



Greece: The Future of Europe?

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On 25 January 2015, SYRIZA (Synaspismós tis Rizospastikís Aristerás – Coalition of the Radical Left) won the snap general election in Greece and subsequently formed government in coalition with the right-wing party of the Independent Greeks. The SYRIZA victory was of great significance for a number of reasons. First of all, it is the first time that the Left forms government in Greece and, to this day, it remains the only left-wing government in Europe. Secondly, SYRIZA's main manifesto pledge was to end the politics of austerity, which had been practiced in Greece since 2010 when the country was excluded from the financial markets because of the enormity of its debt and subsequently resorted to being bailed out by the so-called Troika, which comprised of the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. In return for the bailouts, successive Greek governments had agreed with its lenders a series of structural reforms, which involved mainly widespread privatisation of public assets and drastic cuts in public spending, largely in salaries and pensions. SYRIZA coming to power boded a collision with the Troika and, according to some, with Greece's European partners.

Quick off the mark, LSE Law organised a highly informative and stimulating public event entitled "Greece: The Future of Europe?" on 13 February. The aim of the event was to explore the significance of the SYRIZA victory for Europe; whether its importance is exhausted in the immediate question of the Greek debt and the future of the Eurozone or whether it might bring to the fore deeper tensions or different visions of a democratic Europe.

The panel of speakers comprised of people with a great deal of experience in the politics and economics of Europe and especially Greece and the Mediterranean region. Professor Simona Talani is the Jean Monnet Chair of European Political Economy in the Department of European and International Studies at King's College London and has written extensively on European political economy as well as the political economy of the Arab Spring. Professor Costas Douzinas (Professor of Law, Birkbeck School of Law; Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities) is one of the most influential and prolific thinkers of SYRIZA and has been involved in political developments in Greece since the beginning of the crisis. Professor Simon Glendinning (Professor of European Philosophy, LSE European Institute) is one of the leading philosophical thinkers on the idea of Europe. Paul Mason (Channel 4 Economics Editor and Guardian columnist) has been following and reporting on events in Greece arguably more closely than anyone in the British media. He is also currently working on a documentary, with director Theopi Skarlatos, on developments in Greece after the SYRIZA victory. The event was chaired by LSE Law's Emmanuel Melissaris, who is originally from Greece and has recently written a number of pieces on Greek politics both in English and in Greek.

Kicking off the event, Professor Talani focused on the causes of the Greek crisis and the Eurozone crisis generally and argued that it is due not to the "fiscal delinquency" of Greece or the rest of the countries in the European South (and Ireland) but rather to a combination of the global financial crisis and the structural imbalances of the European Monetary Union. She argued that, although the crisis was mainly one relating to competitiveness, it was mistakenly treated as a fiscal crisis thus failing to address its real causes. Professor Glendinning highlighted three binaries in tension. First, he considered the tension between the left Keynesian strand, on the one hand, and the more radical left-wing strand in SYRIZA. Given the signs that the government has chosen to take the former approach in its negotiations with its lenders, Glendinning wondered what ramifications a deal that falls short of the expectations of the more radical wing may have in terms of the party's and the government's coherence. Secondly, he considered the tension between economic and political European integration emphasising the competing incentives that countries such as Greece and Germany might have for further political integration; the former from a position of vulnerability and the latter from a position of dominance. Lastly, taking a philosophical history approach, he discussed the symbolic representation of the idea of Greece for Europe as well as the deep-seated European dimension of the construction of Germany and the post-WW2 attempt to "Europeanise" Germany, which, as Glendinning noted, could only lead to the Germanisation of Europe.

Professor Douzinas traced the origins of the sudden increase in SYRIZA's electoral back to the mass resistance and solidarity movements over the last five years. He also placed the SYRIZA victory

in its longer-term historical context, both Greek and European, interpreting it as towards the reorientation of the Eurozone's financial policy as well as redemocratisation of decision-making processes. He concluded by urging the SYRIZA government to reorganise the Greek state and social services around the recently emerged social solidarity structures and practices. Paul Mason attributed the SYRIZA victory not only to its support by participants in social movements but also to the charisma of the party's leaders. After giving an insider's account of the state of the negotiations between Greece and its lenders at the time (it is worth noting that his predictions were largely confirmed eventually), he discussed the implications of the SYRIZA victory for European politics and institutions expecting that both will eventually be nudged in a more progressive direction. The lively discussion that followed focused on many of the points made by the speakers.

The full event podcast for Greece: The Future of Europe? is available at <http://t.co/6ta88WbNhH>