the exploitation of public infrastructure, natural and mineral wealth from the French and Greek capital is the compensation demanded from Hollande for his support to Greek government and Greek plutocracy [...] they provocatively pretend to care about the plight of the unemployed and Greek people, when at the same time they are jointly responsible for EU's policy that breaks the rights of workers and especially young people'. (Information from a political channel in Greece, SKAI, www.skai.gr)

¹ Διονύσης Νασόπουλος: Γαλλικό κλειδί για κονδύλια και επενδύσεις, *Τα Νέα*, 19 Φεβρουαρίου 2013

² Η διμερής ατζέντα καλύπτει την ενέργεια, τις μεταφορές, τις κατασκευές, την ύδρευση, τον τουρισμό

³ Διονύσης Νασόπουλος: Γεμάτο το <<ταμείο>> της επίσκεψης Ολάντ, *Τα Νέα*, 21 Φεβρουαρίου 2013

⁴ «Αν μπορέσει η Γαλλία να εκμεταλλευθεί τα κοιτάσματα φυσικού αερίου με την Ελλάδα θα το κάνει. Πιστεύω ότι θα επικρατήσει το διεθνές δίκαιο και το δίκαιο της θάλασσας. [...] «Η ύπαρξη κοιτασμάτων φυσικού αερίου είναι μια ευκαιρία για την Ελλάδα».

⁵ Άρης Ραβανός, Κρουστάλλη Δήμητρα: Μήνυμα Ολάντ για επενδύσεις στην Ελλάδα, *Το Βήμα*, 20 Φεβρουαρίου 2013

The French Press

Arnaud Leparmentier wrote in *Le Monde*, a known French newspaper, that France always supported and had friendly feelings towards Greece but Greece itself became part of the EU as honoris causa member and that Greece did not respect the rules of the union, made political maneuvering and wasted the received funds. He also stated that France might be Greece's friend but the boss is Angela Merkel and criticized the visit in Greece as the shortest one compared to other's Presidents visits. (Arnaud Leparmentier: Greek drizzling for Francois Hollande, *Le Monde*, February 21, 2013)⁶.

In another newspaper, *Le Figaro*, Nicolas Barotte commented on the warm welcome of the French President in Greece, although it was a day before the public protests in Athens. He also mentioned that Left Front Jean-Luc Melenchon said sacrifice and trust will not do as it needs more efforts, such as sorting the public accounts. He also commented that Hollande's welcome was warmer than Merkel's (Nicolas Barotte: Francois Hollande in Athens, the country of austerity, *Le Figaro*, February 19 2013)⁷. In *Le Point*, it was criticized the fact that the visit was covered only by the national channel, Net, and there were not many reporters. Generally, in French Press there were either positive or negative points about the President's visit in Athens.

The International Press

The American Press was more analytical and refrained from taking any clear position. For example, in *Washington Post*, it was mentioned that Francois Hollande gave a vote of trust in Greek business world but also commented on the ongoing strike of TV workers that they covered the event only after the court ruled their actions as illegal. Hollande's attitude towards Greece was characterized as a lenient one. (Associated Press: French president visits Athens as striking Greek journalists pull coverage, *The Washington Post*, February 19 2013)

In *New York Times*, Niki Kitsantonis wrote that there was shown interest from the French President in oil and gas, something that is going to be broached during Mr. Samara's next visit in Turkey, which might have objections. She also referred to the tight security measures during the whole visit, the strike and of course to the words that Hollande said: 'I am not here to sell arms, as I have heard'. (Niki Kitsantonis: Hollande visits Greece to show support for recovery efforts)

Conclusion

Francois Hollande visit in Greece might not brought any immediate result but it can definitely be considered as an action of good will from France, as the slightest business deal and economic expansion can help Greece find again its place in global economy. This, though, does not solve the crisis of the country and more sacrifices and patience from the people will be needed. Any action is necessary in order for the growth to begin and the only way to judge this visit is to wait for the future to show.

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

⁶ Arnaud Leparmentier: Crachin grec pour François Hollande, *Le Monde*, Février 21 2012

⁷ Nicolas Barotte: François Hollande a Athènes, au pays de l'austérité, *Le Figaro*, Février 19 2013