Syriza leader Tsipras offers collaboration with New Democracy against refugees and Turkey

By John Vassilopoulos and Chris Marsden
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This month Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) leader and former prime minister Alexis Tsipras boasted of his anti-immigration record, while offering cooperation to the New Democracy (ND) government in both its anti-migrant offensive and in any hostilities towards Turkey.

In a TV interview on TV Channel Mega, Tsipras backed Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ policy of closing the land border with Turkey at the Evros river. “Given this mass attempt of inflows into the country, in all honesty every government would have done the same thing,” he said.

Greece was turned into Europe’s border guard and jailer under Tsipras’s government, as part of the dirty deal signed by the European Union (EU) and Turkey. This saw thousands of refugees and migrants interned in camps like Moria in Lesbos, dubbed “the worst refugee camp in the world.”

Tsipras boasted that Syriza not only pioneered the moves now being carried out by the conservative ND but did them more efficiently. “In 2015 we had 860,000 recorded entries [into the country]. Where did these enter the country? From our islands. And why did they enter via our islands? Is it because they wanted to risk their lives at sea by drowning or because they enjoyed water sports? It was because [the land border with Turkey] at Evros was shut!”

Emphasising his own repressive credentials, Tsipras denounced ND for not implementing plans to have water patrols on the river Evros and other measures to strengthen the border guard.

Tsipras is signing off on a policy of brutal repression of refugees waged jointly by the government, fascist thugs who have benefited most from the stoking up of chauvinism and xenophobia, and the European Union.

Mitsotakis met with senior EU officials on March 3 in the town of Kastanies in the Evros border region. He declared “an asymmetrical threat against Greece’s Eastern borders, which are also European borders. The unlawful entry of thousands of people turns into a breach of our sovereign territory, with people of unknown origin and unknown purposes at the forefront, who don’t hesitate to blatantly use violence to enter Greek territory.”

This filth is magnified by the media, with Ta Nea journalist Yiannis Pretenteris writing, “When we have an invasion, we push back this invasion. We guard the borders so not even a mosquito can enter. We guard them with tear gas, with fences, with beatings, with shields, punches and kicks… by all means necessary. This is what we did in 1940. This is what we are doing now.”

A Facebook page called “Illegal Immigrant Hunters Association” was set up by far-right activists from the city of Volos in the Thessaly region of Greece. According to a report on e-thessalia, the page was set up on March 3 following the attack on refugees at the border in Evros with a view to the fascists going there to join the other vigilante groups, as well as plans to organise a counter-demonstration during a local anti-racism rally in that week.

According to the article, the 300-strong group was full of “hateful posts, pictures of knives and arms alongside their gun licences.” The group’s main picture was a Greek flag flanked by a hand-grenade and two knives, with the Greek commando insignia in its centre.

Following an outcry on social media, the Facebook page administrator was taken in for questioning by police but was released without charges. Instead, the case was referred to the local prosecutor to rule whether anti-racism laws were broken—a common method of putting the case to rest. The page was subsequently renamed as “Volos Patriots’ Association.”

A video posted online shows a farmer at Evros driving a tractor next to the enormous razor-wired border fence spraying pesticide onto refugees, who are forced to flee, while policemen look on. In front of the tractor is an army vehicle. Amidst the laughter of the onlookers, a voice is heard saying: “Spray them. Spray the faggots.”

The fascist Golden Dawn movement has been given a
lease of life through its involvement in anti-refugee attacks. At the beginning of the month, Deutsche Welle photojournalist Michael Trammer was assaulted by far-right thugs in Lesbos. A few days after, an arson attack destroyed a refugee shelter run by the NGO, “One Happy Family.”

This has Europe-wide implications. Lesbos has become the go-to destination for far-right activists from all over Europe. In the same week as the arson, a group of neo-Nazis from Germany and Austria flew to Lesbos’ capital Mytilini. According to eyewitnesses, they were attacked by local residents after one fascist shouted, “We will do to you the same as we did in Kalavryta”—a reference to the 1943 Kalavryta massacre committed by the Nazis in World War Two, which saw the near-extirmination of the town’s male population with 693 killed by firing squads and a thousand houses looted and burned.

Far-right British media figure Katie Hopkins tweeted March 7 a video of security forces attacking migrants at the border, commenting, “Erdogan says he will flood Europe with Muslims until the Crescent triumphs over the Cross. This is the border with Greece. Mosque in the distance. Soldiers of the Cross holding the line. This is biblical.”

Tsipras allies himself with such forces, portraying the refugee influx in identical terms—as an invasion orchestrated by Turkey that Greece must counter with EU support.

Asked about Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s role in instigating the migrant inflows, Tsipras insisted, “The crucial thing is for us... to realise that we are up against a geopolitical threat. Not only because of the suffering of refugees, whom we must not treat as enemies and invaders, but from a geopolitical threat from Turkey.”

Offering a proposal to collaborate with ND, he added, “And when we have such a geopolitical threat then all political forces ought to have if not solidarity then at least a framework for communication.”

Turkey, he added, is not only being provocative with the refugee crisis but also by sending an oil and gas exploration vessel into waters within Greece’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as well as by signing a supply agreement with Libya, which cuts across Greece’s sovereign rights.

Tsipras praised the initial effectiveness of the Turkey-EU agreement. But now, he complained, with Turkey unilaterally breaking this agreement, Greece is doing nothing to force the EU to bring Turkey to task. The ND government should threaten to veto all European Council decisions if the EU “doesn’t bring Turkey into line, with the threat of sanctions if required.

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