

The Legacy of Syriza: Four years of austerity, privatizations, militarism and attacks on refugees—Part 3

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This is the third and final part of a three part series; find the first two parts here: [Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#)

The Syriza administration likewise showed its true face in its domestic policy. This was shown early on in the appointment of Giannis Panousis, a criminologist and former PASOK politician, as deputy minister of the interior, responsible for civil protection and the police. Among Panousis' demands were the reintroduction of the communal police, more rigorous crime prevention and mobile units in certain regions. He also ensured that police remained armed at demonstrations—a practice Syriza, before the elections, had promised to abolish.

In press statements Panousis agitated against the left, claiming the left-wing autonomous district of Athens, Exarchia, was “controlled by the mafia.” Upon orders from Tsipras, in April 2015 he used police violence and tear gas against the anarchists that had occupied the Rector's Office of the University of Athens, arresting 18 people.

According to Eurostat, spending on public order and security in Greece—including the police—increased from 3.9 percent of the total budget in 2015 to 4.5 percent in 2017.

The law-and-order course of the Syriza government was reflected in further personnel decisions. The former interior minister of the right-wing government of Kostas Karamanlis (New Democracy, ND), Prokopis Pavlopoulos, became president on Tsipras' suggestion and the former intelligence chief under Karamanlis, Dimitris Papangelopoulos, became deputy minister of justice.

In August 2018, the long-time ND politician Katerina Papakosta advanced to deputy minister for civil

defence and thus took control of the police. Just previous to that she had founded a new right-wing party (New Greek Momentum). That she shares the neo-Nazi mindset of much of law enforcement was demonstrated by Papakosta's defamatory verbal attacks on refugees: “Illegal immigrants are flooding our borders by the thousands, like cockroaches,” she stated in 2012.

After the dissolution of the Anel coalition in January, Tsipras pulled a whole pile of ultra-right politicians into his faction and onto the ballot including Terence Quick, previously secretary of state for foreign affairs; Thanasis Papachristopoulos; Vassilis Kokkalis; Kostas Zouraris; and Marina Chrysoveloni, the press spokeswoman for Anel. In July, Papakosta likewise landed on the Syriza ballot. The former Anel politician and Minister of Tourism Elena Kountoura, daughter of a well-known general and monarchist, even won a seat for Syriza in the European Union Parliament.

Refugee policy

Contrary to its electoral promises, Syriza not only continued the inhuman migration policies of its predecessor but intensified them dramatically.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, in 2015 alone over 850,000 people—most of them from the war zones of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq—fled from Turkey across the Mediterranean to Greece. Hundreds of refugees payed for the dangerous passage in inflatable boats with their lives.

The Greek government and the EU, who are responsible for the war crimes and sealing off Europe, had these traumatized and exhausted people, including many women and children, stay in makeshift camps,

barracks or out in the open without minimum sanitary standards, enduring brutal treatment by the police.

To keep refugees from reaching Europe, the NATO states agreed in February 2016 at the initiative of Greece, Germany and Turkey to the deployment of the military in the Aegean. Under the pretext of fighting “smugglers” and “illegal migration,” the ongoing NATO operation, in cooperation with the border protection agency Frontex and the Greek and Turkish authorities, is intended to militarily seal “Fortress Europe” and increase war preparations against Russia.

During the same period, the West Balkan countries, including North Macedonia, agreed to close their borders, thus preventing refugees from continuing to Northern Europe. Around 8,500 refugees were suddenly stranded at the Greek-Macedonian border. The shocking pictures of the terrible conditions in the provisional camp of Idomeni were seen the world over.

But the Greek government and the EU pursued a merciless policy of deterrence. On March 18 they concluded a criminal agreement with Turkey that saw to the internment of refugees in concentration camps—called “hot spots”—and their expedited deportation to Turkey.

The EU-Turkey deal, implemented by the Syriza government as the doorman of fortress Europe, lifted the basic right to asylum and was deemed illegal by several human rights organizations as well as the United Nations. Since then, incarcerated in the overcrowded hotspots, thousands of refugees have spent years in catastrophic conditions. Two months after the deal the Syriza government employed tear gas and stun grenades against protesting refugees in Idomeni and ordered the clearing of the camp.

The Greek state is responsible for countless mistreatments, diseases and deaths of refugees, but only rarely does a case appear in court. This July a Syrian family sued for the death of their father in the Moria camp. Mustafa Mustafa, 46, died of carbon monoxide poisoning in his sleep after constructing a makeshift stove to ward off the winter cold. In that very week a 20-year-old Egyptian and a young Pakistani suffered the same fate.

Only in a few cases was Greece sentenced to compensation before the European Court of Human Rights. For example, four underage refugees from Afghanistan who were detained in cells under unlawful

circumstances as well as nine underage refugees from Morocco, Iraq and Syria each received between €4,000 and €6,000.

The increasing protests of refugees, residents and helpers were suppressed with police violence and harassment. On April 22, 2018, when fascist thugs attacked a refugee protest on Lesbos, the riot police did not intervene. Tsipras had previously encouraged these anti-immigrant forces by overturning the verdict of a Greek administrative court calling for an end to the detention of refugees on the island.

This spring the government ordered the forced eviction of four occupied houses in the Exarchia district, leaving 200 to 300 refugees living there on the street. In protest, the then homeless refugees set up a camp at Syntagma Square, which was also cleared by police at the end of April.

In accord with the EU, the Syriza government has obstructed the work of NGOs and journalists and criminalised humanitarian aid. This was exemplified by the case of the Syrian swimmer and refugee aid Saraardini, who herself had fled by boat to Greece in 2015. She was convicted with over 30 members of the NGO Emergency Response Centre International (ERCI) in August 2018 of alleged trafficking and participation in a “criminal organization” and incarcerated for several months.

The facts of the four-year reign of Syriza speak for themselves. In every area—in social and economic policy, foreign and domestic politics and refugee policy—the pseudo-left party in cooperation with its far-right coalition partner brutally enforced the interests of the ruling class against workers, retirees and youth and so paved the way for the new far-right ND government under Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The first months have already shown that the new administration is continuing and intensifying the far-right course set by the Syriza government.

Concluded

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