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**A Framework for the Analysis of the
2007 Parliamentary Elections in Greece**

by

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A Framework for the Analysis of the 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Greece

VALIA ARANITIS & EFTHIMIS PAPAVALASSOPOULOS¹

Introduction

Modernization of the socio-economic and political system of Greece emerged as a dominant issue in the 1990s (Featherstone 2005, Simitis 2005, Mouzelis 2002, Voulgaris et. al. 2002, Alivizatos 2000, Papoulias and Tsoukas 1998). This issue was reinforced by an inherent dynamic for modernization that hazily appeared in the post-dictatorship era as a result of the necessities dictated by the decision of the financial and political elites to participate in the European integration processes (Lavdas 1997, Ioakimidis 2000). In fact, the accession of Greece to the Eurozone in 2001 combined with the preparations for the 2004 Olympic Games markedly accelerated the pertinent initiatives, with the implementation of far-reaching institutional reforms.

It is ironic that the planning and implementation of the modernization project was primarily undertaken by the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) government, despite the fact that it had been an outright opponent of Greece's membership of the European Community even as late as the mid-1980s (Verney 1994). Managing such a crucial "load" (Kirchheimer 1966) helped PASOK consolidate its dominant role in the political system for a decade. Various rhetorical differences in opinion notwithstanding, the foregoing project was able to attract a wide political consensus, the only consistently oppositional force to modernization and Europeanization being the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).

At the same time, however, the contradictions and the pathology this project generated (the most significant being corruption and its socio-economic effects) gave rise to an implicit yet significant resentment in large parts of the population belonging

¹ We want to express our appreciation to Professor Michalis Spourdalakis for his thoughtful comments and to Professor Kostas Lavdas for his tolerance and encouragement. Needless to say, responsibility for the views expressed in what follows rests with the two authors.

to the traditional electoral clienteles across the spectrum (Lyrintzis, 1998: 78-88, Gravaris, 2004: 27-57, Tsakalotos 1998:114-138). Thus, a critical mass of voters - those who were badly affected by the process of modernization - gradually came forth, openly expressing fear for the consequences of this process. All this goes to show that modernization never enjoyed a wide and sturdy ideological-political footing or social base. Not only did PASOK lose the consensus around its program, but it also failed to bolster any of its achievements (Loulis 2004). Resentment and fear (whether true or imaginary) contributed to the outcome of the 2004 elections won by the New Democracy (ND) party. In our view, the foregoing developments decisively affected the ideological-political power relations and set the stage for remarkable changes in the political scene, political behavior /culture and the political party system. The ensuing period may justifiably be regarded as a new phase in the development of the Greek political system.

The March 2004 parliamentary elections signified an important change, since the easy victory of New Democracy did not merely disrupt more than twenty years of PASOK rule, but also seemed to alter ideological-political power relations and governmental priorities. Electoral victory can mainly be attributed to the fact that ND managed to put together an electoral agenda shifting the discourse from politics to ethics, or better yet, to a discourse on ethics (a moralizing of politics). In other words, ND apparently founded its dominance not only on the attractiveness of its program but mainly on the moral indictment of its political opponents (tirades against corruption, arrogance, etc), fueling and reinforcing the negative stance of the electoral body vis-à-vis politics, politicians, and corruption. This tactics can best be symbolically encapsulated in the dictum on “modesty and humility” Prime Minister Karamanlis issued to the members of his new administration. Despite its overall appearance as modern, this moralization of politics simultaneously stressed its historical continuity with the pre-war conservative doctrine of a “small but honest Greece”. On the basis of this essentially anti-political stance, New Democracy built a majority electoral dynamic already manifest in the 2004 elections and strengthened in the 2006 prefectural/ municipal elections.

I. THE POLITICAL SCENE

A. *The New Governance*

1. The electoral program

The conditions seemed to be very favourable for the new Government . New Democracy had a comfortable and disciplined parliamentary majority that allowed it to proceed with its radical reforms. For the first time since the 1970s, ND had resolved its leadership problem with the unchallenged emergence in April 1997 of Kostas Karamanlis, a strong, highly popular leader. Moreover, in government, the party faced a weak and ambivalent opposition (an opposition expressing for an extended period of time a willingness to seek consensus on key government initiatives). Finally, the opinion polls steadily served to reinforce the confidence and support of the public. The new government did not make its presence felt, however, until after the end of the 2004 Olympic Games, about eight months following its accession to power, since executing this major event forced the new government to manage the plans and procedures put in place by the ousted government. The government initiatives were conducted along the following lines:

a. Stream-lining of public finances by curtailing the public sector and public expenditure through the implementation of a bold program of de-nationalizations and market /state cooperation for the production of public goods. (Pagoulatos 2005) The reduction in the number of civil servants and the simultaneous institution of measures to improve their productivity; and the promise to resolve the issue of the status of a legion of temporary public sector employees.

b. The re-founding of the state through the promotion of radical change leading to the improvement of managerial capacity and the effective functioning of the state, as well as the amelioration of the relationship of the citizens with the state. (Makridimitris 2002:118-135)

c. Combating the rampant instances of corruption.

d. The institution of a small administrative cabinet, the utilization of the existing institutions of deliberation and social dialog (ESEP/ OKE) and the creation of new institutions oriented towards the formation of a consensual politics.

e. The reconstitution and strengthening of the local governance system through the restriction of the number of decentralized administration and self-government units and the subsequent augmentation of their resources and competences.

f. Radical normative reformation with attempts at a drastic simplification of the extremely complex legislation and the reduction in the number of laws.

2. The result on Governance

Economic policy and Privatizations: In spite of the ambitious pronouncements, the results of the current government's economic policy have been rather meager, with the exception of reduced unemployment rates.

The privatization of public sector program pursued the trajectory of the previous administration without yielding the projected results: Lessening state participation in economic activity, opening up markets and ensuring the best possible use of public property assets through the abandonment of the cash-flow rationale and the adoption of methods that could maximize the benefits for the economy and the citizens. Income from denationalizations amounting to € 4,595 million has been secured since March 2004, money which was channeled into the reduction of the public debt. The funds were raised from: the denationalization of the Agricultural Bank of Greece, the listing of the Hellenic Mail Service Deposit Bank on the Athens Stock Exchange, the selling of of the entire state share in the Commercial Bank of Greece to Credit Agricole, and the sale of 8.21 % of ELPE shares to PanEuropean, a strategic partner of the public sector. This effort gained additional impetus and focus with the aid of the institutional framework for the cooperation of the public and private sectors through the Public-Private Sector Joint Ventures (SDIT). A series of tax cuts was incorporated into the effort to attract fresh investments. Tax reforms were designed to foster development, bolster entrepreneurship and consolidate a transparent, fair and functional internal revenue system. Tax brackets for businesses dropped from 35 % to 25 %; the rate for personal companies and partnerships fell from 25 % to 20 %. Furthermore, annual tax-exempt income for individuals rose to € 11,000.

Turning to economic management, government policies bore the mark of the decision to conduct a financial inventory of public finance, imitating the practices of the Portuguese conservative government. Conducting the public finance inventory was

one of the first moves of the New Democracy government once they took power in the March 2004 elections. This move left its mark on the country's economy. It remains to this day one of the highly-contested issues between the two major political parties and a springboard for criticism from the other, smaller parties. The government embarked on the inventory in order to restore "transparency and sincerity" in public finances. The initiative came in the wake of New Democracy's pre-election accusations that PASOK had submitted false financial reports to the European Union. The ultimate objective of the government was perhaps to forge an image of taking over an administration with a bloated deficit and exorbitant public debt. After the inventory was taken, the public finance deficit skyrocketed to 6 % of GNP. The direct consequence of such a finding was the induction of the country into a regime of public finance oversight. The reliability of the country vis-à-vis the EU was now dubious. Our European partners could now say they had been duped into admitting Greece into the European Monetary Union. Germany's E. Steuber and other officials voiced markedly acrimonious criticism, demanding that all Greece-bound European appropriations be returned.

Despite its public finance aspects, the audit legitimated restrictive policies, postponing implementation of the promised benefits to a future government term, while greatly subduing any critical discussion on the social and financial cost of the Olympic Games. In other fields, the government followed the neo-liberal recipe for direct tax cuts with parallel increases in indirect taxes and the value-added tax.

The "Refounding of the State": The restructuring of the cabinet was mainly limited to a redistribution of competences among the various ministries without reducing their number. At the same time, the strengthening of the Prime Minister's office never seemed to adequately confront the chronic problem of administrative coordination.

The new Municipalities and Communities Code introduced by this government amounted to a remarkably hesitant effort, since its provisions did very little beyond shifting some central government duties to local government at an administrative cost and no improvement in its financing such costs. Even more, the changes in the way mayors and prefects are elected (reducing the minimum number of votes required to 42 %) served to elect the New Democracy tickets, drastically suppressing almost all independent candidates. Particularly intensive initiatives were taken to improve public

services and the administration's relations with the citizenry. Aiming at the simplification of all administrative procedures and the restriction of bureaucratic rigidity, a scheme of administrative reform (sponsored by the Third Community Support Framework) and electronic governance (e-government) was worked out. The results, however, have not yet become visible, due to administrative inertia and lack of the appropriate infrastructure. Simultaneously, in the tracks of PASOK practices dating back to the 1980s, New Democracy unfolded a meticulous scheme of partisan colonization of the state by party members, supporters and voters, which posed a great challenge to the already fragile institutions and calls for meritocracy in public sector hiring (under the supervision of the Higher Council for Employment Placement–ASEP).

On balance, we could say that although “refounding” the state was the flagship feature of the New Democracy program, performance proved to be rather poor in the direction of restricting and rationalizing the public sector and increasing productivity according to the *new public management* models. This was evident in the failure of the state apparatus to respond effectively to a number of emergencies. (A case in point was the fire-fighting effort in the summer 2007 and the handling of problems the forest fires caused. Public opinion polls were very indicative of the failure: in an MRB poll of 27 August, 2007, 69.8 % of respondents thought that the management of the situation by the government was either “negative” or “not so positive”: MRB Poll on 27 August 2007).

Corruption: Moral disparagement of its political opponent and the promise to thwart the pervasive phenomenon of corruption at all levels of public life (a demand posed by society at large and crucial to the outcome at the ballot box) were no doubt the spearhead of the election campaign designed by New Democracy for the 2007 elections. The basic measures taken by the new government in this field were a yielding firmness in the disciplinary and penal treatment of persons involved in corruption cases and the establishment of the Zorba Commission. Ironically, however, a chain of scandals involving top members of the government soon surfaced. The most prominent of these involved backroom dealings between the Head of the Competitiveness Commission and the big dairy companies. This was soon followed by a scandal involving obscure transactions related to the investment of certain social

insurance fund reserves in high-risk investment products. The latter became the center of a confrontation pitting all the opposition parties against the government and dominating media and public attention for quite some time. Although the government attempted to present such episodes as isolated instances, it seems that corruption constitutes a structural element of the governance system. Such events gradually gnawed at New Democracy's comparative advantage by making it a part of the overall problem. At the same time, priorities for the new government were reform in education and the resolution of the social security problem.

Educational Reform: Reform at all levels of the education system was a fundamental point in the ND program. During its administration, ND stressed tertiary level reform, seeking initially to support public deliberation and consensus. For this purpose, a Supreme Committee was formed, but restricted to serving as a recipient of recommendations. The key elements of the reform included the institution of a system of university campus/ faculty evaluations and their subsequent linkage to financing, the intensification of studies through the introduction of a maximum completion time for a degree, modifications of the system of appointing university administrative bodies and student representation in such bodies and, finally, the creation of the post of university manager. This earnest effort unraveled against the backdrop of constitutional amendments, which would, among other things, overturn the clauses in Article 16 that prohibit the establishment and operation of any kind of private university in Greece.

The results of the education policy results were inversely proportionate to government objectives. The fragmentary and voluntarist nature of these reforms, higher education reform being a case in point, provoked strong reactions and mobilizations that swept through substantial segments of the educational community. For almost eight months, most Greek universities were shut, while a student movement made its presence felt in the streets of Athens by virtue of unprecedented mobilization and defiance. Its dynamic intervention forced the main opposition party, PASOK, to alter its initial position in support of private universities.

To illustrate this impressionistic picture of ND government activity (March 2004 - September 2007), we could say that despite its centralist programmatic shift the new

governance developed practices imbued with unequivocal conservatism and authoritarianism, such as the violent quelling of the mobilizations by the security forces, the close relationship with the Church², etc, practices that underlined the persisting existence of the ideological baggage of the past carried by the right wing.

B. The main institutional events and their significance

The period following the 2004 elections period saw major institutional events with important and contradictory effects on the functioning of the political system:

The election of the President of the Republic and the Constitutional Revision.

These two supreme processes in the functioning of the republic constituted two of the fields of institutional consensus between the two major parties in the recent past. Actually, the re-election of notable ND member Costis Stephanopoulos as President of the Republic in 2000 and the Constitutional Revisions in 2001 garnered a wide majority.

The initiative on the part of ND to select and nominate Mr. Karolos Papoulias (an historic PASOK figure and a former Foreign Minister under Andreas Papandreou) for the post of President of the Republic reasserted this kind of consensus on both the procedure election and the political profile of the President, confirmed by the wide majority secured in the Parliamentary election proceedings. At the same time, however, this choice of ND seems to conceal an attempt to penetrate a part of the PASOK constituency, since Mr. Papoulias always expressed the historic, so-called “patriotic”³ axis of PASOK.

² The Orthodox Church in Greece has always claimed an institutional role in public matters (vide the constitutional recognition of the Church as the “prevalent” religion of Greece) in spite of periodic tensions. Since the 1970s the Church’s relations with the state have often been tense, culminating in clashes with the PASOK governments and especially the Costas Simitis administration over the omission of religious denomination from ID cards. These events reinforced the relations of the Church with ND through the support the ND leadership lent to the Church cause and the reciprocal, yet indirect, support of the Church for ND in the 2004 elections. This relation was further asserted in the post-election era by means of the privileged treatment the government gave the Church in a variety of matters, such as the establishment of an Ecclesiastical University, the Church’s tax-exempt status, the enjoyment of the benefits of the Development Law for monasteries, etc.

In May 2006 the government MPs proposed the revision of 29 Constitutional Articles in accordance with the procedures provided. Any analysis of this significant political and institutional event lies outside the scope of this essay. It is prudent to emphasize, though, the degree to which the outcome of the amendment endeavor failed to reinforce the consensual culture that seemingly had been forged. The inflexibility of the government in the discussion of the revision of Article 16 (establishment of non-state Universities) and Article 24 led the boisterous PASOK MPs (but not the MPs of the Left) to walk out of the constitutional amendment process, endangering the entire enterprise ever since.

In conclusion, despite its outspoken dedication to social dialog and deliberation, in its effort to impose its positions, the governing party seemed to slip into typical governmental voluntarism when it came of major issues (in the cases of educational reform and constitutional revision), and sometimes into authoritarianism (as seen in the brutal police suppression of the student protests). On the other hand, while hardly differentiating itself in any radical sense from the overall framework of the government's choices, PASOK from time to time raised the confrontational volume for reasons of party antagonism. The tactics of the two parties reflected the controlled-intensity tactics exhibited by cartel parties (Katz & Mair 1995). This event confirmed the steady diminution of polarization in the Greek political system (see below). At the same time, it should be noted that a peculiar social polarization seems to be emerging (for example, the youth mobilizations), which has not yet assumed organizational features and duration.

C. Party System

The developments in the party system over the last four years have been characterized by evident continuities but also interesting contradictions. Thus, while certain features are reproduced and stabilized, the new challenges before the government nevertheless create a dynamic of transformation with an obscure outcome (Lyrintzis 2005, Vernardakis 1999: 17-43). In brief, we may say: Although it is customary for a part of the scientific community to characterize it as a two-party system (Pappas 2001, Mavris 2004), the Greek party system remains a case of limited peculiar pluralism (Mavrogordatos 1984) with two governmental parties, the liberal-conservative New Democracy and socialist PASOK. This assessment is strengthened by the robust

presence and increasing vigor of the two traditional leftist parties [the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA)] and the dynamic assertiveness of the nascent ultra-right Popular Orthodox Rally party (LAOS). Such a situation does little to affect the domineering position held by the two governmental parties (with an aggregate percentage of more than 80 % of the constituency), which are seen to be merely taking turns in the seat of government.

However, the polarization that marked the form and the operation of the party system up until the 1980s seems to be waning. In this context of political party antagonism, polarization strategies are anything but completely absent, since even to a limited extent they still function to rally traditional audiences behind the two major parties and pose dilemmas to voters associated with adjacent political party domains.

The diminishing of the polarization has been directly related to a constant centrist tendency toward convergence (at least since the 1990s) of the two major political formations. This tendency was initially organized by the programmatic shift of the socialist party, spearheaded by its call for modernization and buttressed by the subsequent methodical and successful new “centripetal strategy” constituencies unwrapped by ND in the post-2000 years (Loulis 2007:328-333, Pappas and Dinas 2006).

The foregoing development however does not constitute a mere tactical re-orientation of ideological references and political parties but a strategic shift from the society to the state. Actually in the 1990s a domestic version of the cartel party seemed to have developed according to which the such parties, specifically ND and PASOK but also the two leftist parties monopolized the direct and/ or indirect resources made available by the state³, obstructing the entry of any new players into the party antagonism (Spourdalakis 2003:56-63). This combined with the strong social footing of the

³ Since the 1990s the political parties have enjoyed injections of extravagant funding from the state. No new parties have ever been considered for such funding since they had not yet been able to be represented in either the National or the European Parliament. This causes manifest inequalities in party antagonism insofar as party activities are capital-intensive.

historic post-dictatorship parties may explain the failure of the parties that emerged in this period to stabilize their posture in the party system⁴.

This centrist tendency has caused realignments and released dynamics in the interior of the political parties as well as in the party system in general. In particular, it has been favorable to the emergence and the establishment of a party (LAOS) that lays claim to the conservative audience on the right of the conservative party, testing as it does the consistency of its moderation strategy. Furthermore, the organizational development and the political autonomy of the radical right (something that also happened in the 1970s) seems to put an end to its almost uneventful organic co-existence with the conservative party for over twenty years⁵. *Ceteris paribus*, the challenge for PASOK is equally significant, since its shift seemed to entail significant electoral losses readily picked up by the two parliamentary leftist parties. This development may *de facto* lead PASOK to redefine its social references and its political agenda.

⁴ In the 1990s three distinguished political personages attempted to make their way into the political party system. In October 1992, following bickering with Prime Minister C. Mitsotakis over the so-called “Macedonian issue”, then ND-government Foreign Minister A. Samaras withdrew from the party, causing the fall of the government shortly thereafter (October 1993). In June 1993 he had formed the party of Political Spring (POLAN). In the 1993 elections POLAN received 4.8 % of the vote and ten seats in the Parliament. Its failure to achieve parliamentary representation in the 1996 elections (2.9 %) led to its dissolution. Even worse was the fate of D. Avramopoulos’ endeavor, another member of ND and popular mayor of Athens. In spring 2001 he founded the Free Citizen Movement (KEP). Despite the initial impressive percentages in the polls, KEP quickly exhausted its potential, forcing its founder to suspend all party activities and make his way back to ND. After exiting PASOK, D. Tsovolas founded the DIKKI (Democratic Social Movement) party in 1996. The party’s profile came out as populist and Eurosceptic, claiming at the same time to be the guardians of the founding principles of PASOK, rendered obsolete long time before. In the 1996 elections DIKKI managed to get 4.4 % and six seats in the Parliament. It took a downturn in the 2000 (2.70 %) and the 2004 (1.80 %) elections and of course no delegates in the Parliament.

⁵ Periodic attempts have been made to form a party beyond the right-wing flank of ND in the post-dictatorship era. In particular, the pro-monarchic National League appeared in the 1977 elections. Although it appealed to a significant percentage of the electorate (7%), the National League never managed to consolidate itself in the party system and was summarily subsumed under ND. In the 1980s, another attempt, the pro-dictatorship EPEN, also proved to be stillborn. Both these ultra-right parties functioned as *blackmail parties* mainly aiming at exerting an influence over ND policy. In the 1980s and 1990s, various nationalist and extreme right-wing organizations under a multitude of designations got into the action with negligent electoral results. Therefore, it is no coincidence that a long period of harboring ultra-rightist policies and audiences has become endemic to New Democracy.

Despite the diminishing polarization and the growth of consensus, no real governmental cooperation seems to have emerged either between the two leading parties or between them and the adjacent party formations. This was in evidence in the current election campaign, when all the parties stood on platforms that rejected outright the prospect of participation in any kind of coalition government.

D. Political parties

Since the 2000 parliamentary elections, critical transformations within all the political parties have evolved and at the same time stabilized. These will decisively influence the balance of power in the political system and consequently the result of the elections. More specifically:

New Democracy (ND) The ND party appears to be tackling the leadership issue which had been troubling it after the resignation in 1980 of its founder and charismatic leader, Konstantinos Karamanlis. Between 1980 and April 1997 five top party officials served as party leaders⁶, merely reflecting the ongoing crisis in the party's top echelons. In April 1997, Kostas Karamanlis, the founder's nephew, acceded to the leadership. This postdated hereditary accession of the "carrier of the charismatic blood" (Weber 1958) constituted the beginning of a protracted term of intra-party tranquility. The new leader of the conservative party secured his domination of the party by limiting methodically and painlessly the role of the party barons whose presence created an element of doubt and instability. At the same time, he formed a new leading team distinguished by stability and cohesion.

Another critical choice was that of maintaining organizational skills and abilities as well as recognizing roles in the party organization. Also following the attainment of power, the party went on with summary public sector hiring of its supporters and the awarding of various privileges. It seems that the new leadership comprehended the painful consequences of the downgrading of the party organization after the electoral victory of 1990—a choice which contributed to the rapid decay of the political domination of conservative party. So it comes as no surprise that ND seems to be less affected by the consequences of political cynicism, since all indications are that it has

⁶ Georgios Rallis (1980-1981), Evangelos Averoff (1981-1984), Constantine Mitsotakis (1984-1993), Miltiadis Evert (1993-1997).

managed to maintain an important part of its supporters and members (Pappas & Dinas 2006).

Finally, the political upgrading and the constant activities of the Political Planning Department of the party play an important role in the political communication which partly substitutes for governmental policy. The conservative think tank (the Konstantinos Karamanlis Institute) is linked to the party and is responsible for producing the ideological strategy of the party. These structures have undertaken to conduct a complex communication strategy which in a number of cases seems to have filled the glitches in government management.

PASOK Perhaps the most interesting developments, however, are manifested in the opposition party. These were developments already in the pipeline some months before the 2004 elections with the change in the party leadership.

Under the strain of profoundly negative poll returns, PASOK Prime Minister Costas Simitis (1996-2004) resigned from party presidency, clearing the way for Georgios Papandreou, son of the PASOK founder, to climb to the summit of the party hierarchy. The process of electing the new leader was a dubious choice insofar as the internal party ethics in Greece are concerned, since the new leader, George Papandreou, the sole candidate, was elected in an open referendum in which over one million friends and members of the party took part. The new leadership promises a sweeping wave of change to the framework of the party's political ideology, and the party's organization and functions, are summed up in the motto: 'George, change everything'. These changes seem to have some similarities to those that Blair has instituted in New Labour, but in a different way (Mair 2000). Following this framework, first of all, Papandreou is trying to reform the social references of the party. So, from the consistent appeals to the "non-privileged" of the 1980s emerges the new political subjects, "civil society and the citizens", in the mid 2000s.

In line with this choice: a) he applies and institutes innovative forms of political action and communication, exploiting new technologies and the Internet with the aim of revitalizing participation and interest in politics. These efforts attribute to PASOK the characteristics of a "cyber party"; b) he carefully plans a gradual renewal of

political personnel, introducing to the political forum figures who express the politics of the “new age”. He composed a leadership team of university professors and technocrats (Polemaharakis, Geroulanos, etc) who had up until then never been party members. He ventured to introduce renewal in the ranks of higher officials on the basis of gender and age⁷. At the same time, he promoted important celebrities as candidates for the Nationwide MPs from both the neo-liberal right (Stefanos Manos and Andreas Andrianopoulos, both former ND ministers) and the left (M. Damanaki, former President of the Coalition of the Left and M. Androulakis, former Coalition MP). But he has also stressed the historic continuity of the party by utilizing political personnel which come from both main party axes (modernized and old PASOK). However, these enterprising initiatives have failed to revive the interest of PASOK’s founding base of support in politics, or to form a new type of party activism, still more to form a powerful and extended wave of support for the new leader (Spourdalakis & Tassis 2006:504-508). So, it is not surprising that there has been a sharp drop in the leader’s popularity rating compared to 2004, which leads to an underlying lack of trust towards the leader. Nor is there a consistent and cohesive political team. These lead to false doubts concerning the party leadership. There is no open suggestion, however, of change or the ability to form a new team.

KKE The Communist Party of Greece hasn’t undergone significant changes in its structure, policy profile and strategies. Its rigid organization and cohesive ideology allow, to a great extent, the preservation of its influence over its traditional party basis and the consolidation of its position in the party system. The CP of Greece (KKE) privileges its trade union activities as its field of intervention *par excellence*. Indeed, this orientation has led to the establishment of an unofficial confederated employee trade union (PAME) on the periphery of the General Confederation of Workers of Greece (GSEE). Paradoxically, although they are still active within GSEE, the PAME members have developed separate and antagonistic activities utilizing its organizational capabilities. The same practices were pursued by the unions in other areas of mobilization privileged by the CP (such as the high school and university student movements). The KKE’s political strategy has set up a solid front against the

⁷ The presence of women in leading positions was especially pronounced, with characteristic examples being Mariliza Xenogiannakopoulou, appointed party Secretary General, college professor M. Koppa and actress A. Gerekou, among others.

two leading “bourgeois” political parties, while maintaining an age-old posture of contention toward the other leftist party, the Coalition of the Left. This position is exemplified in its motto, repeated *ad nauseam*: ‘Five parties, but just two politics’. This stance programmatically precludes any participation in any government. Nevertheless, the KKE remains firmly one of the systemic parties.

SYN: THE COALITION OF THE LEFT, ECOLOGY AND MOVEMENTS

The Coalition of the Left is the basic political force addressing the ideological and political space between the KKE and PASOK. It was founded in 1992. Maria Damanaki, who would later join PASOK, was its first president. She was succeeded by Nikos Konstandopoulos, originally from PASOK, who remained in the leadership until December 2004, to be succeeded by Alekos Alavanos, a European MP at that time, hailing from the KKE. His political course has been marked by tension and intra-party strife that at some time placed the party’s very existence at risk. In 2004, he set up an electoral alliance with other forces of the left under the banner of SYRIZA.

The relatively low electoral percentage of SYN in the 2004 elections (3.1%), in combination with the serious ideological and political divisions within the party, generated a series of developments in its leadership, structure, and policy. The new leader, A. Alavanos, who was elected with the support of the party’s left wing, attempted to renew his party by introducing political personnel from the youth movements into the leading group. At the same time, he has taken initiatives concerning the political and organizational unity of the left beyond PASOK, which lead to the incorporation of and collaboration with left-wing groupings. During this period, a twin strategy of intervention affecting both internal and external aspects of institutions is being developed. This is a strategy marked by a certain originality and ingenuity. It seems that it is primarily investing in domains such as education, the environment and so on, attempting to exploit, in terms of both organization and election results, the radical ambience generated by the above actions.

LAOS. It was founded in 1999 by Yiorgos Karantzaferis, a journalist by profession and an ND MP in the past, finally expelled from the party by Kostas Karamanlis due to his extreme views. LAOS managed to survive in the prevailing party system

despite its modest electoral performance. The election of the party leader to the European Parliament in June 2004 was a crucial breakthrough for the party. The ideological-political characteristics and the political discourse of this party have been divergent from what we have seen in terms of the traditional pro-monarchic and pro-dictatorship ultra-right in Greece. LAOS is more akin to the European ethno-populist parties that emerged in the 1990s (Betz 1994, Taggart 1995). It is no accident that its political strategy has been to exploit the classical issues of the extreme right-wing parties, which include immigration, national security and nationalist aspirations that attract the numerous middle-class groups as their electoral audience.

Despite its national-populist rhetoric, it has developed into a systemic party – in the manner of its European counterparts – which is trying to intersect the political cartel of the 1990s from the right. The most interesting element differentiating LAOS from the other post-war extreme right-wing parties, which acted mainly as blackmail parties, is its attempt to appear different from ND in order to stabilize its position and its supporters/voters. At the same time, there is an attempt to form an active and flexible party organization by recruiting political personnel from diverse political areas⁸. However, its political and electoral influence is based on its communication resources (an important factor for a minor party). It owns a weekly newspaper and a TV channel. Furthermore, since the LAOS leader commands communicative skills combined with provocative stances, the party is guaranteed privileged access to the media.

II. THE CONTEXT OF ELECTORAL CONFRONTATION

On 16 August the government spokesman announced elections for 16 September 2007. The Parliament was prematurely dissolved once more at the government's initiative. The government requested from the President of the Republic to dissolve the Parliament in view of the provisions of Article 41 Section 2 of the Constitution, which allows requesting a fresh mandate to deal with a "major national issue". The issues referred to were, first, the budget to be submitted before Parliament in the

⁸ The political personnel are mainly composed of middle range staff of the New Democracy party.

ensuing months and, second, the government's need to push through its reform package with the aid of a strong popular majority. This governmental maneuver was in no case novel. Most post-dictatorship governments had employed such a constitutional stipulation in a primarily indulgent manner, in order to hold elections under the most favorable circumstances possible for themselves, but always mindful of dealing their opponents a surprise attack. So it is obvious that the reasons for the premature dissolution of Parliament had an ulterior motive. First of all, the government hoped to capitalize on the repeated positive polls and the inability of PASOK to take advantage of ND's decline. In any case it was not accidental that the initiatives taken by both the government and the opposition in the run-up to the elections were patterned after opinion poll trends. Equally important, if not more so, was the intention of the government to obstruct the submission of the investigative report drawn up by Georgios Zorbas, the head of a commission combating graft and other forms of corruption. All indications were that the impending report of the commission would substantiate instances of heavy responsibility of government members for the loss of sizeable amounts of social insurance reserve funds invested in high-risk bonds, the purchase of which had also levied excessive and illicit commissions. This issue would dominate public discussion for months on end, fuelling partisan quarrels and making a serious dent in the government's image and reliability. Ultimately, the elections proved to be the only way out for this government, a way out that would allow it to dodge the pressing enactment of distressful and unpopular measures (fixing the social security mess, imposing public finance self-restraint, etc). The timing of these elections caused a sensation, since it has always been habitual to avoid calling elections during summer vacation time. In fact, in the 1980s, in an attempt to disperse all rumors of summertime elections, then Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou came up with the inimitable saying: "This government shall always respect the people's vacations!" It seems that the government wanted to surprise the voters, not to mention the opposition. Reasonably enough, one could assume that this move was part of a preplanned tactic intended to drastically restrict the agenda but also let some steam off the election contest. The new electoral law, the most proportional of all post-dictatorship era laws, would immensely affect the subsequent makeup of Parliament, specifically the possibility of a single-party government. Forecasting the waning of its electoral power due to its many years in power and the swelling popular disapproval of its choices, PASOK

designed changes in the 1990 electoral law⁹. The new law ratified by Parliament in February 2004 provided that 260 out of a total of 300 Parliamentary seats would be distributed proportionately among all parties that would manage to exceed a 3 % threshold of the popular vote, while the remaining forty seats would be granted as a bonus to the majority party. This provision strengthened considerably the representation of smaller parties, contrary to the practice prevalent until then in which such parties had always been underrepresented. Most published polls at that time reflected a relatively steady trend for a new five-party Parliament and narrow margin between ND and PASOK in favor of ND. The extrapolation of the poll findings to the electoral law showed that the probability of the first party securing a parliamentary majority was slim, thus challenging a long post-dictatorship tradition of solid single-party governments and strengthening (and not merely rhetorical) the lure of party coalitions. This new fact determined the tactics of the two major parties: New Democracy struggled to keep LAOS below the 3 % mark, since both these parties strove to attract conservative voters from the same constituency reservoir. This could only help attain the objective of securing a parliamentary majority. On the other hand, PASOK sought to create the preconditions for post-election cooperation with the parties of the Left. The election campaign period brought into focus certain institutional issues with serious political offshoots that split legal professionals and further fanned partisan conflagrations. The first such matter involved the reasons invoked by the government to dissolve Parliament. Creditable constitutional experts maintained that such reasons had but marginal constitutionality, since issues such as the drawing up of the state budget or the implementation of the government's program could hardly qualify as major national issues and, even less so, as states of national emergency. Another matter concerned the actions of the Areos Pagos (the Supreme Civil Court), under Associate Judge R. Kedikoglou, who had been accused of meddling with the judicial functions through a memorandum by virtue of which he urged judges to dismiss all appeals by temporary civil service personnel in litigation for tenure of their employment status. In particular, in a show of unprecedented activism in a context of formal administrative competence, the Areopagus invalidated

⁹ According to the Constitution any electoral law ratified by Parliament takes effect only after the ensuing elections.

the candidacy of F. Gennimata, the top-seated PASOK candidate for Nationwide MP, resorting to a relevant constitutional provision precluding prefects from claiming candidacy for any office during their term. The Court furthermore disallowed the participation of the Democratic Social Movement DIKKI (a minor party founded by former PASOK Finance Minister D. Tsovolas) candidates in joint tickets with the Radical Left Coalition on the grounds that this party (DIKKI) was not legally represented by its founder.

Twenty-two parties posted ballots in these elections. The five most populous parties were presented above. The newly formed Christian-nationalist Democratic Revival party was led by Mr. Stelios Papathemelis, a former minister in the PASOK government of Prime Minister Costas Simitis and then an MP cooperating with the ND majority of the previous. It should be noted that Democratic Revival received privileged exposure from the mass media. The Ecologists/Green Party was unexpectedly strengthened in the wake of the environmental disaster caused by the summer forest fires. A constellation of extra-parliamentary ultra-leftist parties as well as a number of fringe party formations of obscure origins and platforms completed the picture of the September elections.

Themes and “Skills” in the Pre-Election Campaign

The pre-election period was regarded as being in many ways peculiar and interesting. First of all, it was characterized by a paradox: while it was one of the most extended such periods, since the prospect of elections had been in the air as early as February 2007, it formally lasted a mere three weeks, something which had not happened since the first post-dictatorship elections in 1974. The most interesting feature of all was the fact that elections had been called during forest fires unprecedented both in size and ferocity. The blazes lasted for many days, charring massive expanses in the Peloponnesus and Euboea. Their destructive consequences for infrastructure and in terms of human casualties loomed portentous in the pre-election campaign, virtually relegating the election campaign to the background, since the fires monopolized the attention of the public and the mass media. Unavoidably, this brief campaign was suspended, while themes and tactics had to be hurriedly revised. All this affected, if it did not render outright useless, the institutional and political functions of the electoral process, that is, the checking and accountability of the governing party, the evaluation

of the political personnel by the voters and mainly the promotion, the popularization and the juxtaposition of the political platforms. It is safe to say that the procedural character of elections in contemporary democracies was reinforced in this case in the most rigorous fashion.

It is obvious that the pre-election strategies presented remarkable differentiations that originate from divergent ideological-political starting points and institutional roles. This should not be taken to mean that there have been no points of convergence between the two main parties. Specifically, ruling ND has promoted its achievements in the management of public finances, the economy and education, adding doses of self-criticism over any delays in implementing the commitments of the 2004 electoral platform. In reality, however, ND appeared on the pre-election scene with no specific accounting of its government activity and no presentation of a government action plan. It is no coincidence that ND has apparently banked on the popularity of its leader and the effectiveness of his communication apparatus to the exclusion of almost everything else. Actually, the political communication specialists and the political planning managerial staff were commissioned with spinning the party line to the media, displacing once distinguished ND parliamentary personalities.

On the other hand, the main opposition party developed a rather convoluted and diffuse communication strategy vis-à-vis both its political audience. Its methods aimed at: (a) the diehard nucleus of its party audience permeated by staunch anti-right wing reflexes (processed by Mr. Kostas Laliotis, PASOK's master spin doctor), (b) promoting the capability of technocratic management, pointing to the future participation of the scientific and academic community in programmatic procedures and, finally, (c) utilizing the radiance of a number of renowned celebrities from the worlds of glamorous lifestyle and show business. The PASOK political platform revolved around two main axes: (a) the modernization of the state and public administration through a package of institutional reforms that combined the decentralization of political-administrative structures, technocratic management, the strengthening of rule-of-law guarantees and participation and the improvement of efficiency, (b) the modernization of the welfare system with the implementation of individualized and flexible social policies on a par with the logic of a welfare pluralism model.

Of great interest are the tactical convergences in election planning of the two adversaries. In particular, both parties, pose different “dilemmas” (the prospect of no government for ND and the downfall of the right-wing for PASOK), attempted to avert the expected loss of their neighboring political territories and to maintain their hegemonic grip on the political system. The most significant element involved the downplaying of national security issues (a preeminent battleground in past electoral warfare) and the economy in this year’s agenda. Actually, the basic problems of the Greek economy, such as a coherent plan for development, the prevalence of distributive inequality and matters of redistribution, etc. have basically not been discussed. This seems to vindicate Colin Crouch’s view that crucial political decision-making in contemporary post-democracies is the result of cooperation and negotiations between the government and economic elites.

The SYRIZA strategy exhibited the widest differentiations. Under the leadership of N. Konstandopoulos (a high-profile lawyer and politician with center-left roots), SYRIZA had fielded a dual front against the two major parties. The thrust of the party leader’s criticism focused on the obscure wielding of power and the extensive corruption that placed institutions under strain. Following the accession of A. Alavanos to the leadership of the Coalition, the attention of the party turned to the field of social struggle, while attempting to promote issues of the new politics, such as the environment and minorities. At the same time, the formal and inflexible institutional discourse was abandoned in favor of youth-culture talk and practices. It was no accident that a young party member, A. Tsipras, was appointed press representative for the election period. Tsipras had led the municipal ticket for the City of Athens, garnering a significant 10% of the vote. All this goes to show that there was a clear shift from the institutional field to the social domain which reinforced the party’s leftist movement profile. Finally, the tactic of maintaining an equal distance from the two dominant parties was gradually abandoned as conducting its opposition to ND in caustic tones.

Consistent with its strategy of radical differentiation of all the other parties, the CP of Greece (KKE) has been equally acrimonious in its criticism of both major parties for their class and unpopular policies, while expressing harsh disapproval of the

reformism of SYRIZA, its main antagonist on the left of the political spectrum. The KKE rallies workers and the lower social strata to an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist front.

LAOS seemed to apply a right-wing version of new age strategy. The composition of its ballot demonstrated its links with the Greek far-right¹⁰. Its leader and staff members attempted through TV appearances and symbolic intervention to capitalize on the insecurity shared by middle and lower strata in the face of immigration, crime rates, drugs, etc. At the same time, LAOS projected so-called national issues, mainly the “Macedonian issue”, accusing the government for soft-pedaling the whole matter. An interesting part of this tactic that differentiated it from any other traditional pro-American, post-dictatorship, ultra-right formation has been its intense anti-Americanism.

However, party tactics have apparently not been sufficient to motivate the constituency or even to attract its interest. The apathy of the 1990s (Dodos et. al. 1990) that was manifested clearly in the 1996 elections (the so-called “couch elections”) (Lyrintzis & Nikolakopoulos 2007:96) has been steadily transformed into a debunking and devaluation of politics and politicians (political alienation and cynicism). The pre-election polls monotonously repeated a trite stereotype: the citizens trust no political parties and will not be convinced that such parties may be ever expected to want, or be able, to tackle their problems.

By apparently disparaging *en masse* all parties and politicians, the voters compounded a brand of cynicism of their own just to subvert the peculiar cynicism emanating from the two major parties, a power-politics cynicism that has led to communication practices supplanting politics. In reality, the direct and emotionally charged participation in the mass mobilizations that marked the pre-election confrontations prior to the mid-1990s are no comparison to the present predominance of generalized apathy and resentment.

¹⁰ To illustrate the point we note the participation of Mr. M. Vouridis, the leader of an extreme right-wing and racist party (*The Patriotic Front*) and Mr. A. Plevris, son of K. Plevris, a militant anti-Semite and a pundit on the extreme right.

III. “THE MESSAGE OF THE ELECTIONS” //RESULTS

New Democracy (ND) gathered 41.84% of the votes and managed to secure an absolute but narrow majority of 152 out of 300 parliament seats. The Socialist party came second with a limited electoral percentage (38.1%) and reduced electoral representation. The traditional left-wing parties KKE and SYRIZA achieved a significant increase in their votes as well as in their parliamentary representation: the Communist party (KKE), with 8.15% (up from 5.86%), wins 22 parliamentary seats and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) received 5.04% and 14 seats. The Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) entered Parliament for the first time, winning 10 seats by capturing 3.8% of the votes (it is already represented in the European Parliament). The Greens, contesting its first parliamentary election, became the largest extra-parliamentary party.

The results Parliamentary Elections 1993 – 2007

Party	10/10/1993		22/09/1996		09/04/2000		07/03/2004		16/09/2007	
	%	Seats								
ND	39,3	111	38,1	108	42,7	125	45,4	165	41,83	152
PASOK	46,8	170	41,5	162	43,8	158	40,5	117	38,10	102
ΠΟΛΑΝ	4,8	10	2,9	-	-	-	-	-		
KKE	4,5	9	5,6	11	5,5	11	5,9	12	8,15	22
SYN	2,9	-	5,1	10	3,2	6	3,3	6	5,04	14
LAOS									3,80	10
DIKKI	-	-	4,4	9	2,7	-	1,8	-		
Others	1,4	-	2,2	-	2,1	-	3,1	-	3,08	
Total	100%	300	100%	300	100%	300	100%	300	100%	300

Source: *Ministry of the Interior Public Administration and Decentralization*

Obviously, the electoral process does not allow voters the opportunity to express their views on the parties and the political system in detail. However, the “message”

conveyed in the election of the 16th September is aimed at several “recipients” and is of great interest. Attempting a tentative explanatory approach to the results and codifying their various meanings from a critical perspective, it could be noted in particular that:

1. The rate of absenteeism was not as high as expected from the opinion polls and fluctuated within the usual percentage of 20%; a fact confirming the electorate’s great interest in the procedure.

2. In the first place, there is a tendency to express strong disapproval of the two leading parties, which seems to deal a blow to the “two-party system” mentality. It should be noted, however, that such tendencies appeared also in the 1996 elections without leading to any significant further developments.

3. New Democracy managed to become a one-party government despite the fact that during the pre-election period such a possibility was questioned. Nevertheless, there has been a considerable decline (3.5 percentage points) in its influence, which is even lower than the 42.74% it received in 2000. This drop is mostly due to the discontent within the electorate incurred by several important cases of corruption, which were supposed to be dealt with. The “Refounding of the State” was depleted by the recruitment of ND members, the absence of coordination at critical moments and, finally, the often unsuitable choice of government officials. Strangely enough, the party doesn’t seem to have been affected in a negative way by the tragic incident of the fires. However, the greatest challenge that the new government is now facing - taking into account the slim parliamentary majority - has to do with the handling and resolution of crucial issues which it promised it would deal with during the post-election period. This task becomes even more challenging given the new pledges made concerning socioeconomic issues and involving considerable government public expenses.

4. The most significant consequences of this electoral contest affect the opposition party, which is considered the “big loser” of these elections. PASOK has been defeated in consecutive electoral contests, something that hasn’t happened since 1981,

when it first came to power. The 38.1% gathered by Mr. Papandreou's party is the lowest percentage since 1981, when his father Andreas Papandreou was elected Prime Minister. The causes of this defeat are not to be found solely in the three-and-a-half years before the present elections. Without underestimating the decisive role of Mr. Papandreou's leadership model, it could be argued that the defeat of PASOK is due to deeper causes. The relative disorganization and the formation of the leading team based mostly on personal choices rather than on political criteria are elements of the policy already introduced in the early 2000. The party machine and the party platform were abandoned for the most part, as were its bonds with its social and symbolic references. As a result, the party inevitably faces an existential crisis of identity and leadership. It is thus not surprising that just a few hours after the elections there appears a grave problem of leadership, and the issue of the party's ideological and political profile, which have up to now not been confronted. These developments shift the interest of the mass media and public opinion to the party in question. Even though PASOK was the big loser it seemed to steal the limelight the very night of the election, since, a few hours after the announcement of the results, the leadership of George Papandreou, who was considered to be mainly responsible for the defeat, was called into question by party groups.

5. The reinforcement of the Left appears to be a widely accepted fact. For the first time in many years, there will be a strikingly different composition in Parliament, with the Left boasting 36 seats. After a long period of marginalization, it finally holds a stronger position in the political system. The tendency of support for the KKE to increase was already evident in 2005 and was augmented after the fires on Mount Parnitha. But SYN was the party that benefited most from the situation; it benefited even more from the recent ecological disaster in the areas of Ilia and Evia.

6. The sixth conclusion concerns extended mobility within the electorate (floating voters). Approximately 17% of the electorate changed course, mostly benefiting the Left wing and LAOS. These shifts took place from, and towards, all the political parties. This development casts doubt on the endurance of party alignments and the logic of bi-polar politics. It appears that a new type of voter is emerging who may head without commitments and restrictions towards the ballot-box of any and every party. ND's electoral power decreased by about 360,000 ballots, PASOK's decreased

by 280,000. This contrasts with the showing of the two left-wing parties, which increased their power by 370,000 ballots, and LAOS, with an increase of more than 100,000 ballots.

7. A strong tendency to elect new faces to the parliament (about 1/3 of the delegates were elected for the first time in 2007), which had been noted in the 2004 elections, and a significant degree of disapproval of incumbents is becoming apparent. What does not appear to be changing, however, is the “hereditary” logic of the parliamentary seat: descendants of powerful, well-known, and traditional political families appear to be easily electable.

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