DEMOCRACY AND SOCIETY 20.10.2025 | Nick Malkoutzis

Greek idol returns

After leaving Syriza, Alexis Tsipras is seeking a new political beginning

Fed up with playing a minor supporting role, Greece's former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has left the country's political stage. He presented his resignation - after 14 years of being an MP with left-wing SYRIZA - as a retreat to civic life and seeking closer contact with voters. But the move reads more as a tactical pause in a carefully staged campaign of image rehabilitation ahead of a new bid to be the main actor in Greece's progressive space.

Having already relinquished SYRIZA's leadership after two heavy election defeats in 2023, Tsipras is trying to recast himself from the polarising ex-premier who came to power in 2015 campaigning against austerity but ending up signing a third bailout agreement with Greece's lenders into a thoughtful, policy-minded progressive leader capable of rebuilding a splintered left.

A crisis of legitimacy

SYRIZA is currently polling at less than 10 per cent and is on its way to becoming irrelevant. It lies behind social democrats PASOK, who are second, the Communist Party (KKE), as well as radical right, Greek Solution, and populist, Course of Freedom, both of which have risen from the fringes of the political scene.

Course of Freedom is led by former senior SYRIZA official Zoe Konstantopoulou. It is one of four parties founded by MPs who have quit SYRIZA over the past few years due to disputes over policy and leadership. Tsipras will be walking down a well-trodden path if he chooses to launch a new initiative.

In his resignation video and a subsequent newspaper interview, Tsipras did not elaborate on his future plans but explained his rationale for quitting SYRIZA. In his view, the parliament is failing Greeks because the ruling centre-right New Democracy government has subverted the

rule of law and the fragmented opposition cannot hold power to account. His diagnosis of what ails Greek democracy is accurate.

83 per cent of Greeks believe their political system needs major reform or a complete overhaul, which is one of the highest rates of all the 25 countries surveyed.

Revelations of illegal wiretaps, the mishandling of a fatal train crash and other scandals during the conservative government's six years in office have fed a deep scepticism about political competence and honesty. According to a recent Pew Research survey, 83 per cent of Greeks believe their political system needs major reform or a complete overhaul, which is one of the highest rates of all the 25 countries surveyed. Greeks are also scathing in their assessment of elected officials. A staggering 78 per cent say few or none are honest and 73 per cent believe they don't understand ordinary people's needs. These figures far exceed global medians and point to a crisis of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the electoral arithmetic still favours the conservative government. Support for New Democracy has waned over the last 12 months, leaving the conservatives just below 30 per cent in terms of voting intentions. This would prevent Mitsotakis winning a record third consecutive parliamentary majority in the next national vote, due in 2027, but he'd still be in the driving seat to form the next administration as the Greek electoral system awards a bonus of up to 50 seats to the winning party. The main opposition, PASOK, is attracting less than 15 per cent, while all the other parties of the left are in single digits.

No belief in change

Fragmentation is a key barrier to the opposition's chances of toppling Mitsotakis. If a leader could truly unite most of the progressive space, they would pose a realistic challenge. The question, though, is not just whether Tsipras can be that unifier but also if he has anything new and compelling to offer to voters.

The ex-PM insists that personality politics is not enough to address the current situation. According to Pew Research, although Greeks are crying out for change, nearly 70 per cent doubt it is possible. This 'desire without confidence' gap is among the widest in the world, reflecting a deep sense of political paralysis and underlining the need for a convincing set of political arguments rather than just well-delivered soundbites.

So far, Tsipras has been vague about his ideas. In a newspaper interview

after his resignation, he addressed rule of law concerns by talking about the need for 'a shock of honesty, justice and democracy' in Greece. Speaking at a conference in September, he sketched out his nine-pillar 'National Recovery Plan' built around a state-led growth model, demographic resilience and a 'Patriotic Contribution' on high incomes to fund youth education, research and housing.

On economic policy, Tsipras has so far chosen a fairly classic social democratic agenda of wealth redistribution and targeted public investment. This contrasts with Mitsotakis' centre-right bet on market dynamism, but it is unlikely to be enough to stir Greek voters in sufficient numbers.

Whichever he chooses, his first task will be to rekindle Greek voters' belief in the possibility of meaningful change.

His comeback, or its success, will depend on the extent to which he can offer a credible, policy-based response to a wide range of issues troubling Greeks, which include institutional decay, corruption, uneven gains from the post-bailout recovery, rising living costs and one of the weakest purchasing powers in the European Union.

Tsipras might attempt to build a new party or act as the catalytic leader of a progressive coalition. Whichever he chooses, his first task will be to rekindle Greek voters' belief in the possibility of meaningful change. Although he has spent much time recently trying to draw a line under his past, perhaps it can also serve as a source of inspiration.

Undoubtedly, the fraught negotiations with the 'troika' of Greece's lenders in 2015 and the austerity measures his government had to adopt left scars and a legacy Tsipras' critics still exploit. Yet there are underappreciated reforms his government enacted that could form the kernel of a renewed platform: pension adjustments that sought greater contributory fairness, the creation of an independent tax revenue service, extending healthcare access for the uninsured, legalising same-sex civil partnerships and resolving the long-running name dispute with North Macedonia.

What these reforms had in common is that they all carried significant political cost but brought institutional repair or social justice. They offer examples of the kind of progressive reformism that could drive a new political vehicle for the centre left.

Tsipras once demonstrated rare political instinct when he sensed and mobilised public grievances during the crisis years, converted this into

electoral momentum. That skill set is still useful, but the context has changed. Greek voters now juggle more diffuse anxieties – the economic recovery has not been a panacea while trust has been further eroded. Repeating the performance that made him a star a decade ago will not suffice. A disaffected and wary electorate is unlikely to have the desire to watch a repeat performance from a faded idol.



Nick Malkoutzis
Athens

Nick Malkoutzis is co-founder and editor of MacroPolis, a political and economic analysis website based in Athens. He has contributed to The Guardian, Die Zeit and Politico, among others.