

# By supporting pro-austerity parties in Greece the EU has forgotten its founding values

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*Is the EU still a force for democracy? In the lead up to the recent elections in Greece, the EU has supported the pro-austerity PASOK and New Democracy parties, both well known for cronyism and corruption when in government. [Ioannis Tellidis](#) argues that rather than delegitimising anti-austerity parties in Greece, the EU should have had a more negotiated approach to Greece by supporting policies that would improve governance and governability.*



Ever since its inception, the European Union has been conceived of, as well as *perceived* of, as a force for good. Democratisation in South Europe would not have been consolidated had it not been for the Union and its role in fomenting the idea of a European family of nations bound together by common values, aspirations and the will to see their populations develop and progress through (and not despite) their differences and diverse ethno- and sociopolitical characters. The same visions of development and security were true later, with membership of the Eastern European countries.

The latest financial and economic developments in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain have shown that these visions are perilously close to collapsing. Not only because of the irresponsibility of the aforementioned member states and their leaderships, but also because of the inadequacy of the political elites of the European North who have often protested election and/or referenda results in the periphery. Particularly with regards to the Greek crisis, and despite the fact that an overwhelming percentage of the populace wants to [remain](#) in the Euro, cracks have been appearing in the relationship between Greek politicians and their (mainly) [German counterparts](#).

This is only one of the many incidents that should have made top officials in the EU and the financially healthier member-states (well, Germany) realise that throwing their weight behind New Democracy (ND) and PASOK is a suicidal move. Not just because it has forced an electoral reaction by Greek voters towards the extremes (right and left), but also because such a move cancels out any visions for common development and security, given the history of both ND & PASOK while in government. The two parties have been succeeding each other in power for years and their nepotistic, cronyist, favouritist and heavily corrupt behaviours are the main reasons behind the current [social](#), economic and political situation. Of course, corruption is not only a Greek '[sport](#)' as North-European politicians would have you believe – they themselves have [contributed](#) to the perpetuation of the bipartisan regime in order to win deals that were favourable to their [industries](#). But Europe was perceived of by the Greeks to have a bigger role in the elimination of the state's Ottoman traditions.



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EU officials and top-level politicians in Germany and elsewhere seem to have [gone Greek](#) before the last elections (as well as before the previous round, on May 6<sup>th</sup>). Their support for pro-austerity ND & PASOK,

and the threats that accompanied it, seem to promote anything but the change that is so desperately needed in the country's affairs as well as the conduct of its relationship with Europe. ND's campaign, based on a [terrorology](#) that any other vote will see Greece out of the Euro, has worked, giving the party the opportunity to call the shots for a coalition government. One year ago, its leader, Antonis Samaras, [denounced](#) [GR] in Parliament the very arguments he is now using as precisely that – terrorology. More than that, he has still to answer questions of [favouritism](#) [GR] while serving as Minister of Culture as recently as 2009 or the nepotism of other party cadres shown to openly ask voters to come back to ND, especially those that have been [favoured](#) [GR] (with a civil service post, a public works assignment, etc). Other senior ND cadres have referred to Golden Dawn, the neo-Nazi party, as their [sibling](#) [GR], while many cadres from LAOS, yet another far-right party, have been accepted into ND's ranks in order to prevent votes leaking to far right parties. No answer has been given yet by EU officials on how they expect ND & PASOK – given their record so far – to promote the reforms necessary for the transformation of the state.

The bureaucrats and the politicians that push (shove?) austerity measures through seem to have forgotten the values and ideals that drove the Union for decades. Over 50% unemployment among the youth, an average of 3 suicides per day, the closure of thousands of businesses and falling tax revenues because of the aforementioned as well as the lowering of the wages, are not exactly what anyone would call “successful reforms”. Yet, European politicians have sought to delegitimise anti-austerity votes and parties alike. A more negotiated approach towards SYRIZA, for example, coupled with a distancing from ND's & PASOK's records of mismanagement would have shown a firmer commitment towards the Union's values and would have sent a clearer message to the traditional Greek political elites to do away with their antiquated perceptions of [governance](#). The bribes and the [hypocrisy](#) of Northern European officialdom, however, mean that the EU is not interested in achieving the reforms it claims are needed... It only wants its money back – and fast!

If anything, the consolidation of democracy in the South through membership in the EU constituted the belief that the Union would be a mechanism of checks and balances against the usurpations, machinations and violations of human rights that were experienced during dictatorships or politically precarious eras. With their current stance and support towards pro-austerity parties and policies that lead to further asphyxiation, misrepresentation and – crucially – loss of dignity, EU and German officials have seriously damaged their [credibility](#) and reliability – not just in Greece, but also in [Ireland](#), Portugal and recently Spain. The EU could have shown its [solidarity](#) to the countries of the periphery, not by allowing things to stay the same, but by utilising the very values, objectives and ideals of the Union as incentives for the improvement of governance and governability in these countries. Seeking to take care of the banks' short-term interests has seriously undermined the continent's long term ones and has led to the replacement of EU's image as a 'catalytic' force by two other Greek words, '[tyranny](#)' and '[hypocrisy](#)'.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economic, or Kyung Hee University.*

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