



Weekly Briefing

**Greece political briefing:
The aspirations of the new government
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The aspirations of the new government

Summary

The briefing presents the newly elected government's key policies for the next four years. By the bold political agenda announced by the Greek Prime Minister it is evident that in numerous sectors the government aims to introduce policies and radical reforms in order to upgrade the state, the economy, the defense and social system of the country and tackle chronic issues that were subverting the modernization of Greece. However, following the electoral defeat of SYRIZA and the consequent weakening of the opposition in the parliament both SYRIZA and PASOK need to accelerate efforts to forge a strong opposition for monitoring the policies introduced by the government.

Introduction

Following the national elections results, the electoral victory of the conservative party New Democracy (ND) and its re-election as the ruling party, is an indication of a continuity and acceleration of the reformist agenda of the four previous years. Indeed, the announcement of the new government's agenda by the Prime Minister revealed the political intention to introduce radical reforms, even in areas that previously attracted high political confrontation. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the opposition is weakened, which is currently in favor of ND and its reformist agenda. However, the role of the opposition is equally important in the political system and thus, SYRIZA, as well as PASOK need to coordinate in order to better perform their political duty.

The second round of elections results

The second round of national elections took place on the 25th of July 2023. The elections resulted to an eight-party parliament. Specifically, the ND came first with 40,55% and 158 seats in the parliament, the main opposition party, the leftist SYRIZA came second with 17,85% of the vote share and the socialist PASOK was third with 11,85%. The communist party KKE acquired 7,69%, the far-right party SPARTANS acquired 4.68%, Greek Solution 4,44%, the far-right party Victory (Niki) 3,70% and the party Course of Freedom 3,17% of the vote share.

Thus, in accordance of the second round of election results the conservative New Democracy (ND) party, this time, acquired the necessary majority to form a single party government. The leader of ND party Kyriakos Mitsotakis received a vote of confidence in Parliament and will rule the country for another four years (1).

The aims of the new government

Greece's new parliament was sworn on the 3rd of July in the presence of the Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou. On the 6th of July the Greek PM presented the key government priorities in order to modernize the country, including the National Plan for Greece in 2027. As Mitsotakis mentioned during his speech the policies introduced by the new government focus on five pillars: a Productive Greece, a Social Greece, a Digital and Green Greece, a Fair Greece and a Strong Greece (2).

The first pillar – productive Greece- has as a key priority the decreasing of income inequalities, by increasing the minimum wage to 950 euros and the average wage to 1,500 euros by 2027. Moreover, the government aims to gradually reduce taxes. The PM strongly supported that the plan to increase wages and decrease taxes is supported by the aim of accelerating investments in the country, as well as the launch of major infrastructure works. Furthermore, the government aims to reach the recovery of the investment grade by the end of 2023, to reduce the public debt as a percentage of GDP below 140% by 2023, as well as reduce unemployment to 8% (2).

The second pillar – a Social Greece- also includes the implementation of radical reforms, specifically in the sectors of health and education. The reform of the National Health System is a priority for the government, despite been a controversial political issue. In addition, the current government aims to introduce major reforms in the education sector. Specifically, in the higher education the government aims to revise Article 16 of the Constitution, which does not allow private universities to operate in the country (2). It should be mentioned that this is a decision that for decades has caused intense political confrontation and has failed to be materialized so far. In addition, the government's goal is to upgrade the public universities by accelerating their extroversion and competitiveness. In the Social Greece pillar policies to provide citizens with cheap housing loans in order to secure accommodation are also included.

The third pillar- Digital and Green Greece- includes policies to intensify the transition of the country to renewable energy sources. According to the PM, by 2030 the latest, 80% of the electricity of the country would be produced from Renewable Energy Sources. In addition, the imports of energy will be reduced, since in 2022 natural gas imports costed Greece more than seven billion euros. Moreover, the government aims to increase the investments on green energy but also introduce policies to protect the natural environment and beauty of the Greek islands and mountains during this process (2).

The fourth pillar -Digital Greece- is also highly important for the government. The pillar includes policies aiming to digitalize the 90% of the 4,500 administrative procedures of the state by 2027. According to Mitsotakis, all state archives, courts, hospitals etc. will be digitized. Furthermore, the Justice system will be upgraded in order to speed up the court decisions, aiming to reach the EU average by 2027. It should be mentioned that delays in the justice sector is a chronic problem of the Greek justice system (2).

The fifth pillar – a strong Greece- according to the Greek PM is the most important, since it refers to the geopolitical and diplomatic status of the country in the region of East Mediterranean and beyond. For the next four years the government aims to continue the already existing armament programs that have already been approved for the 24 Rafale aircrafts, the 83 upgraded F-16 “Vipers” and the three Belharra frigates. In addition, the supply of the Hellenic Air Force with the F-35 fighters, for which Greece has already received a positive decision of the American Congress, is foreseen to be completed by 2028. Concerning the migration policy, the government aims to complete the fence in the Greek borders in Evros by 2025 and continue strengthening the Greek Coast Guard in order to more effectively protect the Greek borders, as well as saving human lives in the Greek seas (2).

Another important foreign policy issue, that the new government aims to address, is the Greek-Turkey relations, and the disputes between the two countries in the Aegean Sea. The PM mentioned that the differences between the two countries which are prevailing in their relations for more than forty years can be turned into a peaceful and creative solution. In particular this government is in favor of a peaceful settlement at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (2). It should be mentioned that the recourse to the ICJ has been diachronically supported by Greek governments, in respective of their political ideology. However, different conditions and different priorities did not always allow this to happen. Nevertheless, during the last year the political landscape shaped after the beginning of the war in Ukraine and in particular following

the dramatic earthquakes which hit Turkey in February 2023 brought Athens and Ankara somewhat closer following the victories of PM K. Mitsotakis and President Tayyip Erdogan in their respective elections of May and June 2023. Thus, the two leaders agreed to restart conversations. Whether these conversations can lead the two sides to an agreement about referring the continental self issue to the Hauge Court is to be seen. But they are both determined to explore the theoretical possibility.

The opposition

From the above it is evident that the new government aspires to introduce a plethora of policies and reforms to many different sectors. However, the election results and the big loss of the main opposition party, evidently shows that SYRIZA is much weakened. It is worth noting that following the announcement of the second round of election results and the political defeat of the party, the leader of SYRIZA Alexis Tsipras resigned. The political course that the party will take is meant to be seen with the election of a new leader in the fall 2023, when internal party elections will take place (3). So far, a transition leader, Sokratis Famellos has been selected. There is optimism that the internal issues of SYRIZA will be resolved with the election of the new leader. So far, the procedure goes on smoothly (4).

Conclusion

Following the second round of elections on the 25th of June, the operation of the new Parliament has started smoothly. The Prime Minister has announced the government's agenda for the years to come, which aims to radically upgrade the state and its functions in order to support the economic development and modernization of the country. However, it is a new development on the Greek politics that the governing party seems to benefit by the luck of a strong opposition party. It is a political responsibility of SYRIZA and PASOK parties to build a strong opposition camp either separately or in some coordination.

References

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