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Greece

# Syriza's strategy of class collaboration further consolidated

- Debate - Perspectives in Greece -

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**Below you can read the recent interview of Georgios Stathakis for the Vima, one of the biggest tabloids in Greece. Georgios Stathakis is currently a SYRIZA MP and the person in charge of the Development Sector of SYRIZA. He is one of the closest consultants of party president Tsipras and one of the most prominent leaders of the party. â€” NS.**

**Mr Stathakis, in your interview for the “Sunday Vima” in September 2012, you had declared that the new Memorandum would not survive the next six months. There is one month remaining...Is this estimation still valid?**

It is valid that the Memorandum has no future, is not viable, without one or more than one restructuring of the public debt, which it supposedly serves, and without the stabilization of the Greek economy as well. Today there is a restructuring of the debt ahead of us in the end of the year and, at the same time, the stabilization of the economy that they envisioned back in that time is still not visible. There is new recession and new disarrangement of public revenues”.

**The stabilization for you remains...**

...our primary goal, yes.

**How can the recession be stopped at this moment, as obviously we cannot have such thing in two or three months?**

The stopping of the recession requires economic policies exactly on the opposite of the Memorandum, which means stabilization of the public expenses at a level of 40-42%, it is not that important, stabilization of the tax income at the same level, but combined with measures of redistribution of the tax weights, which should facilitate the tendency for consumption in domestic demand to increase, and it requires also some necessary counterweights, a development agenda which would form a mechanism with the minimum investment funds needed in order to achieve recovery.

**Domestic or foreign investment funds?**

Both domestic and foreign ones.

**Consequently, the whole disapproval of foreign investments from the part of SYRIZA is somehow relativised...**

There is no such thing as disapproval of foreign investments, there is disapproval of those investments that are exclusively oriented towards the program of privatizations, public utility and real estate. SYRIZA in general supports all investments that upgrade the country's productive economy, the infrastructure in tourism and other sections and, consequently, we are highly positive towards them, we want an institutional, tax and environmental framework that will be clear and this is what we are going to do as a government, in order to facilitate foreign investments in Greece.

**Speaking of public expenses, how is this compromising with the commitment of Mr. Tsipras to restore pensions at the pre-Memorandum levels?**

Without the word “gradually” this phrase stays meaningless. This “gradually” is very important. Salaries and pensions can return to levels that are compatible with those before 2009 only provided that economy recovers and reaches the level of 2009. This is a gradual procedure. Obviously, the intention of SYRIZA is, as far as economy comes back to development rates, both working people and pensioners to have the responding portion in this development.

**Consequently this is not something achievable by “one law”...**

...that's why Alexis Tsipras also used the word “gradually”.

**You put the emphasis on the reform of the state and the public sector. On what model is this going to happen?**

All major changes that there have historically been in Greece, under Trikoupis, Venizelos or Konstantinos Karamanlis, were combined with a profound change in public administration, because the effort to change things in economic policies and set goals can't go forward, without an effective and just state. This is the big bet for SYRIZA, there must be profound changes in public administration. The state delivered to us is not ours, but all goals set by SYRIZA depend on the profound changes in public administration.

**State apparatus, public administration, these mean “middle class” or something around it. As you mentioned Konstantinos Karamanlis, is this mention linked with the recent “flirting” between Mr. Tsipras and the supporters of Karamanlis inside ND?**

I think it's a matter neither of love nor hatred. The exit of the Greek society out of the impasse obviously surpasses the narrow ideological frameworks in which our political system has been formed until today and SYRIZA acts as a force which tries to clearly describe the way in which we can have this exit. In this process it will be politically supported by broader strata that exceed the traditional space of the left. Thus, it addresses to the centre and to parts of the right that at this moment can form a new political coalition.

**So, you estimate that there are possibilities of collaboration everywhere.**

I estimate that the political scene will be very different from how it used to be in the past. Obviously, there will be more rearrangements in the space of the centre and SYRIZA must be present in all these processes, in order to build a very powerful social and political bloc, which is necessary, if it (SYRIZA) is to make any change needed in the Greek society.

**You say that the open space of Social-Democracy will be covered by you and nobody else.**

I imagine that everybody has the ambition for this space to be a field where SYRIZA will gather all these parts that look for expression.

**I don't think Mr. Lafazanis has such an ambition...**

Our party has space for various and different strategies. Nevertheless it is our common belief and there is a convergence of opinions on that, that we used to seek and still we seek unity of the left, this is given and nobody disagrees with that, and at the same time we agree on the fact that SYRIZA must express a much broader spectrum of political forces.

**The involvement of SYRIZA in the “law and order” agenda favors you or should you insist on the economic field?**

My personal opinion is that SYRIZA should insist on the economic and social agenda. The government is substantially absent from this. It has put extravagant weight on the “law and order” agenda, where SYRIZA obviously will strongly defend matters of human rights. It is not the field, however, where it can show its capability of intervention at the moment.

**You consider a new “haircut” of the Greek debt as given. But who will buy Greek bonds in the future?**

As far as the debt is not viable, nobody will buy Greek bonds. The debt must get viable. As long as there is no application of a policy to reduce it, which usually happens in two ways, either by higher development rates or by inflation, but instead of a policy of austerity and deflation, there is no other way than successive “haircuts”.

**You have recently been in the USA. It is not finally a problem for SYRIZA that its interlocutors are found outside the euro zone?**

SYRIZA should do these trips to North and South America, as we should do the next ones to China and Russia. We come from a political family that does not govern at the moment in Europe, therefore we should, if anything, form on the international level an elementary familiarity with the opinions and strategies promoted by SYRIZA. In America things are easier because Obama's policy has much in common with what we intend to do. He reinforced the welfare state in the crisis, he raised minimum salaries by 25%, he created an agenda of restraint of the recession with an increase of the public debt and he taxes the rich.

## Some short comments:

1. It is highly provocative for workers, employees, unemployed and pensioners in Greece the fact that, according to Mr. Stathakis, one of the most prominent members of SYRIZA leadership, the level of salaries and pensions are directly linked with the growth of the economy and consequently the GDP. This means accepting that working people are destined to get only a certain percentage of the wealth they themselves produce. This acceptance equals acceptance of one of the most fundamental rules of capitalist economy. As long as it is true that for the salaries to rise, there must be positive development rates, one can easily assume that, when there is a recession, as is the case in Greece, cuts in salaries and pensions are a reasonable consequence. We recognize that Mr. Stathakis criticizes the size of these cuts, that's his point of criticism to the Memorandum. At any case though, Mr Stathakis is clear: working people must pay for the capitalist crisis (their responding portion).

2. Mr Stathakis, agreeing with president Tsipras (who expressed himself in a recent interview mildly in favor of the COSCO investment in the port of Piraeus) is enthusiastic about foreign investments in Greece. Foreign investments, no matter what one may imagine, equal some very simple things: privatizations, layoffs, lower salaries, environmental disaster. That's the meaning of Mr Hollande's recent visit in Athens: the expression of French corporations' interest in buying the water services in Greece. That's the meaning of the Qataris' interest in the ex-airport of Athens: the conversion of a huge free space in the city into a huge commercial centre. Domestic private investments are not better at all. There is the same meaning in the great investment by Mr Bobolas in the gold mines of northern Greece: buying a gold deposit probably worth some billion euros, for only 11 million, with consequences for the environment that can't be even predicted yet. In his last public speech, Mr Stathakis made it clear that SYRIZA will unconditionally support, for the development's sake, any enterprise that is profitable and does well, whether it is a public or a private one. On the issue of large investments in regions where there is significant opposition by the local society, he spoke

for the need of establishing an institutional tool that can decide which part is right (the investor/entrepreneur or the people), so as to avoid lawsuits and trials, that are usual in such cases (people suing corporations) and if the verdict is for the investor, the investment should go on.

3. Mentioning three prominent bourgeois prime ministers as examples to align with is of course odd, but not so unpredictable. Harilaos Trikoupi was the prime minister under whom the first bankruptcy of the Greek state occurred, back in 1893. Eleftherios Venizelos is responsible for the disastrous nationalist military campaign in Asia Minor (after World War I) and for the ethnic cleansing of the Greek state, through harsh expelling or suppression of the then existing national minorities. A government under him, later on, established a law prosecuting ideas and not actions, according to which thousands of communists and progressive workers were exiled, imprisoned or executed. Konstantinos Karamanlis is the successor of the civil war state, being elected as a prime minister for the first time in 1955. Under his governments, the prosecutions of communists went on, Grigoris Lambrakis (a left deputy) and Sotiris Petroulas (a radical left student) were murdered and electoral fraud dominated. He had close relations with para-state groups and above all with the militaries that imposed the military junta in 1967. He was also the first prime minister after the fall of the junta, and thus the person who secured the peaceful return to bourgeois democracy, that is the consolidation of class domination that had been seriously questioned in the insurrectionary years of 1973-74. All these three persons are mentioned by bourgeois politicians and historians as being connected with the capitalist modernization of Greece in three different periods. Trikoupi promoted the industrialization of the country and introduced the railway, Venizelos gave Greece its current borders, Karamanlis led Greece joining the EU (the then EEC). I'm not implying of course that the SYRIZA program or strategy are directly inspired by these three persons. But, the leadership of SYRIZA has since long ago adopted the catchword of "productive reconstruction" of the country as their central strategy. And as this strategy is deprived of any class reference (by whom and for whom?), it can easily lead to such mentions.

4. There is no need to say that finding common elements between SYRIZA program and Obama's policies is just a mark of SYRIZA having gone simply too far.

5. Concerning the agent which is to apply the SYRIZA governmental program, let me make a short remark. In the elections of May and June, the leadership of SYRIZA spoke of an "anti-austerity left government", addressing a call to all left (or "left") parties: KKE, ANTARSYA and "hopefully" DIMAR, indirectly trying also to attract support by the right anti-memorandum party of Independent Greeks. This catchword shifted to a "government of national salvation" in the months to come, comprising non-left parties. Next, as Tsipras described in the same interview mentioned above, the primary collaborators turned to be the traditional centre-left. Now we see that SYRIZA go even beyond that: they plan to form a government collaborating with parties expanding from the left (themselves, as other left parties are not mentioned anymore) to the right (even parts from inside ND). In fact, the eventuality of forming a government with right-winged parties (namely the semi far-right Independent Greeks of Panos Kammenos) was open from the very beginning. It was also theoretically justified by the scheme introduced by President Tsipras: that the old traditional division between left and right is no more timely, and is to be substituted by the division between pro- and anti-Memorandum forces. But now Mr Stathakis insists on the necessity for a government which is to "express a much broader spectrum of political forces". In his last public speech, he meticulously described how SYRIZA will form their governmental program: not on their own, but in collaboration with social organizations, scientific societies, business institutions, workers etc. This is a bad version of Popular Front governments, which historically have led to treasons and disappointment among the working classes and in some cases prepared the ground for authoritarian or even fascist regimes to emerge.

6. The working class in Greece has no real solution to expect from such projects of class collaboration. What is needed is a conscious strategy of rupture with capitalism, and a party that will be able to propose and apply it. In Greece we have the social material, the militant vanguard that can support such a project. The processes inside SYRIZA have already shown their short limits: they can't pressure the leadership, who feels every passing day freer to speak, they can't restrain the socialdemocratic adaptation to class collaboration. Therefore, the creation of such a

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party mainly depends on processes outside SYRIZA, above all ANTARSYA, despite all existing problems.

PS: According to the last gallop that was published yesterday (26/2), 23% of the questioned would vote for SYRIZA, and at the same time only 20% think things will get better under a SYRIZA government. This is a clear sign that this kind of "realism" expressed by SYRIZA not only lowers the masses' willingness to struggle, but it does not even offer a reliable alternative.