

Analysis

May 2012

Date of publication

May 13, 2012

public issue

The elections of 6 May 2012 and the end of the Greek two-party system

Structural break in contemporary Greek political history

Without a doubt, the parliamentary elections of 6 May signal a **radical change in the contemporary political and electoral history of Greece**. The popular verdict formalizes the collapse of the party system that was formed during the Third Hellenic Republic. The consolidation of the institutional operation of two-partyism resulted in the alternation in power of the dominant two parties five times since the restoration of democracy (1981, 1990, 1993, 2004 and 2009). But the convergence of both parties in their support for the policy of the Memorandum and their participation in the outgoing coalition have now led to the demise of the two-party system. In the space of 30 months, the two government parties loss a total of **3.3 million votes** (socialist PASOK -2.2 million and conservative New Democracy -1.1 million). This represents the largest mass shift during the period since democracy was restored in 1974. The election result constitutes a point of no return for the party formations of PASOK and ND. Particularly when one considers that their current voter support (32%) is less than half of the 77% of the vote which they received in aggregate in the previous parliamentary elections 2½ years ago (October 2009).

The present percentage of support for the two-party system is **the lowest recorded in a Greek electoral contest since 1926**. In Greece's political history, such a percentage in favor of the two main parties had only been recorded 62 years ago – in 1950 – in the first elections after the civil war. In those elections, which it should be noted were held with the proportional representation voting system, the two biggest parties, the People's Party led by Constantine Tsaldaris and the Liberal Party under Sophoklis Venizelos, received **36.04%** of votes in total. If the third party at the time is included, i.e. the National Progressive Center Union of Nikolaos Plastiras, then the aggregate percentage of the three biggest parties was almost **52.5%**. With the current standing of the parties, and even though the system is not proportional representation, the first two parties (aggregate of ND and left-wing SYRIZA) received **35.6%** and the first three (i.e. with PASOK) just **48.81%** of the vote.

Author

Yiannis Mavris
Public Issue Research Institute

Public Issue

16, Vas. Konstantinou Str,
Athens, GR – 116 35
T: +30 210 757 5000
F: +30 210 757 5100
E: info@publicissue.gr
W: www.publicissue.gr

The present fragmentation of political forces has proven to be greater even in comparison with the composition of Parliament following elections in 1950. Today, it is taking on such dimensions that it may appear to be ideologically-politically equivalent to the corresponding fragmentation of political forces in the first elections following the civil war. That was the result of the occupation and the civil war; today it is the political-electoral result of the implementation of the Memorandum.

The 'pole of the Right'

Current voter support for Antonis Samaras' ND party (1,200,000 votes) represents just one-half of ND's support in 2009, and – even more strikingly – only 60% of its support in 1981, when it was for the first time crushed in elections by PASOK. Its percentage of the vote is the lowest ever received by the main party of the Right, either since the restoration of democracy (ND) or before the dictatorship (Greek Rally, National Radical Union). It can be compared only to the percentage of the People's Party (18.8%), again in the elections of 1950.

The conservative pole emerges from the elections geographically, socially, politically and ideologically fragmented. It is divided into **three main ideological currents** (figuratively speaking, the 'popular right', the 'far right' and the 'liberal right') and is represented by seven party formations, which in aggregate account for **45.8%** of the (contracted) electorate. All three currents of the Right presently appear to be split along party lines. The 'popular right', which is the main body, attracting in total **29.5%** of the electorate, is represented by what remains of ND (18.85%) and the Independent Greeks of Panos Kammenos (10.6%), with a strength ratio of **2:1**. The 'far right', which has received **9.9%** of the vote in total, is represented mainly by Golden Dawn (6.97%) and secondarily by the remnants of LAOS (2.9%). Lastly, the 'liberal right' has the lowest – though highly consolidated – voter support in Greek society, accounting in total for **6.5%** of the electorate. This current comprises Democratic Alliance (2.55%), ReCreate Greece (2.15%) and Action – Liberal Alliance (1.8%). On the basis of the aforementioned ideological distinction, the pole of the Right to emerge from the election has the following composition: the 'popular right' now accounts for approximately two-thirds of the conservative pole (64%), the 'far right' one-fifth (22%) and the 'liberal right' just one-seventh (14%). However, of greater political importance is clearly the fact that the Memorandum has deeply divided the Greek right. It is quite remarkable that the balance

of pro- and anti-Memorandum forces within the party formations of the Right is estimated at **55%-45%**.

There are examples of the Greek right regrouping in recent political history (1951-2, 1974). But a prerequisite for this was always the presence of a strong and untainted leader, something that is difficult to envisage in the present conjuncture.

Center – Left relationship overturned

The recent elections also overturned the Center – Left relationship, which was established in the early 1960s with the formation of the Centre Union at the expense of the United Democratic Left and became firmly rooted both socially and politically during the post-dictatorship period with the rise of PASOK. But the historic collapse of PASOK, which constituted the main political by-product of the aforesaid period, has overturned the situation. The Left, spearheaded by SYRIZA, has now been elevated to the opposite pole of the political scene.

Today, there is little likelihood of a repetition of a Centre Union experiment in a modern version, whilst on account of the economic and social crisis the prospect of a reconstitution of the center or middle ground does not seem feasible.

Public Issue was founded in 2001. It specializes in public opinion research on political, economic and social issues in Greece and Cyprus. Member of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) and the European Society for Market Research (ESOMAR).

© Copyright 2012. Public Issue. All rights reserved.