



# Weekly Briefing

## **Greece Social briefing:**

**The confidence crisis in Greece and the role of the society**

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## **The confidence crisis in Greece and the role of the society**

*During the ongoing Greek crisis numerous citizens are disillusioned and disappointed. Suffering by economic calamity they are losing their trust to politicians and important national and international institutions. Alternatively, they endeavor to cope with daily problems counting on values such as the family. The majority favors theoretically structural changes which will restructure the country and modernize the society in the long term but it often refrains from undertaking its own personal responsibility in that regard.*

The Greek crisis is multifaceted. Although much attention is paid to economics and public finances, the crisis is also revealing a deep distrust of institutions. This tendency is not a new phenomenon and had been partly evident before 2010 but the impact of the crisis is certainly massive. The most recent example of how the Greek society regards institutions is coming from the World Values Survey. The Greek think-tank Dianeosis, the National Center for Social Research and Metron Analysis company were responsible for interviewing Greek citizens and the results were presented in September 2018. While similar polls were organized in previous years during the economic crisis, the new one is comprehensive and more detailed offering useful insights.

To start with, respondents were asked to assess the importance of their family and friends as well as of work, leisure, religion and politics. 99.4 percent regards the family as important and 92.2 percent the friends as such. Work follows with 89.5 percent, leisure with 88.3 percent and religion with 81.6 percent. No doubt, the family is the most important value that has strengthened the cohesion of the Greek society in difficult times and as a result relations among family members are being strengthened. 77.1 percent of respondents believes children should learn about good manners at home, 74.2 percent about

diligence and 54.6 percent about responsibility. And 82.2 percent sets as personal objective to make its parents proud.

For the overwhelming majority of Greek citizens politics can hardly affect its daily living conditions and it thus heavily rely on their family, friends etc. Specifically, 66.2 percent of respondents considers politics as insignificant. Also, only 28.2 percent is interested in it while 37.7 percent and 33.8 percent are little or not or at all interested respectively (in total 71.5 percent). This 71.5 percent is composed of 66.2 percent of men and 76.3 of women. On the whole, Greek citizens are not particularly satisfied with how the Greek political system works in the scale from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (fully satisfied) [1=17.6 percent, 2=11.5 percent, 3=12.6 percent, 4=11.2 percent, 5=15.5 percent, 6=10.8 percent, 7=11.5 percent, 8=5.8 percent, 9=1.7, 10=0.9 percent]. However, the survey demonstrates citizens are keen on voting in national (71.1 percent) and regional elections (71.8 percent). Also, 82.4 percent prefers a democratic political system while only 3.1 percent a technocratic government. At last, 72.8 percent associates democracy with equal rights between men and women, 69.9 percent with the right of electing leaders and 45.1 percent with receiving unemployment allowances.

The poll also exhibits the lack of confidence of the majority of Greeks to important institutions. 90.9 percent, for instance, does not trust the political parties, 85.3 percent the government, and 85 percent the parliament. Additionally, 85.3 percent does not trust the press, 85.2 percent the television, 77.5 percent the banks, and 74.4 percent the syndicates. In addition, citizens remain skeptical vis-à-vis international organizations such as the IMF (89.6 percent), the EU (73.1 percent), NATO (71.3 percent) and the UN (65.6 percent). Alternatively, institutions enjoying high confidence are universities (82.4 percent), armed forces (80.2 percent), the police (70.7 percent), the church (65.4 percent) and the courts (59.1 percent).

Findings as the ones presented above reflect the general disenchantment and frustration of Greek citizens during the ongoing economic crisis. The

dominant feeling in the society is that the ones who are responsible for this crisis (the politicians) have not been brought to justice. More importantly, it is that ordinary citizens – suffering by austerity for years – are paying a heavy price for which they are not responsible for. Under these circumstances, a confidence crisis is developing in Greece. In parallel with the political system, this confidence crisis affects the media and the banks at the national level that are largely associated with the interests of bankrupted political parties. In contrast to the political system, the media and the banks, institutions that are trusted such as universities and armed forces have played no significant role during the crisis. They have been therefore immune to the citizens' ire.

International organizations such as the EU and the IMF are criticized because of their active participation in the Greek crisis. They are both illustrated as policemen during the implementation of austerity measures. Greek politicians have also fueled this negative sentiment regarding the EU and the IMF. They have been traditionally experts in finding scapegoats and blame someone else for their own mistakes. By transferring the responsibility to external actors, they have hoped to save their political careers. Most Greek politicians tend to present themselves as good and tough negotiators who are fighting to protect the citizens' rights against the allegedly aggressive instinct of both the EU and the IMF. Beyond the EU and the IMF, the limited trust to other international organizations such as the UN and NATO mirrors perhaps a general attitude of Greeks that they have been abandoned by their international partners in recent years. This maybe exhibits the lack of knowledge about their role. 42.2 percent of respondents, for example, are not aware whether it is China, France or India having no permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

### **The role of the society**

The main question that is subsequently raised is how the confidence crisis can be alleviated or even reversed. As already mentioned, the low trust to institutions had been partly apparent before the outbreak of the crisis and

dramatically sank after 2010. This said, the trust to institutions – principally the Greek political parties, the media, the banks and the EU – will gradually increase when recovery will be practically realized. The exit of Greece from the bailout does not automatically generate prosperity for Greek citizens. It cannot be thus expected that their majority will change its views of critical national and international institutions in the short-term. The Greek society is not patient and has been already exhausted after eight years of painful austerity. Negativity is a general element in the Greek society.

For Greece to change, overcome the crisis and achieve sustainable growth, structural reforms are necessary. 62.9 percent of respondents believes society has to improve via reforms indeed. But it remain unclear whether the majority is prepared to contribute to at the personal level and fight against pathogenies. With reference to corruption, for instance, 43.2 percent says it is likely or highly likely ordinary citizens need to bribe in order to receive services. Further to this, 28.4 percent argues the best way to find a job is by knowing someone and 14.5 percent by a family member or a close friend whereas only 12.6 percent responds the best way is through a public competition. More importantly, 18.7 percent admits is has used personal acquaintances to find a job position. It is not easy for the society to reform itself if citizens are not personally helping towards this direction.

Moreover, most Greek citizens do not necessarily count on individualism in their daily life. Specifically, individuals are not determined to play a more active role and care about themselves. In the scale from 1 (governments have to undertake greater responsibilities and care about everyone) to 10 (citizens have to undertake greater responsibilities and care about themselves) the majority expects from governments to do more [1=22.4 percent, 2=16.7 percent, 3=15.1 percent, 4=11.3 percent, 5=12.5 percent, 6=7.1 percent, 7=7 percent, 8=3.7 percent 9=1.1 percent 10=2.8 percent]. For many decades statism has been a main feature in Greek politics influencing the general attitude of the majority of

people. This tendency has not yet changed in spite of neoliberal policies adopted during the crisis.

### **Conclusion**

The widespread confidence crisis in Greece has been one of the results of the 2010 bankruptcy. The majority of citizens is losing hope and negatively views critical political and economic players and institutions that created the problem or continuously fail to steer the way out of it. The lack of trust is deepening in the Greek society and this tendency can hardly be mitigated soon. Despite the stabilization of public finances, better living conditions for ordinary citizens are not expected to be created in the short and medium term. Also, the majority of citizens finds it unfair that the responsible for the crisis have not yet paid a real price for it. But citizens themselves should be equally open to criticism. While they are keen on blaming external actors for the crisis, their contribution to structural changes remains limited. They expect the state to undertake greater responsibilities instead of themselves whereas they are not always prepared to give a personal fight against long-lasting pathogenies such as corruption.