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The two totally different results in the 2023 Greek local elections

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The local elections of 2023 in Greece can be characterized as a first “crack” in the dominance of the governing party of New Democracy. In view of analyzing the results, it is important to distinguish between the two different rounds, the first on the 8th and the second on the 15th of October 2023.

The first round of local elections seemed to confirm the hegemony of New Democracy; partly due to the constitutionally controversial electoral percentage of victory (i.e. 43%). The new electoral law led to the party’s triumph on the 8th of October, when the candidates of the New Democracy won eight out of thirteen regions and the majority of the municipalities. In this regard, one could say that these results attest to the continuity of the triumph of New Democracy in the double national elections of 2023.

However, this continuity was interrupted in the second round of the elections, where the results revealed the voters’ will to prevent the absolute hegemony of New Democracy. This is so as in Greece, it is believed that that the gist of the people’s will within the context of the local elections historically derives from the result of the three biggest cities, Athens, Thessaloniki and Piraeus. Hence, the loss of New Democracy in these cities in the second round of the elections can be characterized as the first crack of its hegemony. This observation becomes apparent from the huge defeat of Kostas Bakoyiannis, the mayor of Athens and nephew of the Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The newly elected mayor of Athens, Charis Doukas achieved a big win. This win was totally unexpected and significant, due to Charis Doukas’s lack of recognition and the “theoretically” consolidated position of Bakoyiannis family in power. In addition, the elections in the Greek capital underlined the

problematic electoral law, as Charis Doukas took 60% of the seats in the municipal council with only 14,19% of the votes in the first round.

The general reverse of the political momentum in the second round is obvious in electoral data. In 47 municipalities (approximately 56%), out of the total 84 where elections took place on the second day, the candidate who was second in the first round was elected mayor in the second round.

Apart from the role of party politics in the local elections, I would like to emphasize two other characteristics that might contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Greece's political reality. Firstly, an important feature of these local elections was the high level of abstention. In the first elections of the 8th of October the level of abstention was around 47,5% and in the by-elections of 15th October the level was a record high of 59,29% of the voters. Such low number highlight the de-legitimization of the democratic institutions and the voters' apathy and indifference towards politics in general. The responsibility lies not only with the officials, the parties and the "system of power", but also with citizens who decide to abstain, either due to a mature stance or due to an apolitical behavior.

A second key point is the disappointing numbers in the representation of women in mayoralties. Out of a total of 332 municipalities in Greece, only 22 women were elected mayors. This figure, which amounts to an approximately 7%, shows the low level of gender equality in Greek politics and especially in positions of power. The male-dominated local government in Greece demonstrates the general image of the woman's position in Greek politics. An image which is far from flattering in 2023.

Concluding, the Greek local elections might signal a new start for the opposition parties, allowing them to question New Democracy's hegemony and to prevent Prime Minister Mitsotakis from becoming the most long-standing leader of government in the modern Greek history. However, the most probable scenario is that due to the opposition's weakness to formulate a cohesive strategy able to reverse the current political dynamics, the local elections will remain a "crack" to New Democracy's hegemony, yet they will not signify a rupture.

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