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Greece

Towards a head-on collision - Tsipras rejects the blackmail of the ECB and the aggressive acts of the European leaders

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The statement of general policy by Alexis Tsipras tonight was followed with special attention both in the country and by European governments - and no doubt also in the USA. In the country, after the blackmail of the ECB and the continuous attacks of EU leaders, an atmosphere of effervescence is spreading, a sense of newfound dignity, of determination both to support the government in the face of blackmail and to exert pressure to prevent any retreat. Abroad, especially in ruling circles, every word and every particular measure that is announced are being carefully weighed to gauge the determination of the Prime Minister and his government.

Most of them were expecting a significant inflection, foreshadowing a retreat, which would facilitate a "compromise" at the European summits this week -which would actually be a submission by Greece to their diktats. They have certainly been disappointed. Because Alexis Tsipras did not actually make any substantive concession. Certainly, he avoided using the term "cancellation of the debt ". But he strongly emphasized its non-viable character and demanded its "reduction" and "restructuring". Another point: he did not announce the immediate restoration of the minimum wage to its 2009 level (751 euros), but committed himself to do so in the course of 2015. For the rest, he ticked off all the points of the Thessaloniki programme : emergency measures to address the humanitarian disaster (food, reconnection of electricity, transport and medical coverage for everyone), restoration of the labour legislation, abolition of unfair taxes on land, a tax reform to make the rich pay, raising the tax threshold to 12,000 euros, reinstatement of civil servants who had been sacked, an end to the privileges granted to private media, reconstitution of the ERT (public radio and television), activation of the bank shares owned by the state, an end to the selling-off of the public patrimony (ports, infrastructure, energy), an end to police repression of popular mobilizations.

A strategic point: Alexis Tsipras reiterated that he refuses to request the extension of the present "bailout programme" and the supervision of the Troika and has requested an extension of the liquidity granted to Greek banks, based on the reimbursement of the profits made by the central banks of the eurozone on Greek debt and the extension of the debt capacity of the Greek government. Finally, he insisted on the necessity of a balanced budget, while refusing the exorbitant primary surpluses destined to reimburse the debt *ad vitam eternam* and to recycle austerity. But even this commitment to a balanced budget hardly seems compatible with the social measures announced, in a context of anemic tax revenues.

A highly symbolic reform was that of the nationality code, granting citizenship to all children of immigrants born in Greece, of which he made an impassioned eulogy. He also dwelt at length on the role of the newly created Ministry of Immigration, emphasizing its role in the protection of human rights and people's dignity, while asking for a change of EU policy in this domain. Proof, if any were needed, that the participation of the Independent Greeks (ANEL) in the government has in no way altered the position of Syriza on these issues.

In fact, the hard core of the Memorandums has been swept away. The break is definitely there. And Alexis Tsipras hammered it home in many ways. First of all he specifically referred to the role of mobilization in Greece and to international solidarity, which he emphatically saluted, in the battle that the government is waging. And he was very firm on the fact that the restoration of national and democratic sovereignty and of the dignity of the Greek people are not negotiable. In the present context, this amounts to a call to take to the streets, and I do not doubt that it is being heard, in Greece and in Europe.

In addition, at the end of his speech, after a long tribute to the long history of struggle of the Greek people, he put back on the table the issue of war reparations from Germany and put Manolis Glezos at the head of the campaign which will be conducted by the government. Now we know that this is a real "red rag" for the German leaders.

Overall, we can say that Alexis Tsipras has sent out a message of firmness and combativeness, both inside and outside his country. He disappointed the expectations of those who were already betting on a downward slope of concessions leading to a capitulation. It seems quite out of the question that the European leaders can tolerate in any way the policies that were presented today before the Greek Parliament.

So we are well and truly before a scenario of confrontation, which will take a decisive turn in the course of this week, with the combination of European summits and street mobilizations. We are probably on the eve of major events that can upset the present course of events in Greece and in Europe.

It is in the combination of the determination of the Greek leadership, the mobilization of the people and international solidarity that the "magic formula" of a possible victory can be found!

8 February 2015

*Postscript: Kouvelakis recently gave a long interview to the online magazine **Jacobin**, [Greece: Phase One](#) covering the history and current state of Syriza.*