

EU backs Greece's Tsipras as Left Platform splits from Syriza

By Robert Stevens
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Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' decision to call snap elections is a calculated manoeuvre aimed at establishing a new political framework for pushing through deeply unpopular austerity measures.

In the hours after Tsipras announced that he was resigning and calling the new elections, statements from European officials made clear that the decision was carried out under the direction of Greece's European Union (EU) creditors. Tsipras' Syriza party expects to win the elections to be held next month and to form a new government, perhaps with one or another pro-austerity coalition partner.

At a press conference Friday, European Commission spokesperson Annika Breidhardt confirmed that the commission knew beforehand of Tsipras' plans to resign. "For us this was not a surprise, following the repeated phone calls between [European Commission] President Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister Tsipras and [Greek President] Prokopis Pavlopoulos," she said. "We expected it."

Eurogroup President Jeroen Dijsselbloem said elections should be completed as soon as possible. "I think the intention of Prime Minister Tsipras is to get a more stable government," he said. By stable, Dijsselbloem means one capable of imposing spending cuts and attacks on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class agreed to by Syriza, but without the problems created by having come to power in January pledged to do the opposite.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was equally approving, saying, "Tsipras stepping down is part of the solution, not part of the crisis."

Several major European newspapers hailed the new elections as the coming out of Tsipras as an openly pro-austerity politician. Italy's *Corriere della Sera* praised Tsipras for dropping populist promises and

embarking on "a long road to renewal which, for all its difficulties, has shown itself to be the only path possible."

Over the past decade, Greece's right-wing New Democracy (ND) party and the social democratic Pasok have been thoroughly discredited for imposing a series of austerity measures at the behest of the EU. This is why the ruling class turned to Syriza. The *Guardian's* Athens correspondent Helena Smith wrote, "Tsipras, the logic goes, is the only man who can truly transform Greece. The application of neo-liberal policies on a resistant populace can only come from the left ..."

Tsipras timed the election announcement for the evening of August 20. Earlier in the day, the Greek government received its first tranche of new loans, which are conditional on imposing a new raft of austerity measures agreed to overwhelmingly by the Greek parliament. Upon receiving the funds, the government immediately paid a €3.2 billion debt owed to the European Central Bank (ECB).

Tsipras called the elections hoping to capitalise on the confusion created by Syriza's total repudiation of the anti-austerity programme on which it was elected. He said, "The political mandate of the January 25 elections has exhausted its limits and now the Greek people have to have their say."

The "political mandate" of Syriza was "exhausted" by the government's repudiation of the anti-austerity sentiment that brought it to power. As for the Greek people having "their say," this was nominally the purpose of the referendum on austerity measures that was held in early July. Workers and youth overwhelmingly opposed the demands of the EU, and the Syriza-led government responded by immediately agreeing to even harsher measures.

As with the referendum, the new election is not

intended to register the democratic will of the population. Rather, it is a continuation of the political conspiracy of the banks and Greek ruling class.

Participating fully in this conspiracy has been Syriza's "Left Platform," which has done everything it could to cover for Tsipras and insist that Syriza is a vehicle for opposing the dictates of the banks.

Anticipating that a new wave of austerity will spark enormous social opposition and anger, a section of the Left Platform has now announced it is leaving the party. Twenty-five of its deputies declared that they would form a new party, dubbed "Popular Unity," to stand in the elections. Prior to announcing this decision, Left Platform said it would establish a "broad, anti-memorandum, progressive, democratic front, which will decisively run in the elections in order to enforce the repeal of all the memorandums."

This new party is an outfit of proven dissemblers who have loyally served inside Tsipras' pro-austerity government. For years, the Left Platform—an amalgam of ex-Stalinists, Maoists and assorted pseudo-left organizations—has specialised in spouting anti-austerity rhetoric. This continued while they acted as a leading component of the Greek capitalist state. They hailed the election of Syriza as a major turning point in European politics and sought to present Tsipras' fraudulent referendum in July as an unprecedented acknowledgement of popular control over government policy.

With Tsipras shifting to a more openly pro-austerity position, the Popular Unity Party will seek to play the role of containing social unrest.

Popular Unity has announced its readiness to form alliances with forces across the political spectrum, including on the right wing. In a statement hailing the new party Friday, former Left Platform and Syriza Central Committee member Stathis Kouvelakis stated that Popular Unity will "provide an expression to social forces that do not necessarily recognize themselves as part of the Left but want to fight austerity, the Memoranda ..."

With 25 deputies, Popular Unity is now the third largest grouping in parliament, headed by Panagiotis Lafazanis, who previously served as Tsipras' minister of energy. Under the Greek constitution, if an election is called within a year of the last one, the president first asks the two leading opposition parties to attempt to

form a government. If they cannot, elections are triggered.

On Friday, Pavlopoulos gave the mandate to the main opposition party, New Democracy, who now have three days to attempt to form a government. As ND and its likely allies are not able to command a majority, the mandate is then expected to pass to Popular Unity.

A statement from Popular Unity declared that it will attempt negotiations with "anti-austerity" forces, including the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE), though this gives no real possibility of a viable coalition. It appears rather to be a mechanism for drawing the KKE and smaller political groupings together into a political alliance.

Speaking to the Parapolitika radio station, KKE General Secretary Dimitris Koutsoubas held out the prospect of future collaboration with the new party. Tsipras was calling elections "very soon," he claimed, "precisely so that his internal party rivals, as well as the bourgeois opposition parties, will not be able to organise themselves."

Syriza's betrayal and the cynical manoeuvres of the Left Platform will lead to a strengthening of the most right-wing and fascistic forces. The actions of Syriza since the election are a devastating indictment of all those within the pseudo-left who claimed that supporting Tsipras' government was a means of both fighting austerity and combating the threat of fascism in Greece.

Syriza, whose first act on assuming office was to enter into a coalition with the openly xenophobic Independent Greeks, will only shift further to the right.

In this context the comments Friday of Syriza Labour Minister George Katrougalos were striking. Asked by a BBC journalist if Syriza's embrace of austerity meant that there was a risk of a growth of support for right-wing parties, Katrougalos replied there no longer existed a "typical confrontation between left and right."

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