

Greek MPs Pro European But Weary of European Institutions

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Syriza, a radical left party critical of the functioning of the EU institutions, won the Greek parliamentary elections of 25 January 2015 and formed a government coalition with the smaller right-wing eurosceptic party of Independent Greeks (ANEL). Does this mean that Greek political elites are hostile to the EU? The answer to this question is obviously affected by the context of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and loan agreements signed in 2010 and 2012 between Greece and its creditors, when Greece was on the brink of default. The ways in which Greek MPs perceive the EU were the topic of our attitudinal survey research, supported by the Hellenic Observatory, among Greek MPs. Our survey was conducted in April – October 2014 and involved face-to-face interviews with 74 MPs (25 per cent of the total) who were randomly sampled and came from all Greek parties except for the communist party (the KKE traditionally refuses interviews). The survey is topical, as before the elections the Syriza and ANEL parties had taken a strong anti-Memorandum stand which they will try to implement as government partners, while the centre-right New Democracy (ND) and the centre-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), which were together in power in 2011-2014, had followed pro-Memorandum policies.

As the survey has shown, Greek MPs share a multiple political identity, regardless of political party affiliation. They are attached to Greece (100 per cent) and to their electoral district (99 per cent) and to a lesser but significant extent to Europe (77 per cent). By the same percentage share (77 per cent), MPs claim that Greece has benefited from being a EU Member-State. They adopt a rational European identity, based on a cost-benefit calculation. The latter holds true more for MPs who place themselves on the centre and the right of the Left-Right ideological scale than for the left-wing MPs. The majority of respondents do not construct their European identity by contrasting Europe to Europe's neighbours (e.g., Russia, Turkey) nor do they construct their national identity by contrasting Greeks to Europeans.

Yet, half of the MPs consider "the EU as a threat to Greece's economic growth": 95 per cent of the Syriza and 100 per cent of the ANEL MPs agree with this statement, but only 19 per cent of ND and 13 per cent of PASOK MPs do so. This is related to the high distrust which all MPs show to EU's executive institutions, such as the European Commission (EC) and the Council of the EU. On the scale of 0.0-10.0 (no trust – full trust) the average score given by MPs is just 4.6 and 4.7 respectively, while the score for the European Parliament is 6.7. Compared to the pre-crisis year 2007 when we had conducted a similar survey among Greek MPs, trust towards the same institutions has decreased. Moreover, in 2007 only 25 per cent of the MPs agreed that "Greece's interests are not taken into account by those making decisions at the EU level", whereas last year 84 per cent of the MPs agreed with the statement.

In brief, despite the tormented relations between Greece and the EU after the onset of the economic crisis, there is pro-European "political capital" among Greek MPs, who however have become increasingly weary of the functioning of EU institutions. This is something to remember in the short-run, as negotiations between the EU authorities and the new Greek government unfold.

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