


European-cum-National Elections in Greece

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Eurocrisis in the
Press

By [Vassilios Paipais](#)

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Last Sunday's European elections found the Greek electorate deeply divided, fragmented and to some extent disoriented. In general, Greek voters paid scant attention to the wider European agenda but they are hardly to blame as they were consciously invited by the two main parties to do so, i.e. to treat the EU elections as a vote of confidence or condemnation for national policies. The landscape of the 2012 national elections has been more or less confirmed but with some significant variations that can't be ignored.



SYRIZA is the uncontested winner of the elections as it still expresses much of citizen dissatisfaction with the austerity policies and the government's stalling reform agenda. SYRIZA's clear victory (26.6%) with a 3.9 point difference from ND (22.7%) cannot be overestimated as this is the first time a leftist party finishes first in European elections. However, the main opposition party is far from having established hegemony in Greek politics as some would argue that its performance is relatively unimpressive compared to expectations generated from six gruelling years of depression and skyrocketing unemployment. No one can be sure whether the Left has reached the ceiling of its electoral appeal but it does not yet seem to be developing the dynamic of a popular movement that would bring it, unrivalled, to power.

Golden Dawn (9.4%) should also be counted among the winners of Sunday's elections. The extreme-right has proven to be a resilient and growing movement, the only one (along with the communists) which can claim a rise in the absolute number of voters (an addition of 110,000) since the last national elections. This number, coupled with the revamp of the other far-right party LAOS which managed to gain 2.7% of the votes, paints a rather gloomy picture. The fact that a party that is openly racist and under investigation for its alleged criminal activities is still seen by a large number of Greeks as genuinely anti-establishment should provide a pause for serious consideration. I have written on this [elsewhere](#) and unfortunately my predictions have been confirmed. The extreme-right appeal is likely to keep rising as long as the country's recovery from economic devastation and political corruption relies on short-sighted austerity policies and is entrusted in the hands of the politico-economic elite responsible for its bankruptcy.

Finally, the ruling coalition's defeat is a clear sign of its unpopularity despite the achievement of a primary surplus earlier this year. The Greek population suffering under extreme taxation and suffocating unemployment rates experiences an unprecedented disaster that makes government promises sound hollow and unrealistic. The centre-left coalition partner 'Olive Tree' can hardly be proud for securing 8% of the votes (5% less than the national elections despite the fact that this time they ran as a coalition of progressive parties). Finally, the recently formed reformist party 'The River' fared relatively well (6.6%) but the voters remain unsure about its nature and objectives.

As a whole, the message of these elections is that nobody is the absolute favourite of the electorate. The country longs for both stability and change but trusts no one to be able to deliver a viable breakthrough to this almost impossible conundrum.

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