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Local Elections 2023 and the Political Dominance of New Democracy

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The result of the local elections, especially in the first round, confirms the political and electoral dominance of ND (New Democracy) in the Greek party system. This outcome is a continuation of the 2023 double national elections; ND managed to form a single-party government, while SYRIZA (Coalition of Radical Left) faced an unprecedented electoral collapse for an opposition party. Moreover, PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement) does not seem to capitalize on SYRIZA's political and electoral decline. The electoral dominance of ND, along with its electoral distance from the parties in opposition, seems to develop the basis for the establishment of a party system with ND as a dominant political party, according to the analysis of Giovanni Sartori.

However, the outcome of the second round was negative for ND, as the party faced a surprising defeat. More specifically, ND set as a main target for the second round the electoral victory in all (13) Regions, but also in major municipalities such as Athens and Thessaloniki. In this frame, and in order for this target to be achieved, important interventions by Ministers took place in cases that they were considered as critical. More specifically in Thessaly, as this prefecture faced significant problems due to severe floods, the Minister for Rural Development Mr. G. Avgenakis (M.P.) promised a direct package of compensation, only if the nominated candidate of ND was re-elected. Moreover, at the Municipality of Chalandri the (then) Minister of Health Mr. A. Georgiadis (M.P.) declared that if the current Left-wing Mayor was re-elected, the Municipality will not get funded by the EU 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

The result of this strategy was that ND managed to win only one Prefecture (Peloponnese) out of the six remaining ones from the first round. In addition, it was defeated in both Athens and Thessaloniki, and also in Chalandri. Following the negative results, Prime Minister Mitsotakis declared that he "received the message". However, this was a controversial comment as in both cases (Thessaloniki and Athens), there was

no political assessment whether the Mayors had a good term of office or not. Especially in the case of Thessaloniki, the outgoing Mayor was not the nominee of ND in the previous elections. However, during the 2023 elections, ND chose to nominate him as the party's official candidate. This choice indicates the party's false assessment. Moreover, in the case of the Municipality of Athens, K. Bakoyannis had a controversial term, especially concerning the project of the "Long Walk". In addition, the MPs of ND claimed that the negative outcome of the second round was the result of a political alliance among the parties in opposition against the candidates who were nominated by ND. However, in the case of Athens, the electoral sum of the first round was not enough for Mr. Ch. Doukas to become the elected Mayor. Therefore, citizens who voted for K. Bakoyannis in the first round were politically neutralized in the second one. In Athens and in Thessaloniki, the nominated candidates of ND were defeated by candidates who had PASOK's nomination and were supported by the SYRIZA party in the second round. These cases along with the case of the prefecture of Thessaly, when the common (SYRIZA-PASOK) candidate was elected as governor, started a discussion about a possible political alliance between PASOK and SYRIZA for the European Parliament upcoming elections (2024). This reminds a kind of strategy that was adopted by the French Socialist Party (PS) at the Epinay Congress in June 1971, which led to the governmental collaboration with the French Communist Party in 1981 under the Presidency of F. Mitterrand. However, this does not seem to be a realistic prospect, as this strategy presupposes common ground between PASOK and SYRIZA in terms of party members and social alliances. Such examples are the social and political alliances between Centre Union (C.U.) with United Democratic Left (EDA) in the mid 1960's and between PASOK and KKE towards the 1981 elections. In the current situation, the members and the social strata of PASOK and SYRIZA do not seem to have the same ideological and political underpinnings. While the members of SYRIZA and the social strata that support the party seem to have a center-left orientation, the members of PASOK and the social strata which support the party have adopted an anti-SYRIZA strategy, with a neo-liberal political agenda closer to ND. The political and governmental alliance between PASOK and ND started in 2011, continued after the 2012 elections and culminated during the dramatic referendum in July 2015.

The basic characteristic of the 2023 local elections is the high level of electoral abstention. This phenomenon indicates that the local communities' representation system faces a political crisis. Since the 1990s the political parties in Greece have been transformed into cartel parties. In this frame, they have weakened their ties with society as they have abandoned the mass organization structure (Local Organizations, Trade Unions, Student Unions). Therefore, based on the theory of R.S. Katz and P. Mair (1993) on the *Three Faces of Party Organization*, the party on the ground has been undermined, while the party central office and the party in public office have been strengthened. The emphasis is given to technocratic dimension of politics, to (private)

mass media and to lifestyle politics as well. Thus, the political and electoral dynamics of ND, seem to take place in an unstable political environment. The main guarantee of New Democracy is the social and political alliance which was built by Kyriakos Mitsotakis since 2017. K. Mitsotakis managed to represent the 40% of the Greek people who voted for "YES" in the 2015 referendum. A social alliance with the dynamic social strata of the Greek society and a political alliance with the political personnel of the modernizing PASOK. This alliance allows ND to dominate politically and electorally the Greek politics, despite the negative result of the second round of the municipal elections.

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