

The Brussels diktat: and what followed

Etienne Balibar, Sandro Mezzadra, and Frieder Otto Wolf 20 July 2015

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Alexis Tsipras, February 2015. Alexis Tsipras, February 2015. Demotix/indiPHOTOpress. All rights reserved. Does the unjust and forced ‘agreement’ between the Greek government (now facing the task of ratifying the agreement in the Vouli) and the other states in the European Union (not all of whom feel the necessity for such a sanction) mark the end of one era and the beginning of another? In many ways yes, but almost certainly not in the sense indicated to us by the ‘Summit’ report. In reality, the agreement is fundamentally unenforceable in economic, social and political terms, though it will be ‘forced through’ by a process that promises to be at least as brutal and even more divisive than the extremities we have seen over the last 5 years.

It is therefore necessary to try to understand the implications of the agreement and to discuss its consequences, avoiding all use of rhetoric but not of engagement or passion.

In order to do so we must first look at how the negotiations unfolded (those opened by Alexis Tsipras’s return to Brussels on the back of his ‘triumph’ in the July 5 referendum – which, for good reason, has not ceased to fuel incomprehension and criticism among his supporters in Greece and abroad), and secondly we must look at what these negotiations tell us about the positioning of the various European forces.

We must define the stage that the crisis in the EU has reached (a crisis of which Greece is both the symptom and the victim) in terms of three strategic domains: firstly the debt situation and the effects of the austerity measures; secondly the division of Europe into unequal zones of prosperity and sovereignty; and finally the collapse of democratic systems and the resulting rise in populist nationalism.

But first, it is vital that we include an ‘assessment’ of the Brussels agreement: ‘as seen from Athens’ (from the Greek people’s point of view) and ‘as seen from Europe’ (which does not mean as seen from Brussels, whose institutions clearly have no awareness whatsoever of the current European climate).

The ‘agreement’ from the Greek perspective

Seen from Greece, the agreement seems to be well and truly like a diktat. Varoufakis went so far as to mention ‘Versailles’, a provocative allusion to the 1918 treaties which had the well known repercussions for German history and for the fate of the world. The accusation was sufficiently serious and credible for Merkel to state immediately that she is unconcerned with ‘historical comparisons’ ... This dramatized illustration is justified for two closely linked reasons.

The first is this: even though Tsipras’s July 7 proposals in Brussels constituted a large concession on his part (accepting, in the main, the proposals of budgetary and economic austerity that he had previously refused, in particular those concerning retirement and taxation), they were nevertheless integrated into a Greek government project (so as not to say a ‘plan’) of adjusting Greece’s economy and finances, whereby, under conditions that would have certainly been more difficult than desirable, he could have hoped to develop his own political strategy in the interests of his people. Incidentally, this is why Tsipras went along with the repeated demands for an adjustment of the debt (demands increasingly supported by renowned economists with very different orientations - both from the IMF and independent of it).

Under repeated pressure from the German minister for finance and the president of the Eurogroup speaking in his name, it is precisely this last attempt at rationality and coherence that Greece's interlocutors immediately set about destroying, talking of their 'loss of trust' in the Greek government (a purely moral argument) and imposing punitive measures without any economic rationale.

The result has been an anti-plan of improvement that resembles bleeding the Greek population's remaining resources (notably the resources of the poorest strata of society, those who are already right up against humanitarian catastrophe) and carving up the national economy in preparation for completely unpredictable 'ideological' privatizations. In this respect, measures like raising the retirement age are particularly significant – absurd if not criminal in an economy where youth unemployment is almost 60% – not withstanding the preventive 'seizure' of Greek assets that is reminiscent of a usurer taking guarantees (even if Tsipras, in an extremely difficult situation, managed to avoid the establishment of a local version of the Treuhandanstalt in Luxembourg, in an establishment which... is also headed up by Schauble!).

Europe conducts itself with respect to Greece in this instance, both as a usurer and as a predator, the objective not being to maintain the viability or growth of its resources, but instead to drain them until exhaustion. Whatever this anti-politics may be – rationalized in the eyes of some (perhaps in good faith) by the dogmas of a monetarist orthodoxy inscribed in 'golden letters' in the European treaties that have been signed since Maastricht, and reinforced by the 'budgetary pact' of 2012 – it clearly does not constitute any sort of justification since we are no longer at the beginning of the crisis, and all the European leaders (including the German ones) have observed the enactment of the regressive effects of the policies that they have imposed at their leisure.

They know very well that Greece's national debt, having doubled in 10 years, has not reached 180% of GDP because of its absolute growth (comfortably outdone, even in proportion to population, by other European countries), but instead as a result of the collapse of production and consumption. Therefore, it is not a question of rationality, nor of the creditors' interests, but of political vengeance and the humiliation of an 'interior enemy'. This is confirmed when we see that each measure that has been imposed corresponds exactly to a reversal of social or economic politics that Tsipras' government was engaged in during its electoral programme and when it took office.

We must now move on to the second reason which allows us to talk of a diktat; perhaps an even more serious one and in any case a motive that is destined to seal the former: the measures of 'trusteeship' that create a protectorate within the EU and that are based on the model of ancient colonial practices but applied this time to one of its members (whom we demand thereafter to be symbolically 'co-responsible').

Undoubtedly the most blatant measure regards the sovereignty of parliament; the obligation to submit economically and socially sensitive draft legislation to the control and authorization of 'institutions', notwithstanding of course a 'verification' by these same institutions – the result of which will allow the release of European loans. To illustrate the functioning of this mechanism: the 'Memorandum of Understanding' has already imposed a series of predetermined legislative acts without delay (preliminary to the implementation of the agreement), cancelling existing legislation and replacing it. Together, the acts represent a programme of extreme neo-liberal transformation (without equal in modern Europe) of the right to work and of administration (which is not lacking in irony when we note that one of the principles is actually supposed to be the 'depoliticisation of administration'!).

We have also noticed the demand for the 'independence' of statistical tools (arising after the Greek authorities' carried out an 'audit' of their debt and its legitimacy), a demand guaranteed by the

Troika experts' return to Athens (whose level of personal independence is indeed beyond suspicion). Finally, it must be mentioned that the necessity for a governmental reshuffle (meaning the entry of anti-Syriza parties and the expulsion of the 'radicals') is a foregone conclusion in the corridors of the Brussels Commission. Materially, this means that the austerity measures and the trusteeship reinforce one another as policies, so that Greece is no longer a sovereign nation (in any sense since this process started years ago and was only halted by Syriza's rise to power).

Unfortunately what this means is not that Greece is entering into a shared sovereignty – judicially equal and politically organized as would imply a progression towards European federalism – but instead that it is bowing to the will of the master. Which 'Master', however, are we talking about? It is at this point that we must look at the other side of the coin: the European Union.

Europe's new constitution

We must do so by looking again at the facts and their historical significance, but also more deeply, by defining the material constitution presiding over modern Europe: the division of powers; the institutional shifts resulting from the Treaties and from the enactment of the treaties; the relationships between economic and political (and geo-political) forces; the hierarchy of interests codified by 'rules' and 'principles' for which states and their populations are forced to bend over backwards; the decision procedures (or as we say nowadays, the 'governance' procedures); the inequality of access to real power for different social and national groups and the impossibility of influencing it, etc. In short, we must ask ourselves what sort of 'regime' is modern Europe under?

Let us not revisit entirely what should already have become obvious, that is to say the institutionalization of neo-liberalism since the 1990 milestone that came in the form of the dogma of 'free and fair competition' whose 'revolutionary transformative' effects can be seen across society today – the EU's equivalent of the Soviet Union's state socialism.

If only to remind us that the belt is now tightened: neoliberal 'liberty' is essentially coercive. It involves – wherever 'deviations' or 'failures' are identified (essentially among the 'debtors' and the 'weak') – incessantly forcing citizens to be free (as Rousseau – who would never have imagined this sinister use of his formula – would have said). Clearly, the degree of coercion varies enormously depending on one's position on the scale of real power. But more precisely: when the Greek and Italian governments were replaced by a constitutional manipulation (2011) and the preceding Greek referendum prohibited, the 'revolution from the top down' – which was set up at the beginning of the public budgets crisis and the arbitration in favour of the banks – was thenceforth a 'fait accompli'. Habermas talked of postdemokratischer Exekutiv-föderalismus, a highly enlightening concept.

But this 'post-democratic executive' that has taken effect on the (quasi) federal tier – because the federalism being built in Europe on extraordinarily fragile foundations comes entirely from the top – has the remarkable property of being only partially visible and institutionally legitimate. To a great extent, it remains occult and informal, which is clearly illustrated by the fact that the 'European Commission' no longer has the power of political initiative, nor of mediating the interests of the member states. Jean-Claude Juncker (president of the European Commission), threw in the towel – having already had to resign himself to a humiliating recoil a few weeks ago – after a crucial question over the future of Europe arose regarding the hosting of refugees and the solidarity between states before the humanitarian catastrophe in the Mediterranean. The Commission, being now no more than a (proliferating) regulatory structure and a transmission belt, lost the power of negotiation to the Eurogroup: a group established by no treaty and following no rule, whose internally elected president then serves as a spokesperson for the most powerful and most influential of the member states – Germany, in other words.

So, one power structure conceals another. Nevertheless, we must not hasten to conclude that the material constitution of Europe is simply a mask for ‘German Imperialism’, even if such imperialism really exists. Because in some ways, the German hegemony that is currently active in Europe has no choice but to be indirect, aided or not by context (in the case of the ‘Greek punishment’, incidentally, it benefited from a multitude of favourable conditions). In other ways it is partial, dependent on challenges coming from several adversaries who also participate in the ‘power bloc’ to varying degrees, adversaries who bring with them potentially deep divisions. Undoubtedly, among these adversaries there are other European countries (the coalition of which might eventually be able to equal the German hegemony, except – as we have clearly seen in recent weeks – that they are held back within and without by their financial, and increasingly their ideological, dependence), and also – and of this we are convinced – the European Central Bank (ECB).

Because the interest of the German economy (which wants to secure a privileged position in the world market) is not the same as the banking system’s economy (whose vault-key is the ECB, led by a former employee of Goldman Sachs), it would be completely erroneous to assume that Berlin and Frankfurt are in harmony (in the same way, incidentally, as Mr Schäuble’s aggressive moralism is not the same as the speculative pragmatism of the monetary institution, as we have seen in the periodic conflicts between Mr Draghi and Mr Weidmann). This is why, when discussing ‘neoliberalism’, it would be prudent to be wary of the generalizations common amongst the members of the extreme left, because a common ideological framework does not dictate one sole politic and does not resolve conflicts of interest.

Without doubt, the ECB played a decisive role during the episode which just unfolded, a role one has even labelled ‘terrorist’: by cutting off the cash assets to Greek banks, the ECB forced the Greek government to close them and to establish capital control, thereby placing the country’s economy on the brink of asphyxia and compelling Tsipras to choose between surrender and chaos. Schäuble and Dijsselbloem took advantage of this blackmail, a fact that does not indicate, however, that this alliance works automatically. Draghi certainly did not want Greece to leave the euro (whilst Schäuble paid little attention and might have actually wanted Greece to leave in order to ‘tighten’ the zone around Germany): he took a risk and it paid off (for the moment). The long term picture is a different one altogether. The division within the synthesized European ‘governing body’ is also part of its ‘material constitution’.

At this point we can begin to contextualize the assertion made above: that the agreement constitutes a fundamentally unenforceable diktat made up of ‘unrealistic and unachievable reforms’, (from *Le Monde* 14.07.2015, a journal, in actual fact, that has relentlessly pushed for the adoption of these reforms), a diktat that will be implemented by force to the point of absurdity. Clearly, this will depend on the opposition that it sparks (within Greece and, one would hope, outside Greece, because it concerns all of Europe and all of Europe’s citizens), opposition that will grow and gain credibility as the contradictions and destructive effects of the diktat are exposed. But the opposition will depend on the consequences of the increasingly varied strategies being employed by the European states with regard to the crisis.

At this point and before penetrating the heart of the current contradictions, a digression would be a good idea, one that might help us reveal what resulted from the negotiations of the Brussels agreement of July 12-13.

‘Brussels night’ reveals Franco-German divisions

In general, political observers agree to divide up the European states into four groups with regards to the ‘Greek crisis’ and its logical solution (setting aside Great Britain, who does not count in this affair, especially since it is itself busy discussing an eventual ‘Brexit’): Germany and its more or

less satellite countries, who align themselves to German politics or pre-empt it (so as to serve as figureheads for the most 'merciless' German demands – dixit *Le Monde*); the 'poor countries' of northern and eastern Europe who 'conceded important sacrifices' in order to access the eurozone and who do not want the Greeks to 'benefit'; the 'indebted' countries of southern and western Europe who accepted the austerity measures that were rejected by the Greeks and fared variously in the aftermath; finally France (and in some sense Italy), who are not really complying with the regulations of the 'agreement on budgetary discipline', but who nevertheless wish to be considered as core members on the European 'executive board'.

In reality, this classification boils down to two groups, because the anti-Greek competition between different European countries – other than France and Italy ('we can no longer be confident', 'we no longer agree to pay') – was directly used (if not orchestrated) by Germany in the Greek affair (where the 'Schäuble line' prevailed over the 'Merkel line' in German politics). France alone, tacitly supported by Italy, took a (moderately) different position (in particular on the question of the Grexit).

Understanding the Franco-German division is the key, therefore, for at its base it is pretty decisive, but evidently not for the reasons defended by the French presidency.

With regard to the German government and its 'inflexibility', we believe that ideology and politics have always played a more fundamental role than economics (even if it is true that the German banks still have a huge chunk of Greece's net-worth, and that the German budget provides nearly a third of the European Solidarity Fund's resources). They reveal as much about German interior politics as the objective to create a continental hegemony – this 'German Europe' which Ulrich Beck described in his now famous book; not as a conquest but more like the project of a schoolmaster.

The two schemas devised by the Bundesfinanzministerium and opportunistically leaked just before the reconvening of the Eurogroup – the interim Greek exit from the euro (a temporary arrangement, which everyone knew would become permanent); or the reduction of Greece to a protectorate state, and the expropriation of its resources – were equal in substance (from a political point of view), especially if one remembers that in both cases the ultimate objective was actually to destroy the Tsipras government. The second schema prevailed, due to the first's difficulties of 'principle': it remains to be seen whether it will carry its project through successfully (though it seems pretty close already).

So what happened on the French side of the crisis? Firstly we could hypothesize, that in contrast to the Germans, at some point Hollande became convinced that the only way of 'forcing' the austerity measures on the Greek people was by 'advising' Tsipras to make Syriza shoulder their weight (though this task will be much more difficult – if not impossible – given the extreme nature of the measures imposed by the European summit). The referendum itself (which infuriated the Germans and hardened their resolve to 'smash' the Greek government) played a role in this sense. After all, Hollande himself has some experience in breaking electoral promises and must have found it easy to imagine that others might do the same...

Two other factors weighed in to make him risk everything to ensure that there would be no Grexit: the opinion of the French left – which mostly supported Syriza – on the consequences of Greece's expulsion; the conviction of America's hostile attitude towards the Grexit which stemmed from the dangers that would arise in the financial international monetary system (since 2008 the USA has nurtured an obsession with 'systemic risk'). But the key is undoubtedly the issue raised by Varoufakis in his article in the *Guardian* on July 10, 2015: Germany is using the Greek situation to 'discipline France', to impose budgetary discipline – which France is in fact incapable of putting

into practice – and to manipulate public opinion on the ‘sanctions’ which should result. Again, the issue is political; it raises as many questions about the distribution of power in Europe as about control over the dominant discourse. On that fateful night, one might say that Hollande (perhaps helped by Merkel against her own minister) ‘won the battle’ to keep Greece in the euro. But he undoubtedly ‘lost’ on the conditions which were imposed for that, and because it is these conditions that will determine what follows, we can assume that his apparent ‘victory’ will not carry him very far...

The unresolved problems – inflamed by last week’s standoffs – are inextricably ‘Greek’ and ‘European’ problems. Despite having to examine them alternately and from both angles, in reality, this means once again that they demonstrate to what extent Europe’s destiny is at stake in the Greek question, and to what extent the Greek decisions (their resistance, propositions, and eventually their errors and failures) lead to consequences for the whole of Europe today.

Three general questions thrust themselves to the fore more prominently than ever: the debt and political economy; the structural inequalities and new relationships of domination; democracy and the danger of the extreme right.

An uncontrollable European debt, a still unstable currency

Let us begin with the debt. It seems appropriate to remind ourselves of something obvious: the cumulative European debt – public and private – is still growing and generating its own toxic derivatives, and is therefore putting the stability of the euro in permanent danger. It possesses neither – in contrast to the USA – a compensation mechanism in the form of a universally accepted and hoarded reserve currency, nor a central bank which is authorized to ‘lend as a last resort’, and therefore involves both speculative risks and risks of economic stagnation such as those that we are seeing at the moment.

Most attention is being paid to public debt. because: the States – since the 1880s – has been massively engaged in institutional dependence on the financial markets; the bailouts and provisions of liquid assets to private banks by the ECB (except when it is a question of putting pressure on the Greek government) have had the result of continually transferring the risk of speculative operations onto the citizens as taxpayers; the neo-liberal political discourse has not stopped chastising the ‘spendthrift’ States. In actual fact, the bulk of the debt is private; debts that force economies to hover between the Charybdis of indebtedness and the Scylla of austerity policies.

This problem applies to Europe as a whole (even if the common currency is not adopted by all its countries at the present time, and no doubt never will be). The Greek debt represents without doubt a particular systemic risk (which we are not reducing by strangling the Greek economy or strangling its repayment possibilities!), but it is the whole system that is engaged on an unhealthy course that would call for a joint solution – in other words restructuring as part of the eurozone’s conversion into a coherent economic space, not only integrated or ‘disciplined’ but oriented towards a perspective of collective industrial development and transformation.

Hence the pertinence of the Greek government’s proposal to examine the conditions of its own debt reduction and of its revival in the framework of a ‘pan-European conference on debt’, – taking into consideration all the variables in the problem and also taking the various stakeholders into account – a proposition swiftly ruled out by the ‘institutions’ who did not even listen to them. The Greek suggestion was indeed converging with the IMF’s conclusions after it discovered the ‘mistaken calculation’ at the heart of its previous austerity plan for Greece (which led it to no practical conclusions).

At this point, we might ask ourselves about the reasons behind the unrelenting and insurmountable

obstacle that prevents Europe from confronting its financial problem rationally and on an appropriate level: what is it that ceaselessly strives to find scapegoats? Nationalism and short-term egoism, plainly, together with the aforementioned ideological obsessions, but also banking interests and, once again, the anti-communitarian behaviour of one country (Germany), a country which ceaselessly submits budgetary surpluses at the expense of its neighbours and which has benefited over the long-term from the considerable 'transfers' from indebted countries by making a profit on the financial markets from the spread of national interest rates. We can see why Germany will not be pressed to become involved in a common struggle against corruption and tax evasion in its neighbours to the south, whilst it is also the loudest critic of this corruption as it tries to justify its imposition of trusteeship. In the same breath, Germany relentlessly places the value and stability of a currency in danger, a currency whose character it has proclaimed to be sacrosanct. The Europe of inequalities, fractures, and dominations

The debt question and its missing solution – a solution based on the political will for a continental solidarity – raises a second issue, one that is more worrying still for European futures: the development of internal inequalities. They do not have a clear shape because they result from social and historical causes which are immersed in the history of the continent as a whole, and also because they stem from its successive divisions and reunifications (neglecting here the rhetoric on 'cultural differences' which the mass media and certain political commentators are fond of, with a flavour of intra-European racism).

Nevertheless, we might say that having tended to sway towards an east-west axis (reinforced by the political divisions in Europe and by the heterogeneity of its economic systems during the Cold War period) its internal inequalities now seem to be based on a north-south axis. The pseudo-economic resolution of the Greek crisis – coming after the 'solutions' enforced in Spain and Portugal (where public accounts and the reliability of banks were reestablished at the expense of an explosion in unemployment) – dramatically demonstrate the size of the chasm which is deepening within a 'unified' Europe, for whom the initial idea was to connect the reduction in enmities in the wake of war among its peoples, by opening up the prospects of prosperity and synergy.

Obviously, this is the logic of a fanatical economic liberalism, the same fanaticism that was enshrined by the latest generation of treaties: to transform the comparative advantages into the development of inequalities and finally into relationships of domination. Certain analysts on the radical left – spurred on by the history of relations between the planet's 'North' and 'South' – see this as an already advanced colonial relationship within the borders of the European continent, including in the form of the Mediterranean region's 'specialization in tourism' and the offer of educated workforces to the northern regions.

From this perspective, France (in industrial decline and with a high and unfaltering unemployment rate) would hold an intermediary position, one that is very hard to manage despite its size, and the new member states of Mitteleuropa (having gone through the trial of 'real socialism' and converted to the most intransigent market ideology) would specialize in outsourcing to the profit of the dominant region.

This thesis is a simplified one, especially because it tends not to take into account the social and territorial inequalities that are common internally to every 'region' and country – inequalities amplified by neoliberal logic. However, the formulation has the benefit of drawing our attention to both the structural and virtually hostile character of the polarizations taking place. For us, a more immediate and concrete consideration should be added, one more closely linked to context: southern Europe (primarily Greece and Italy) is not simply in the process of reproducing forms of dependence and domination at its core, reproductions analogous to colonization (in some ways 'constructive' and in others 'deconstructive'). It is also in organic relations with a new and

increasingly unsettled and unsettling ‘South’ (through the intermediary of the Mediterranean space to which it belongs as much as to continental Europe), one that will be impossible to contain behind walls or border operations. Of course, by a new ‘South’ we mean the poverty- and refuge- driven migrations, threatened by civil wars and backlashes from western interventions (whose consequences were never calculated by those who initiated them).

Our line of argument is clear: if it is illusory to believe that we could be following – or maintaining – ‘European construction’ through such polarization and conflicts of interests (which are increasingly amplified across Europe), it is even more illusory to believe that Europe would be able to exist as a political body which can ‘neutralize’ and ‘hide’ the flows linked to globalization that both stem from and end within.

What is confirmed for the IMF intervention – an organism that is primarily charged with restructuring economies affected by currency collapse – in the regulation of a budgetary dispute between the members of the euro zone, also holds with regard to migratory flows and new conflicts in the ‘margins’ of Europe. An increasingly divided Europe is also not completely contained ‘within Europe’. Before disappearing from the scene, Mr Juncker had the time to let out a cry of anger against the ‘egoism’ of the European states who refuse to ‘share’ the burden of refugees: why did he not push clear-sightedness to its conclusion, denouncing the aberration – which consists of dunking Greece’s head underwater – one of the two states who are facing their arrival on a daily basis? It will be too late after that to build walls in the heart of the Balkans or on the shores of the Danube... In the absence of European democracy, state populism

The third is clearly the democratic problem, highlighted in all its severity by the monstrous product of July 13, 2015 – hence the problem of legitimacy of powers in Europe. Time and time again, everyone has repeated it. But it should be approached with all its components and in its current state – moving away from only talking about the formal aspects of the institutional crisis, no matter how important these aspects may be. At least in appearance, the most serious of the arguments invoked before (and a fortiori after) the referendum of July 5 by the European governments in their effort to disqualify the Greek government’s demands for negotiation (over debt, economy, and the future of the country in the European construction) was as follows: the needs of one people or one EU member state (or one member of the Eurozone) cannot outweigh the needs of 18 others (needs which are expressed by their respective governments, basing their legitimacy on regular elections).

This is likely to mirror a ‘communication component’ created in Brussels and repeated in satiety by journal correspondents who are near the Commission (Le Monde and Liberation in France in particular). It contains the idea that a ‘part’ cannot decide for the ‘whole’ (any more, it should be said, than ‘the whole’ can impose on one ‘part’ the sacrifice of its own existence, except in a totalitarian regime). However, this only applies if, independent of the detail of representative procedures, a contradictory discussion occurred in which the ‘people’ – in the democratic sense of the term (the ensemble of citizens who are to be represented and affected by the final decision) – took part.

The European techno-structure and the political classes of different countries (who enviously protect their monopoly of ‘mediation’ between the national level and the European level) do not even want to hear it spoken of. We were still very far from it when certain countries opened referendums in 2005 about the ‘European constitution’ project, even though there were some real moments of discussion and collective participation. But the negative votes obtained in France and in the Netherlands (whatever the complexity of their interpretation might be) were quickly used to disqualify even the idea of popular consultation and to annul their results: conduct which had a massive effect on the disaggregation of civic spirit in Europe and which to some extent explains the violence of the reactions produced by the Greek referendum of July 5.

A spectre is haunting Europe; the voice of the people – the power of the people, even. But since the rise in democratic demands goes hand in hand with the growing unease – and in some ways the anger – which is produced by the shifting of political decisions from the nation-state towards supranational institutions and the obscure organisms which are subject to no popular-control whatsoever, a ‘compensation’ package has been put into practice, a package which has disastrous effects in the short term and terribly worrying effects for the future.

By making the most of the fact that a large part of the dubious sovereign debts were bought up by ‘public’ European organisms, the idea that they are incessantly ‘paying for the Greeks’ (who would do nothing but squander the money that is ‘given’ to them, when in fact most of this money is spent on paying back the interests from previous loans) has been hammered into the minds of the taxpayers of the different neighbouring countries, in addition to the idea that they personally will ‘lose’ considerable sums of money if the Greeks default without offering security (while these losses are virtual sums whose actual impact on the finances of each country depends entirely on the economic context).

The implementation of this state propaganda which is taking hold of public opinion, generates a populism, or rather an extremism ‘of the centre’ (to employ the expression used by sociologist Ulrich Bielefeld) that is particularly forceful in Germany, but also in France and in the Netherlands, and institutionalized in countries like Finland where its convergence with xenophobia can clearly be seen. As a result, the economic crisis develops as a gap in representation which is linked to the fact that there is absolutely no institutional possibility for European citizens – whether as individuals, or as territories, or indeed as local, national or transnational communities – to actually control the decisions which are taken in their name (the European parliament being no more than an empty shell, a shell that played no role whatsoever in the examination of the Greek default and its wider consequences, except for the provocative and contemptuous declarations made by its president Mr. Schulz).

But the crisis is also increasingly taking the form of the revenge of aggressive nationalism (anti-Greek, anti-German) and xenophobia, at once against internal ‘minorities’ and against external competitors, and joining with the development of organized forces, collective passions and anti-political and anti-European discourse.

It is the governments themselves who are the instigators of this massive populism (rarely described as such) and so are the parties forming the ‘great coalition’ of conservatives and social-democrats holding political power in Europe today, in close collaboration with technocracy and finance. But it is the movements of neo-fascists who – to varying degrees – are preparing to do well from the situation and who are already making the most of it by making their presence felt in the daily life of each country. We have already gone far enough in this direction, whether under the cover of the protection of ‘national identity’ or of the need for ‘defence’ against migrants and minorities.

The ‘democratic invention’ (to echo Claude Lefort) which Europe needs today must happen both in the form of an institutional creation – instituting the principles of representation and deliberation completely missing in all echelons of real power – and in the form of an active citizenship, that is to say a mobilization of the mass of citizens (which one might call ‘counter-populism’) on all fronts which require transnational responsibility (from the freedom of information to the environment, not forgetting workers’ rights, the mobilization of unstable and unemployed migrants, and the fight against corruption and tax evasion).

It is no exaggeration to say that Syriza, before and after its rise to power and in the same way as other European movements (Indignados, Podemos), succeeded in awakening great hopes amongst

the most advanced faction of the European left, because it was moving precisely in that direction: this, without doubt, is no stranger to the obstinacy with which it was attacked with the result that we can see. This is why, in tentative conclusion on this analysis of the diktat of Brussels and its consequences, we arrive – with the prudence that is appropriate when we are speaking from the exterior of a country or of a movement – at some hypotheses and some reflections on the achievements of the Greek left (as well as on the critical situation in which it currently finds itself). Syriza's strategic dilemma

The Greek parliament has just adopted the Brussels Memorandum in the prescribed terms (the *sine qua non* condition for primary rescue funds to be unblocked and banks reopened). The acceptance came as a clear majority, the old parties of government voted in favor but with a strong minority opposition that included about thirty Syriza MPs (after the central committee of the party itself rejected the agreement by a small majority). Tsipras, the prime minister declared (with a phrase that has spread worldwide): he 'didn't believe' in the economic virtues of the Brussels plan, but he had to accept it in order to avoid 'disaster' both for Greece and Europe. He thus took responsibility, and he demanded solidarity. Strikes and demonstrations are taking place. What is the lesson to learn from these latest developments? What conclusions can we draw on the immediate future and on the long-term consequences?

The first observation is that the discussion on the value and the terms of the Brussels 'package' has begun even before its implementation. This is true in Greece, clearly, but also abroad – including within public opinion and in the press organs that ask themselves the question of whether, in going 'too far', Germany and the EU have not actually sapped the conditions of their authority. If the answer turns out to be yes, it would mean that the 'question of trust' has switched sides... But for this, we will have to wait and see how the implementation takes shape. Once the shock of the new austerity measures has been absorbed by Greek society if it is able to survive them (the first major uncertainty), Tsipras's government – for its part and if it stays in power (second uncertainty) – promises: an obstinate fight to exploit each trace of and every possibility for autonomy left in the signed documents (a good example being the management of the 'guarantee funds' which unify Greek assets); a systematic resistance to the idea that the most impoverished social categories should bear the brunt of the charges, notably the fiscal ones; a renewed offensive against corruption; and a renewed insistence on the question of the structural causes of debt. None of these will happen without a fight (not long ago we would have said 'without a class war'...), but all this might shake things up.

Paradoxically, the main 'external' support at Tsipras's disposal in this combat currently comes in the form of statements from the IMF. This is because the IMF is refusing to play the role that Brussels assigned to it, publicizing its radically pessimistic analysis of the 'supportability' of the Greek debt, and by calling on Europe to do more to reduce it. It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of this statement of position, in view of its timing. It signifies that the IMF – recently involved in the attempts to align Greek dependence with the norms of the 'Third World' (as in the Argentinian case) – might create internal contradictions in the system by acting as a 'reverse mediator'. This corresponds to a balancing of the relationship between international financial interests and intra-European political objectives. One might think (or hope) that this marks the creeping beginnings of 'renegotiation', even if in the short term it induces all the governments in the Eurogroup to harden their pressure for the 'fulfilment of the commitments made'. Mr. Schäuble, on his part, never forgetting to play both cards, has seized the occasion to relaunch the idea of a 'temporary Grexit'.

The second element in the strategic dilemma, more important still, concerns Greece's interior situation (social, moral, political). Greek society is rich in solidarities that have been defended and used against the barrage of impoverishment and hopelessness over the last months and years. But it

is exhausted, and it is divided along lines of class and ideology that could shift at any time, perhaps brutally. This depends on the course of events, but also very much on the way in which governmental action is perceived: as 'treason' or as 'resistance'. In our eyes, it is crucial that Tsipras (just yesterday in his speech at the Vouli and in his letter to the MPs of Syriza) perseveres in his resolution to 'speak truth' about the constraints, the perspectives and intentions of his government – by adopting a typically parrhesiastic posture, in the tradition of Greek democracy. It is no less crucial that, under the pressure of great tensions (which could triumph tomorrow), the unity of Syriza on 'the verge of ruin' is still resisting. But Tsipras was forced to make changes in his government and to call risky elections in the near future. Let us try to make the conditions of Syriza's extremely fragile balance more clear.

The first point in question is whether or not Tsipras was right to call the referendum when he did and how he did, taking the double risk of 'provoking' the anger of the European powers who wanted to continue to maneuver behind closed doors, and also of producing the immense disillusionment and anger of the people (in particular the young people), people brutally confronted with overwhelming exterior forces and a mockery of democracy.

On balance, we think that he was, for the reason that – using Chantal Mouffe's terms that were reused by Ulrike Guerot in *Die Zeit* – the referendum has traversed the occult 'governance', and generated a real 'return of politics' in the European crisis that is irreversible in some ways. Questions over the interests and of the voice of the people – notwithstanding those over the publicity of decisions that concern common interest – were clearly raised. Better still, an ideological confrontation took place: the dominant camp of Greece's rivals (Schäuble, Juncker, Dijsselbloem...) claimed that the aim of the 'no' at the referendum was to exit the euro, whilst Tsipras maintained that his mandate, and the proposition which he was submitting to vote, was both to remain in the eurozone and to refuse austerity measures – a demand for a new Europe therefore. Our feeling is that he won the battle on the question of principle, even if he lost the war that ensued due to a crippling combination of forces.

This immediately takes us to a second question: was Tsipras right to speak of an imminent 'disaster' in the face of which the only responsible attitude was to fold without actually collapsing in principle? On this point, the response seems to us to be even more clearly in the affirmative. On one side, the collapse of public finances in Greece and the impossibility of financing economic and daily life was an inescapable reality (whose dark perspectives were highlighted again in the IMF's report), and in this sense the 'terrorist' blackmail worked well. Whilst on the other side, the perspectives for the positive (and even conquering) use of the 'Grexit' – being flagged up by the 'Marxist wing' of Syriza's representatives as well as by theorists from both the extreme left and the extreme right – never even had an outside chance of success. If they were not simply expressing fundamental opposition to the idea of the European construction, they were based on an archaic conception of the autonomy of (small) nations in a globalized economy; on inapplicable and authoritarian conceptions of the 'control' of monetary politics and of the circulation of capital (a kind of modernization of 'war communism'); and on a profound lack of consciousness regarding the impact of savage devaluation and competitiveness-at-all-costs on the lives of the working classes. It is true that some might reply that austerity is already insupportable and only promises to worsen, but this brings us back to a former problem: the problem of applying (or not) the terms of the agreement. In any event, the politics of making things worse makes no sense.

The unity of Syriza – as a 'governmental' party and above all as a movement – seems to us to be both the most difficult and the most decisive element. It is the most difficult because the rifts are very real, and also because unity cannot be decreed – it depends on social conditions as much as on a political willingness. It is the most decisive because at the present time there is a maximum push from the European 'centre' to create a rupture. The German press (*Suddeutsche Zeitung*) speaks

profusely of Syriza's 'schizophrenia' – they want both to uphold their criticisms of the agreement and also to stay in power in order to put it into practice on their own terms. It orders Tsipras to 'clarify' his intentions by 'shedding' the leftists that surround him, continuing the narrative about 'lack of trust' in the process. And the Greek parties once disqualified by their past politics, who 'supported' him in parliament, are lying in wait to replace Tsipras. The 'rebellion' of Syriza's MPs who voted against the agreement seems to us to be absolutely legitimate, and to belong to the democratic experience propelled at the heart of the crisis. But it ought not, without fatal risks, to play into the hands of the adversaries. Besides, the rebellion is not ideologically uniform because only one part of the opponents is motivated by a fundamental hostility to the European construction; others (including such leading figures as Varoufakis and Zoe Konstantopoulou) always demonstrated their engagement in the combat for a 'new Greece' leading to a 'new Europe' in both words and in deeds.

If Syriza's unity holds in spite of the internal tensions (which mirror the same conflicts in the bosom of the Greek people and of public opinion), the government will itself be able to hold on, to resist against pressure from the right and from the extreme right, and so the dialectic of application and of resistance will be able to launch itself. If this unity does not hold, we are entering the unknown, and will bid farewell to the hope that this movement has awakened in Greece and in Europe (and even beyond). The reader understands where our hopes lie, though they are based on nothing certain. 'Long March' for Europe: our solidarities

In his speech in the Vouli, Tsipras clearly said: the solution that we had to choose was not the best one; it was simply the least disastrous. And he specified: for Greece but also for Europe. It is a consistent position which he has defended since his rise to power, and notably at the moment of the referendum: 'our mandate is not the exit from Europe', that the vast majority of the Greek population do not want. Implicitly, our mandate is to fight without respite for the emergence of a new Europe, a Europe in which Greece – free from its oligarchical privileges and from the corruption that was encouraged by the creditors themselves – will have its rightful position and might even serve as a model for others. This was the theme of the article published in May 2015 in *Le Monde*: 'Europe is at a crossroads' (31.05.2015). This unwavering commitment does us a great service, creating responsibilities – if not obligations – for us as well.

It now appears that the European alternative to the neoliberal construction of Europe stemming from Maastricht – with its destructive effects and its insurmountable contradictions – at least presents itself as a much more difficult task, strewn with many more obstacles than many among us would have believed possible. Europe has undertaken a long journey to rise 'from the top' or 'from the bottom' out of its constitutional crisis, to invent the conditions of its citizenship, to assemble the forces of its cultural renewal. Greece is, and will be, at the heart of the clashes and the challenges. By testifying our unfaltering support to Greece, down to the daily necessities, based on the appreciation (and free criticism) of the vicissitudes that it is going through, it is ourselves that we will be helping. We must find the forms of this solidarity and make them effective. We must also remember the thing that placed Syriza in the situation in which it finds itself today, that which contributed to the imbalancing of forces and that which facilitated the diktat: it is, to a great extent, the insufficiency of this solidarity (or the ineffectiveness of this solidarity – which amounts to the same thing).

The efforts of the Greeks to keep the extraordinary democratic power alive that was demonstrated in the popular gatherings of Syntagma and in the referendum campaign – and in order to find new points for its application – should be responded to by connecting to it our own capacity to organize movements and campaigns that help to garner support for its cause amongst public opinion (or that in the end converge with it).

These movements and campaigns must be without exclusions, emphasizing internal discussion and therefore embodying the renewal of politics without which there can be no ‘constituent moment’ in Europe. They must cross borders – protecting themselves at all costs from nationalism and ‘populist’ emulation with such nationalist anti-European currents that are clearly on the rise (like the French National Front) – even when it might seem that the denunciation of the same ‘ills’ (technocracy, elitist corruption, disdain for the people, fiscal pressure) might produce a common ground for a parallel rhetoric.

What exactly could be better for this new intra-European internationalism than to find itself gathering in Athens, on the side of the Greek people? But we would like to add that it exists also in Germany, at the heart of what appears to be the ‘fortress’ of neo-capitalism and which is in fact itself filled with contradictions and rich in alternative possibilities; in Spain, alongside Podemos – burdened now with the task of thinking up a new challenge to the system; in France, where social-democracy is converting itself into ‘republican’ patriotism, ‘competitive destruction’ and the commercialization of its culture; in Italy, where the battle against the ‘fortification’ and the ‘militarisation’ of European borders is taking place and where struggles and resistance within and against the crisis continue to be strong, although politically dispersed; in England, where the debate for or against isolationism is about to take place (against a background of the privatization of all of its social services)...

Finally and above all, we need mottoes around which the solidarities – the convergent objectives for democratic renovation and resistance to austerity – from the different regions of the continent can be clearly seen. The audit of the debt undertaken by the Greek parliament is in itself an example – by thereafter giving substance to the idea of a new economy and of a new monetary politics, like those proposed by movements like ATTAC. The invention of new forms of labour organization and struggle, able to cope with the new nature of financialized capitalism, as well as of new social rights and welfare systems, follow from there. Resistance to security politics; the defense of the freedom of circulation and information is another objective. And these are not the only ones.

As Alexis Tsipras wrote in 2015: there are two roads opening for Europe. As difficult as it may be to oppose dominant policies, we believe that the choice is always there, more vital than ever. The opportunities must be created. This will take the time that it needs. But it need not wait.

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About the authors

Etienne Balibar is Emeritus Professor at Paris X Nanterre and Anniversary Chair of Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University, London. Etienne Balibar has addressed such questions as European racism, the notion of the border, whether a European citizenship is possible or desirable, violence and politics, identity and emancipation.

His books include Reading Capital (with Louis Althusser, New Left Books 1970), Race, Nation, Class (with Immanuel Wallerstein, Verso 1991), The Philosophy of Marx, Spinoza and Politics, Politics and the Other Scene (Verso 2002), and We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship (Princeton University Press 2004). His latest publications are Equaliberty (Duke University Press, 2014); Violence and Civility (Columbia University Press, 2015), and Citizenship (Polity Press, 2015).

Sandro Mezzadra teaches political theory at the University of Bologna and is adjunct fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society of the University of Western Sydney. In the last decade his work has particularly centered on the relations between globalization, migration and citizenship as well as on postcolonial theory and criticism. He is an active participant in the 'post-workerist' debate and one of the founders of the Euronomade project.

Among his books: "Diritto di fuga. Migrazioni, cittadinanza, globalizzazione" ("The right to escape: Migration, citizenship, globalization", ombre corte, 2006), "La condizione postcoloniale. Storia e politica nel presente globale" ("The postcolonial condition: History and politics in the global present", ombre corte, 2008) and "Nei cantieri marxiani. Il soggetto e la sua produzione" ("In the Marxian Workshops. The subject and its Production", Manifestolibri, 2014). With Brett Neilson he is the author of "Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor" (Duke University Press, 2013).

Frieder Otto Wolf is Honorary Professor for Philosophy at the Free University of Berlin. He has been working on the politics of radical philosophy, on finite marxism, and on the politics of the European Union. He is editing the collected works of Louis Althusser in German. He has been active in European politics, having served as an MEP from 1994-99.

His books include "Die neue Wissenschaft des Thomas Hobbes" (1969), "Radikale Philosophie" (2002), "Humanismus für das 21. Jahrhundert" (2009), and "Rückkehr in die Zukunft" (2012).

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