



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The victory of the conservatives in Greece – the final end of the populist era in Southern Europe



Greece confirmed its confidence in the centre-right government of former Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Sunday's elections. At the same time, it has remained on the course it embarked on four years ago to emerge from the era of left-wing populism.

By chanting, "All of Greece is blue", supporters of New Democracy celebrated the election result, which will bring four new years of government with a stable parliamentary majority.

The party of Prime Minister Mitsotakis will now have the same number of seats in the parliament (158 out of a total of 300) as in 2019 when it replaced Alexis Tsipras' left-populist Syriza government with an increase of 83 mandates.

The new, convincing mandate confirms Greece's shift from experimenting with the left-wing populist politics of Syriza.

Tsipras, Greece's prime minister from 2015 to 2019, remembered for his unconventionality and resistance to reforms demanded by creditors of over-indebted Greece, is sliding into the political margins with his party after another defeat, like many similar movements in Europe in the past decade.

Voters tired of rebel movements

Greece distanced itself from populism four years ago when the New Democracy of Mr Mitsotakis achieved its first victory.

At that time, there was much caution that ultra-leftist politics could return to the scene. However, that did not happen last Sunday.

The campaign showed that voters are not interested in a "war" over the wiretapping affair of politicians from the social-democratic political party PASOK, which Syriza insisted on.

As if they were tired of the rebellion of the extreme left movement, voters were most interested in the economy, growth, health care improvement, and relations with Turkey. These are topics in which New Democracy and Mr Mitsotakis have been effective.

Migrant issue had no influence

The issue of migrants did not influence the elections in Greece. This issue has been used by populists across Europe over the last decade.

Even the tragedy of the sinking of a ship with hundreds of migrants in Greek waters just before the elections did not influence the final result.

It showed that Mitsotakis' previous restrictive policy towards migrants has broad support, and that the Greeks do not want to return to the regime of open doors previously advocated by the Syriza populist government.

The centre-right government has been following the EU trend on this issue, which is tightening policy on asylum and migration.

Greeks are satisfied with such a relationship, so a survey before the elections showed that as much as 70% support the extension of the wire barrier on the border with Turkey, which the Mitsotakis government promised by the end of the year.

Economy versus populist adventures

The economy and its recovery decided this election and the previous ones, which speaks of the stabilisation on the Greek political scene regarding actors who offer longer but stable growth without traumatic solutions.

In the previous term of the conservative government, Greece recorded a visible economic recovery. After these elections it will return to the long-awaited investment grade by the rating companies.

Growth in Greece is far higher than the eurozone average. Foreign investors have returned, wages and pensions have risen, and government bonds have irreversibly exited long-term junk status, which will continue to lower borrowing costs.

Just eight years ago, in the era of left-wing populists, the country was on the verge of being kicked out of the eurozone, unable to repay its debts and forgotten by investors.

With the continuity of the centre-right government, Greece will remain strongly pro-EU oriented, which is a relief for the bloc's partners, because the danger to its cohesion will no longer come from Athens.

In addition, the economic measures of the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis rely heavily on EU programmes and funds, so Greece remains an important support for intra-European unity, which is often subject to testing.

The dominance of conservatives in the Mediterranean

The new victory of Mr Mitsotakis is also significant as a confirmation of the trend of the dominance of right-centre forces in the countries of Southern Europe, whose financial crises in the past decade have brought the EU zone to the very edge.

After last year's victory of centre-right forces in Italy, led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the success of New Democracy in Greece confirms conservative primacy in the largest Mediterranean member of the EU.

It has prospects of being cemented if the current forecasts about the lead of the centre-right People's Party over the currently ruling Socialists is realised in Spain in the July elections.

If that happens, the problematic Mediterranean zone, which led the entire region into an economic cataclysm through experiments with populist policies, will become an important pillar of its stability.

The three influential members of the EU, and its large economies will be led by conservative governments, whose policies have proved to be a strong barrier to populist movements, whether of left or right orientation.