The Greek referendum will likely be the beginning of the end for Alexis Tsipras

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What would defeat in Sunday's referendum mean for Alexis Tsipras and his Greek government? **Kyriakos Moumoutzis** *writes that while Tsipras has argued for a 'No' vote on the basis that it would strengthen the country's hand in future negotiations with its creditors, the uncertainty experienced in Greece since the referendum announcement is likely to increase the prospects for a 'Yes' vote. He argues that if a 'Yes' vote does occur then the Greek Prime Minister would be correct to follow through on his apparent pledge to resign should he lose the referendum.*

When the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras decided to unilaterally abandon negotiations with Greece's creditors over the country's so-called 'bailout programme' and to propose a referendum on the latest offer that Greece had been made, he employed a tactic that is common in negotiations in the European Union: using difficulties with domestic ratification of EU agreements to extract concessions.

Paradoxically, no agreement was reached in this particular case, but Mr Tsipras believes that once the Greek people have rejected the latest offer from the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the three 'institutions' will have to make them a better one. In his words: 'The day following the democratic choice, and a proud "No" to subjugation and to indignity, our country will have a much stronger negotiating position, and it will be the moment of truth for the creditors. They will finally understand that Greece is not going to surrender, that Greece is not a game that is over'.

Prior to Mr Tsipras' announcement regarding the referendum, the ratification difficulties that he has tried to use as a negotiating tactic were real. The constituency within Greece that is in favour of the policies included in the country's two bailout

Alexis Tsipras, Credit: Martin Schulz (CC-BY-SA-3.0)

programmes was never particularly large. The (partial) implementation of the two programmes reduced its size further. Many of those that the two programmes have left worse off support Mr Tsipras' Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza). They now feel that they have nothing left to lose and that anything would be better than the continuation of austerity. As one of them put it: '[A choice] between more austerity or chaos? Chaos'.

The irony for Mr Tsipras is that as soon as he made his announcement regarding the referendum, ratification of any agreement on any offer that the three 'institutions' might make Greece became less difficult. Ratification difficulties diminished as the Greek people caught a glimpse of the alternative to non-agreement/non-ratification. Over the last week Greek citizens have seen queues outside of banks, in supermarkets and at petrol stations, while they live in fear of banks running out of money and of shortages of food and fuel.

'Chaos', it seems, is no longer preferable to austerity. Opinion polls showing the 'Yes' vote ahead have already been reported. Mr Tsipras has hinted that he will resign if the Greek people vote 'Yes'. Rightly so. A 'Yes' vote will mean

either that Mr Tsipras has failed to implement the mandate that he has been given or that the Greek people have rescinded their mandate. If this proves to be the case, the announcement regarding the Greek referendum will have been the beginning of the end for Mr Tsipras.

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Note: This article originally appeared at Europe on the Strand – the blog *of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at King's College London. It gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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