



# Weekly Briefing

**Greece Social briefing:  
Society Developments in Greece  
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## **Society developments in Greece**

The economic crisis and the impact of austerity measures and unemployment on the personal status of citizens has been the main concern of the Greek society for years. The beginning of 2018 finds citizens equally worry about future developments in the course of the year. In particular, a poll conducted by Pulse company in mid-January shows that 42 percent believed that course of the economy would be worse. 29 percent gave the answer ‘the same’ and only 25 percent believed it could be better. Older people are less optimistic than younger ones. 50 percent of respondents who are over 60 years also believed that the course of the economy would be worse. This percentage is reduced to 46 percent for respondents between 45 and 59 years old, to 37 percent for respondents between 30 and 44 years old and to 29 percent for respondents between 19 and 29 years old. Obviously, supporters of the governing SYRIZA party (45 percent) are more optimistic than supporters of the main opposition New Democracy party (15 percent).

Daily difficulties Greek citizens are encountered with when dealing with economic issues is reflected in another survey presented by Kapa Research company in January. Delays in the payment of rents or non-payment of rents is a significant problem as the relevant percentage of unreliability reached 48.9 percent. Additionally, 33 percent of property owners seek to sell a property as opposed to 12.3 percent in 2006. However, only 20.3 percent of respondents is interested in buying. The owner-occupied housing percentage has dropped from 81,6 percent in 2006 to 73.9 percent in 2018. Last but not least, 76.8 percent of property owners regard property taxes as unfair while 38.3 percent finds it difficult to pay the new property tax.

From another perspective, Greek citizens prefer political stability. A survey conducted by Prorata company in February exhibits that 58 percent did not want a snap election as opposed to 34 percent which favored such a political

development. However, most citizens do not believe that Greece will be able to return to normalcy in August 2018 after the third bailout will expire. 63 percent of respondent believes that fiscal supervision would not be successfully conducted by August 2018 while only 30 percent remains optimistic. SYRIZA supporters are more optimistic (67 percent) as opposed to New Democracy percentage (17 percent).

As far as society reactions to austerity measures are concerned, circa 20,000 people rallied outside parliament in mid-January to protest against a new bill demanded by the country's international creditors. This, inter alia, included new electronic process for foreclosures on overdue loans and arrears to the state, opens up closed professions, restructures family benefits and made it harder to call a strike. The demonstration march in Athens was largely peaceful but police fired a round of teargas to disperse a group of protesters who tried to break through a police cordon outside parliament. The unrest was short-lived. Along with the protest, bus, subway and city rail services were disrupted and some flights were grounded as workers went on strike.

Although the economic crisis remains the top priority for the majority of Greek citizens, a new issue has dominated the public agenda in January and February. This is related to the name dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). The two countries disagree on the name of the latter and Greece finds its constitutional name 'Macedonia' unacceptable distorting its national interest. For FYROM to enter NATO, a mutually accepted solution under the UN umbrella has to be found. As long as this is not happening, Greece is able to block a NATO invitation for FYROM. After a deadlock for years the governments of Greece and FYROM are currently negotiating to find a mutually accepted solution under the UN umbrella. But Greek public opinion seems hesitant in accepting a potential compromise including the name of 'Macedonia' with the other side.

The reaction of Greek public opinion has led to the organisation of demonstrations against name talks. In particular, on 21 January numerous

Greeks gathered in Thessaloniki. According to police estimates the rally drew around 90,000 people. It was attended by politicians, members of Greek diaspora groups and some hardline clerics. MPs of the extreme-right Golden Dawn also joined the protest. Cretans in traditional costumes who travelled to the northern city for the protest, some with their horses, stood out in the crowd. Some representatives of conservative New Democracy were also present despite indications by its leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis that they should shun the event.

After the Thessaloniki rally, a similar one took place in Athens on 4 February. Police said some 140,000 people joined the Athens rally but organisers put the turnout closer to 1.5 million people. Protesters traveled from across the country to the Greek capital, where they waved flags and chanted slogans, including ‘Macedonia is Greek’ and ‘Hands off Macedonia’. The famous Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis was among those addressing the crowds. During the Athens protest, circa 700 left-wing and anarchist protesters set up a counter-demonstration nearby, bearing banners calling for Balkan unity.

Public opinion data show Greek public opinion is highly concerned about the name dispute with FYROM. According to a survey of Pulse company, 72 percent of respondents finds the issue ‘significant’ or ‘very significant’. Additionally, 59 percent of respondents disagree with the use of the word ‘Macedonia’ in the Balkan country’s name and 35 percent agrees. Also, 65 percent of respondents view positively the protest rallies for the name of FYROM and 34 percent negatively. Within this framework, 32 percent of respondents trusts the leader of New Democracy and 24 percent Prime Minister and leader of SYRIZA Alexis Tsipras in handling this affair. On the whole, public opinion in Greece has been ill informed about this name issue and therefore it remains skeptical on a potential compromise between the two respective governments.

At the time of writing, the governing SYRIZA party is behind New Democracy in all opinion polls. The most recent poll organised by Prorata company exhibits that the latter took a percentage of 34 percent in the intention

to vote question while the former took 26.2 percent. When the two leaders – Tsipras and Mitsotakis – are compared by Greek citizens they both have their advantages and disadvantages. A Public Issue survey demonstrates that people consider Tsipras more persuasive than Mitsotakis (29 percent vs 14 percent), being closer to ordinary people (14 percent vs 10 percent) and stronger in negotiating (10 percent vs 8 percent). Alternatively, they consider Mitsotakis more serious than Tsipras (21 percent vs 14 percent), more sincere (14 percent vs 10 percent) and more reliable (18 percent vs 14 percent). Nevertheless, a new corruption scandal – where medical company Novartis and Greek politicians are allegedly involved – which was revealed at the beginning of February might have a critical impact on the political landscape in the coming months.