



# 2014 European Parliament elections: Views from across Europe

## Выборы в Европейский парламент 2014 г.: Взгляд из европейских столиц

Sweden  
59.2685° N, 15.7591° E

Finland  
62.4302° N, 24.7271° E

Estonia  
58.7673° N, 24.7990° E

Latvia  
57.0035° N, 24.3446° E

United Kingdom  
53.1142° N, 2.5771° W

Denmark  
55.7200° N, 12.5700° E

Lithuania  
55.3006° N, 23.8491° E

Ireland  
53.0000° N, 7.0000° W

Netherlands  
52.2066° N, 5.6422° E

Poland  
51.4273° N, 20.1726° E

Germany  
51.0000° N, 9.0000° E

Belgium  
50.7802° N, 4.4269° E

Luxembourg  
49.7562° N, 6.0970° E

Czech Republic  
49.7500° N, 15.7500° E

Slovakia  
48.6300° N, 19.5561° E

France  
46.0000° N, 2.0000° E

Austria  
48.1200° N, 16.2200° E

Hungary  
47.2753° N, 20.5528° E

Slovenia  
45.8002° N, 15.9039° E

Romania  
45.7909° N, 24.7731° E

Croatia  
45.3333° N, 16.5268° W

Italy  
44.2632° N, 11.4403° E

Bulgaria  
42.3755° N, 25.1629° E

Portugal  
38.7000° N, 9.1833° W

Spain  
40.6986° N, 3.2949° W

Greece  
38.3228° N, 22.2592° E

Malta  
35.8997° N, 14.5172° E

Cyprus  
35.2251° N, 33.6124° E

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# Greece

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Is Greece European? This was the title of intriguing article written by Robert Kaplan in 2012.<sup>2</sup> According to Kaplan, Greece's economic and political development bears the marks of a legacy inconsistent with modern Western European standards.

Indeed, one could argue that there is a plethora of features in the Greek economic and political reality that might deviate from the advanced Western European societies. The most prominent of them are clientelism and the absence of meritocratic social and economic development due to the entanglement of the state, political parties and business. The rise and establishment of a self-sufficient and enlightened bourgeois class was particularly hampered by these conditions. For the most part, political parties have been family businesses, while the party in power not only dominated the highest rank of the bureaucracy – as is normal and proper in a democracy – but the middle and lower ranks too.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the European Community initially and later the European Union were highly appreciated for the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes and cohesion funds, which considerably benefited Greece while at the same time allowing the parties to maintain their clients. Not surprisingly, the early anti-European rhetoric of some political parties disappeared by the mid-1980s, when it was replaced by a different kind of "battle", to be fought in Brussels. This aimed at extracting the maximum funds from member states in order to keep the Greek economy afloat and sustain the unrealistically high standard of living pursued since 1981. Nevertheless, the subsidies did not improve the state's overall efficiency as Greece has had a poor record in the transposition of the EU's single market rules and a high rate of infringement cases.<sup>4</sup>

The debilitated competitiveness of the Greek economy resulted in the ballooning of the public and private debt. According to an assessment by Bertelsmann Stiftung,<sup>5</sup> Greece achieved the smallest integration-induced income in the period between 1992 and 2012 of all EU member states. Between 1992 and 2009, the value of the Greek integration index rose from 47.6 to 64.2. At the end of the evaluation period (2012), it dropped to 33.9 index points.

In 2010, the *annus mirabilis* for the Greek economy, its socialist government (led by PASOK) admitted that the country was unable to service its mounting public debt and resorted to the rescue mechanism set up by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Greece was offered a first bailout package, supplanted two years later by a second linked to a harsh austerity programme. However, this had consequences, since Greece's bankruptcy revealed the structural deficiencies of its state and private economy. Thus, the political-economic establishment that had in past decades managed the destiny of the country, as well as EU subsidies and funds, lost its credibility entirely, overshadowing the European Union as institution per se. Many began overtly questioning core features of the process

of integration, such as the gradual sharing of competences or even the country's eurozone membership, calling for the resumption of national sovereignty or independence.

Moreover, the fact that this austerity programme was to be implemented by political parties (the conservative New Democracy party and the social-democratic PASOK) that had managed Greece's domestic affairs in such a catastrophic way, while receiving very generous public funding in order to cover operational costs, further damaged the EU's credibility. The implementation of the adjustment programme did not distinguish between well-off and more vulnerable segments of the Greek population. On the contrary, it imposed horizontal measures and cuts in salaries, pensions and the minimum wage.<sup>6</sup> The primacy of collective bargaining between the various interest groups, embedded in the Greek Constitution, was also lifted.<sup>7</sup>

A general feeling of externally imposed injustice began to take root within Greek society, undermining both the legitimacy of the adjustment programme and parliamentary democracy as a system. Large numbers of Greeks chose atypical channels of political participation, while verbal and physical attacks on individual PASOK and New Democracy members of Parliament were by no means rare. According to a survey carried out in 2013<sup>8</sup>, Greece has the highest rate out of all OECD countries of people who believe the government is either largely or entirely run by a few big entities acting in their own interest (83%), while political parties are perceived by the public as the most corrupt institutions in the country. Of 95 countries, Greeks' attitudes towards their political parties are the joint-second worst in the world, along with Mexico and Nepal. Only Nigeria's fared worse in the public eye.

Consequently, the decline of the mainstream "government parties", which usually gathered more than 80% of the vote altogether, enhanced the prominence of political parties that were either formerly negligible, like Syriza, or completely on the margins of the political landscape, as was the case with the neo-Nazi movement, Golden Dawn. In the two national elections of 2012, Greece's old party system collapsed as voters abandoned former mainstays and turned to both the left and the right of the political spectrum; Syriza because of its uncompromising anti-austerity stance was elevated to major opposition party, while Golden Dawn garnered about 7% of the vote.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas until 2014 Greece belonged to a group of countries in which elections for the European Parliament are of secondary importance, with low turnout and little impact on party competition, the latest electoral contest was significant in that it was yet another showdown in domestic politics. Furthermore, it was an opportunity to assess public sentiment towards the EU. As most Greeks are not able to distinguish between the various EU bodies, the European Parliament is generally perceived as an extension of the EU.<sup>10</sup>

For the very first time in modern Greek history, a leftist party gathered a majority

of the votes. Previously, the most significant performance of the left had been in 1958, when the so-called EDA coalition gained 24.4% of the votes. However, while the Greek left had prevailed in terms of political culture and ideological thinking since 1974, leftist parties did not manage to capitalise on their wider resonance in elections. On 25 May 2014, radical left-wing party Syriza topped the national poll, while extreme right-wing Golden Dawn's strength increased remarkably (see the list at the end of the text). The government coalition partners – centre-right New Democracy and socialist PASOK – suffered a combined loss of 11% of their votes, compared with results from the 2012 elections.

Syriza has marked the Greek party system since 1992 by formulating “new issues”, particularly feminism, democratic rights and environmentalism. In 2000, the party initiated a change in its political orientation and strategy, adopting more radical positions in some matters and forming an electoral coalition with several parties and organisations from the extra-parliamentary left. This ‘left turn’ was organised from within the party by a domination of the leftist faction over the so-called ‘moderniser’s faction’.<sup>11</sup> However, in 2010 the latter split to form a new party, the Democratic Left (DIMAR).<sup>12</sup> Although Syriza has been trying to cultivate a unified profile, it engulfs groups with radical agendas, which go beyond the party’s official positions demanding a return to the drachma and a big-spending state with nationalised industry and banks.

Syriza’s remarkable success in the May 2014 elections boosted its hopes of coming to power following the next parliamentary elections. If this happens, the party will be called upon to perform a very difficult balancing act: challenge the corrupt and anti-patriotic old political and economic establishment on the one hand, while making its

programme appealing for the middle and at least a part of the bourgeois class as elements of a greater social coalition, on the other.

It is also uncertain whether Syriza will be able to address the huge public demand for overwhelming social change. If it fails, a new and more radical political actor, Golden Dawn, is waiting to take on the role of social ‘hero’ and effect radical change in Greek society. Indeed, Golden Dawn’s violent tactics have allowed the party to cultivate an anti-systemic and anti-immigrant profile, capitalising on these sentiments and hoping to usurp the massive realignment of the Greek electorate away from mainstream parties. As analysts of the phenomenon have already noted, the ethnocentric, racist conception of politics does not stop at excluding non-Greeks from the state, but also incorporates a call for the radical transformation of society.<sup>13</sup> The latest electoral results made clear that the influence of Golden Dawn is spilling over from the impoverished suburbs into the most cosmopolitan districts, such as Kolonaki, in the centre of Athens, and to the most rural and non-urban regions of Greece. Should this scenario materialize, Greece will have to be expelled from the European Union and Kaplan’s question will become obsolete.

**The final list of all elected parties, the percentage gained, and the seat allocation:<sup>14</sup>**

**Coalition of Radical Left (Syriza)** – 26.57% of the vote and six MEPs

**New Democracy** – 22.72% of the vote and five MEPs

**Golden Dawn** – 9.39% of the vote and three MEPs

**Olive Tree** (coalition in which PASOK also participates) – 8.02% of the vote and two MEPs

**The River** – 6.60% of the vote and two MEPs

**Communist party** – 6.11% of the vote and two MEPs

**Independent Greeks** – 3.49% of the vote and one MEP

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Anastasia Adamidou for her comments.

<sup>2</sup> Stratfor, June 6, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nicos, Mouzelis, *Modern Greece. Facets of Underdevelopment* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978) and Konstantinos, Tsoukalas, *Social development and State* (Athens: Themelio Publisher, 1993) 5th edition (in Greek).

<sup>4</sup> Maria, Rammata, *Contemporary Greek Public Administration* (Athens: Kritiki Publisher, 2011) (In Greek), pp. 254-257 and Kevin, Featherstone & Dimitris, Papadimitriou, *The Limits of Europeanization. Reform Capacity and Policy Conflict in Greece* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 57-58.

<sup>5</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *20 years of the European single market: growth effects of EU integration, policy brief 2014/02*.

<sup>6</sup> See Theofanis, Exadaktylos & Nicholas, Zachariadis, *Hellenic Observatory papers on Greece and Southeast Europe*, No 65 (December 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Valia, Aranitou, *Social Dialogue and employer associations. From the social partners’ cooperation to the market hegemony* (Athens: Savvalas publisher, 2012) (In Greek), pp. 171-176.

<sup>8</sup> Transparency International (Authors Deborah Hardoon, Finn Heinrich), *The 2013 Global Corruption Barometer*, p. 15, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Andreas, Stergiou, “The 2012 Parliamentary elections in Greece”. Original title: “Des élections à l’anarchie?”, *Outre-terre: Revue européenne de géopolitique*, vol. 32, *L’euro sans l’Europe? II* (2012), pp. 357-361.

<sup>10</sup> The elections were held in line with a new electoral amendment for the EU parliament elections giving the possibility of an indirect vote on an EU Commission President for the very first time.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Costas, Eleftheriou, *The uneasy symbiosis: Factionalism and Radical Politics in Synaspismos*. Paper prepared for presentation at the 4th Hellenic Observatory PhD, Symposium, London School of Economics. 25-26 June 2009.

<sup>12</sup> “The History of the Greek Left from its origins until today”. Original title: *Die Linke in Griechenland. Ein historischer Überblick von ihrer Entstehung bis zu den Maiwahlen 2012*, *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies XVIII* (2012), No. 25, pp.166-167.

<sup>13</sup> Antonis, Ellinas (2013) *The Rise of Golden Dawn: The New Face of the Far Right in Greece*, *South European Society and Politics*, 18:4, 543-565.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Greece’s Interior Ministry