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‘Alexis Tsipras’, in Kevin Featherstone and Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Greek Politics* (Oxford University Press) in press (to be published in early 2020)

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Abstract

This chapter follows the evolution of Alexis Tsipras’ radical left political leadership in its shift from an inclusive to a personalised model as well as from a maverick to a mainstream style. Drawing on an institutionalist approach to leadership, it analyses the historical factors that shaped Tsipras’ ideas and actions as well as the structural constraints that circumscribed his attempt to put forward and implement his progressive policy programme. The policy project he pursued is argued to have become broader over time, as Tsipras was transformed from figurehead of alternative youth politics to representative of the interests of the wide array of social strata that lifted SYRIZA to government power. A brief attempt to discuss Tsipras’ legacy highlights his contribution to Greece’s party system and democracy as well as the consequences of his leadership for the future of the international left.

Keywords: Alexis Tsipras, radical left parties, left leadership, left populism, anti-austerity politics

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union the leadership of European radical left parties (ERLPs) has undergone a profound transformation. The emergence of leaders such as Die Linke’s Oscar Lafontaine (Germany), the Socialist Party’s Jan Marijnissen (Netherlands), France Insoumise’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon (France), Podemos’ Pablo Iglesias, and indeed, SYRIZA’s Alexis Tsipras in some of the more electorally successful ERLPs, has revealed a new brand of left leadership that breaks with the experience of pre-1989 communist, Eurocommunist, left-socialist and revolutionary parties. Instances of ‘personality cult’ and the centralisation of party power are nothing new in the history of the radical left

(Kriegel 1972, Tucker 1979). What is decisively different about post-1989 left leadership of the kind described here, is its agenda, characterised by a shift to left social democratic policy priorities (Bailey 2017), its maverick and left-populist style (March 2011) and the increased strategic weight it attributes to office-seeking in contrast to the traditional focus that leaders of radical left parties placed on policy and ideology (Olsen et al. 2010).

The case of Alexis Tsipras's leadership is 'typical' from this point of view. At the same time his case is exceptional among the ranks of this new left leadership, if we take into account the fact that he is one of only three leaders from the post-1989 ERLP family who have had the opportunity to take the helm not only of their party but also of their country (the others being the former Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin (Tudoroiu 2011) and the former Cypriot President, Dimitris Christofias (Katsourides 2016) and become PM. The Tsipras case thus offers a unique opportunity to explore the characteristics of this new type of radical left leadership, while in opposition as well as while in government, with the aim of analysing its evolution and exploring its potential effects on Greek and more broadly, European, politics.

The first section will clarify the concept of political leadership that will be used in this case study and set out a framework for analysis of the emergence and evolution of Tsipras' leadership. The following sections will examine, respectively, the ideological and political traditions from which Alexis Tsipras draws his co-ordinates, his leadership style, policy project and legacy.

Norms, institutional constraints and political leadership

The study of political leadership has long been divided among several approaches that are predominantly biographical (Edinger 1964), psychological (Greenstein 1969) and organisational (Helms 2012). Whereas the first two focus on the person and personality traits of the leader, the latter places much greater importance upon the complex institutional and social environment within which leaders operate and treats leadership as a resource and/or focal point for effectiveness, accountability and collective identity at the national and international political domains (Foley 2013).

Without questioning the importance of the contribution of leaders' personal qualities to explaining political outcomes and at times not hesitating to make reference to such qualities, this case study will approach political leadership primarily from the perspective of organisational theory, i.e. emphasising the embeddedness of political leaders within their organisational milieu performing specific, albeit malleable, roles and the structural constraints they face when trying to push through their political agenda. More specifically, we start from the core precept that institutions shape and constrain political actors (March and Olsen 1989). From this perspective understanding political leadership involves, on the one hand, examining the norms, experiences and events that shape their core values and ideas providing direction to their actions following a 'logic of appropriateness' and, on the other hand, analysing the impact of a leader's ideas and actions on the political and institutional context in the face of persistent institutional constraints.

How do leaders exercise their roles and assert their own agendas within given institutional constraints? In line with the long-term trends of the 'presidentialisation' (Poguntke and Webb 2005) and personalisation (Langer 2011) of politics, it can be argued that leaders are increasingly better able to exert their agency by developing a direct relationship with supporters and voters, often overshadowing and disempowering their parties and cabinets in the process (Costa Lobo 2014). In addition to (and reinforcing) these broader contemporary trends affecting liberal democratic government, the Greek case is also characterised by a personalistic political culture which allows the leader an enhanced degree of personal discretion in the exercise of power. This more traditional type of personalism has long compensated for historical state weakness (Featherstone and Papadimitriou 2015:19)

Furthermore, it would seem that different institutional constraints posed by role requirements, such as leading an opposition party or leading a national government, affect the ways in which leaders exercise agency. Literature on government-opposition dynamics for instance has pointed out the tendency for anti-establishment political parties and their leaders to go mainstream, i.e. turn towards more moderate policies and tone down Eurosceptic rhetoric, once the possibility of government becomes real (Abedi and Lundberg 2009, Sitter 2001). It will be examined in what follows whether Tsipras' trajectory from leader of a minor opposition party towards

the Prime Ministership has led to significant changes to his leadership style, both in terms of personalisation/ presidentialisation and in terms of moving towards the mainstream.

Eurocommunism and the new social movements

Alexis Tsipras' early political engagement began with the Communist Party of Greece (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος - ΚΚΕ) in the late 1980s when he was still a high school student. At the time, the orthodox Marxist and pro-Soviet ΚΚΕ, while still dominated by the generation of the Resistance and the Greek Civil War (1947-1949), was undergoing a period of soul searching. Gorbachev's 'perestroika' and the coming of age of a new generation of cadres who had been active in the Athens Technical University ("Polytechnic") uprising and the anti-junta struggle in the 1970s had led to a flowering of new ideas and a reconsideration of the party's strategy at the national and European level. In terms of domestic politics, this period saw the formation of an electoral coalition between the Communist Party and its smaller rival in the left milieu, the Eurocommunist, Greek Left (formerly Communist Party of the Interior – Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας εσωτερικού). The latter had originated in a split from the Communist Party that had taken place in 1968, in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Prague (Καπετανγιάννης 1979). The Greek Left (Ελληνική Αριστερά - ΕΑΡ) had recently discarded the communist label and adopted feminist and environmentalist imperatives alongside its position in favour of Greece's European Community (EC) membership and its commitment to the 'democratic road to socialism'.

The 'Coalition of the Left' (Συνασπισμός της Αριστεράς – ΣΥΝ) participated in two short-lived coalition governments in the early 1990s with the centre right party New Democracy (ND) in the first case and ND and PASOK in the second case (Pridham and Verney 1991). Participation in the Coalition of the Left catalysed a split in the Communist Party in 1991 which saw many of its more 'critical communist' (Moschonas 2013) prominent cadres remain in the Coalition, while those who remained in the Communist Party retreated into their ideological roots and maintained a traumatic view of coalition agreements with the other parties of the Greek left (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013). Synaspismos itself was transformed into

a party in 1992. Alexis Tsipras, at the time still a KKE member, was one of those activists who chose to remain in the Coalition and join the new party, abandoning the Communist Party.

While Synaspismos was a pluralistic party whose members were recognised as coming from different traditions of the left (communist, Eurocommunist, left socialist, ecologist), it was Eurocommunist ideas that were dominant within its ranks. Three main factions were active in Synaspismos for the best part of the 1990s and early 2000s. The Left Current comprised mostly but not exclusively former KKE members, the more radical fringe of the former Eurocommunists, trade unionists and the party youth (that had mostly been recruited after the 1991 split and hence had no political 'origins' other than Synaspismos itself). The Presidential 'faction' was a support network for the most successful leader of the party over this period, Nicos Costantopoulos (1996-2004). The Renewal Wing, mostly though again, not exclusively, comprised cadres whose origins lay in the Eurocommunist former KKE interior. What divided the factions were ideological differences (economic policy and the position towards the European Union, EU) and strategy (being a party of protest or being a party that could be seen as a reliable government partner for PASOK). The Left Current was 'soft Eurosceptic', radical and oriented towards activism and protest, while the Renewal Wing was staunchly pro-European, reformist and open to 'programmatic' agreement with PASOK. The Presidential faction held an important moderating role among the two main 'camps' and often brokered compromise and policy positions that reflected a synthesis of opinion.

Much like most of the youth wing of SYN, Tsipras was throughout this period closer to the Left Current. However, in the pluralistic context of Synaspismos, where policy was decided by consensus among the factions, Tsipras was exposed to Eurocommunist ideas and imperatives in their post-1989 evolution that included embracing electoral politics, advocating a democratic socialist political and economic agenda and adopting a critical but supportive position on the EU.

A successful operator in party politics, Tsipras was appointed as the first SYN Youth Secretary (1999-2003), later joining the party and being elected a member of SYN's Central Committee and the Political Secretariat, in charge of Education and Youth, with wide party support. He rose rapidly within the party hierarchy, becoming SYN's lead-candidate for the 2006 mayoral elections in Athens. Tsipras was selected for

that post by the new party leader, Alekos Alavanos (2004-2008), a stalwart of the Left Current, who was aiming to give his party a more radical profile and appeal to young voters. Tsipras' electoral campaign was very successful, projected a fresh and youthful profile that attracted an unprecedented 10.6 per cent of the Athenian vote (Makraki and Apospori 2008), a major success for a new candidate representing a small party of the left in a conservative stronghold.

Two years later, Alavanos stepped down from SYN's leadership in order to lead the new wider Coalition that SYN had forged with other smaller organisations and groups of the Greek radical left in 2004, a coalition named SYRIZA, nominating Tsipras to replace him as SYN's leader. In SYN's 5th Congress, Tsipras won 70% of the delegates' votes and became the leader of SYN. Alavanos's unsuccessful attempt to shift the centre of power from SYN under Tsipras' leadership to SYRIZA soon led to his resignation and to Tsipras assuming the leadership of both SYRIZA and SYN in 2009, at the age of 34.

Tsipras' rapid ascendance to the highest of ranks in the Greek left might have one think that he is a 'test tube' politician whose only point of reference and main experience had been internal party politics. This was not the case. From his early years, Tsipras stood out initially as a leader of the student movement and later a frontline activist and organiser in the Global Justice (or 'alterglobal') Movement (GJM) of the early 21st century. As the first leader of SYN Youth, Tsipras had played a significant role in shaping its political direction. In particular, under his guidance, SYN Youth was established as an organisation attuned to gender equality, secularism, human rights, pacifist and anti-authoritarian priorities. Tsipras himself and SYN Youth were also engaged in what were at the time non-conventional repertoires of action, such as those practiced in the GJM. Beyond its protest-oriented and transnational character, a further key aspect of the GJM that left a marked imprint on SYN Youth, and later SYRIZA, was its pluralistic, less ideological and more pragmatic approach towards co-operation and alliances within the broad milieu of the radical left and the social movements (Della Porta 2007).

In brief, Alexis Tsipras' formative ideological and political influences came from the time-honoured traditions of the Greek communist and Eurocommunist left. Equally, if not more so, however, Tsipras was a child of the major political events and the social movements of his own time, in which he was an active participant.

Leadership style

Alexis Tsipras became a *strictu sensu* political leader the moment he assumed the Presidency of SYN in 2008, at a time when SYN was a small but established party of the minor opposition with stable parliamentary representation, rarely receiving more than 3-4 per cent of the vote. Soon afterwards he led the SYRIZA coalition into the 2009 elections and was elected to Parliament for the first time. After the turbulent events of 2010-2012, and the game changing double elections of 2012 discussed elsewhere in this volume, Tsipras became the Leader of the Opposition; while after the January and September 2015 elections he was appointed Prime Minister of Greece. It will be argued in this section that Tsipras' leadership style was transformed over time, gradually since the 2012 elections and decisively since Tsipras became the PM of Greece for the second time, in September 2015. The change was from inclusive to personalistic/ presidentialist and from maverick to mainstream leadership.

Inclusive to personalistic/ presidentialist leadership

Throughout its 20-year lifespan (1992-2012) and until its merger into SYRIZA, SYN was not a leader-centred party. The views of the leader were important, but the operation of the party's collective decision-making bodies allowed cadres and members a significant say in party policy and strategy. Intra-party factions were the most powerful actors, in the context of setting the agenda and deciding party strategy and policy. SYN's leaders were expected to show a significant capacity to synthesise the views of the factions. This would sometimes lead to immobilism, but overall it had the effect of constraining personalism at the leadership level. It was in this context that Tsipras was called upon to lead his party.

Prima facie, Tsipras was a highly appropriate candidate for the leadership of such a party. He is said to be a good listener (Markaki and Apospori 2008), open to input from a broad range of sources and advice and a fast learner (Interview 1, 2). He is reported as being skilled at synthesising views (Interview 2), a team mobiliser and an alliance builder: SYRIZA nearly collapsed just before the 2009 elections when Alekos Alavanos resigned from its leadership and 'it was Tsipras who stepped in and

held it together' (Interview 2). Some of these qualities seem to have suited Tsipras well when he again assumed the PM role after the September 2015 elections, helping him to run his cabinet and maintain his unorthodox coalition with the right wing nationalist ANEL party (Interview 3). Yet being inclusive, open to input and able to reconcile internal differences was a feature of his leadership style that gave way to a more personalistic and presidentialist leadership style over time.

The 'personalisation of politics' is a term that refers to the shifting focus from the party to the person of the candidate. Mediatisation of politics and institutional factors (i.e. presidential vs parliamentary systems) seem to play a significant role in encouraging it (Aarts et al 2011). It can be shown that Tsipras' leadership evolved in the direction of both personalisation (in relation to his party) and presidentialisation (vis-à-vis his government).

The campaign for the May 2012 national elections was run on the premise that Tsipras himself was an asset for the SYRIZA coalition. It was party strategy but also the importance of the office of the PM in the Greek political system which encouraged a personalistic campaign focused on the leader (Interview 1), especially since in the May 2012 elections it was SYRIZA's declared aim to claim government responsibility (Tsakatika 2016) and hence present a lead candidate who would make a suitable PM. This was reinforced in the 2014 campaign for the post of European Commission's President which Tsipras ran on behalf of the Party of the European Left (Schmitt et al 2015). The extent of the international coverage of the Greek case and the personal focus on Tsipras as a radical left opposition leader who would challenge austerity in Europe largely contributed to elevating Tsipras to a highly visible and central position within Greek politics. The personalisation of SYRIZA's campaigns peaked in the 2015 elections of both January and more so, September, where the electorate was called upon to 'Vote for the PM' with Tsipras being the main focus of the campaign, completely displacing the party.

The shift to a more personalised leadership style was complemented by 'presidentialism' in the exercise of government once Tsipras assumed office. In the light of the principle that a left-wing cabinet should operate in a collective (rather than a centralised) way, Tsipras convened his cabinet regularly. He appointed large cabinets which included the highest number of Alternate Ministers in contemporary

Greek political history (i.e. Ministers that participate in cabinet meetings rather than junior Ministers who do not), (see ggk.gov.gr) aiming to have 'all hands on deck' and shared responsibility among coalition partners and among his party's factions. That said, Tsipras' term in government has not escaped the pattern that reflects Greece's 'prime ministerial' political system, which is conducive to 'presidentialisation' and the PM operating as *primus solus* (Koutsoukis 1994: 280). The Greek 'core executive' involves autonomous ministries and weak inter-ministerial co-ordination (Featherstone and Papadimitriou 2015). The PM has absolute power over cabinet appointments, but a weak administrative apparatus available to him for the purpose of controlling, overseeing and co-ordinating the workings of his government (Sotiropoulos 2001).

In terms of improving government co-ordination and efficiency, Tsipras initially attempted, in conjunction with the government deputy PM Yiannis Dragasakis, to articulate problem-solving at three levels: when an issue emerged, the first attempt to resolve it takes place within the Ministry, should this fail given wider implications that extend beyond the Ministry, a second attempt took place cross-Ministry and only then would the issue be raised at Cabinet level with the involvement of the PM (Interview 4). These efforts were not been very successful, ultimately, due to the chronic structural weakness of inter-Ministerial co-operation (interview 4). To compensate, Tsipras chose to strengthen his own hand by appointing initially two and, after a first reshuffle of his cabinet, three Ministers of State who worked under his guidance and a junior minister without portfolio attached to the PM (see primeminister.gr). He built his own team around the PM's Office and established a new branch of the PM's Office in Thessaloniki in November 2016.

From Maverick to Mainstream Leadership

Tsipras did not project charisma in the Weberian sense of being considered as possessing 'supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities' (Weber 1978: 241); he was not a party intellectual, but a persistent and successful mobiliser; he did not come with excellent credentials from his studies, professional activities or leadership experience in other fields outside of politics. He was often scorned by his opponents and hostile media for his lack of general

knowledge and poor foreign language skills. Tsipras was not the heir of a political dynasty; nor did he project himself as a working-class hero. In contrast to all the political leaders of post-authoritarian Greece who would fit in one or other of the descriptions above, his was a profile of a likeable 'everyman' with whom ordinary people could identify with.

While representing a party with roots in the history of the Greek Eurocommunist left and a traditionally sober, moderate discourse, Tsipras' achievement of electoral success and government power coincided with a shift to a maverick, anti-establishment, left populist discourse (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014), particularly between 2011 and September 2015 (Tsakatika 2016). The electoral decline of the main parties of government, especially PASOK, left a considerable section of voters in search of a new political 'home'. SYRIZA's assumption was that they would be willing to vote for it, provided its discourse was broad enough to include them. Partially by making reference to the legacy of the Greek Communist Left and partially by 'appropriating' the radical beginnings of PASOK (Tsipras 2017), Tsipras 'performed' (Moffit and Tormey 2014) left populism and in the process managed to displace PASOK on behalf of his party. His references to 'our people' on the one hand and the 'external' and 'internal' Troika that condemned the Greek people to impoverishment and indignity on the other hand became a staple of his public speeches (Tsipras 2014). This discourse was very effective in gaining him personal appeal and favour with a significant part of the working class and lower middle-class groups that traditionally supported PASOK.

Tsipras' maverick leadership style nonetheless steadily shifted towards a more mainstream approach since he became leader of the Opposition in 2012 and substantially after his second electoral victory in September 2015. Moderating his discourse was one aspect of this shift. A characteristic example was the shift from '*scrap(ping)* the Memorandum with one law containing a single article' (Tsipras 2012), to '*replacing* the MoU with a national plan for productive reconstruction' (Dragasakis 2012). This shift took place between May and June 2012, when the prospect of government office was in sight, as the May 2012 elections were inconclusive and were repeated a month later. Aiming for a peer-to-peer relationship with his European Council colleagues as a PM that can be relied on to keep agreements, rather than acting as an outsider aiming to disrupt business as usual in

Brussels, has been Tsipras' preferred approach since the summer of 2015. In domestic politics, his discourse has since increasingly approximated that of a mainstream politician of the centre-left, going about the business of government.

To summarise, over the past ten years Tsipras' leadership style has shifted from inclusive to personalistic and from maverick to mainstream. These changes have mirrored the shift of his party from a minor party representing a small segment of the professional middle class to a major party that represents broad social segments of middle and working-class strata that shifted their allegiance to SYRIZA in the context of the political realignment that followed the economic crisis. It has also mirrored the evolution of Tsipras' career from leader of a small opposition party to PM of Greece.

Policy shifts

Tsipras' first steps in politics were aimed at the political representation and mobilisation of a younger generation of Greeks without previous party-political identification that the party system had alienated. According to Tsipras' narrative, his cohort's economic prospects were bleaker than those of its members' parents. They found themselves in precarious jobs, in a two-tier labour market and dependent on family support to the detriment of their independence. Furthermore, the values and preferences of this generation were not represented or legitimately expressed in public life. For instance, issues such as same sex marriage, separation of church and state, deeper democracy and transparency in governance, a more open approach to immigration and a reconsideration of foreign policy priorities were not on the agenda of the two-party system that dominated Greek politics in the post-authoritarian period. Young people consequently felt unwilling and unable to participate in politics because they saw established political parties and trade unions as representatives of the interests of an economic, cultural, media and political elite. This was the project Tsipras pursued in his student activist days, during his 2006 mayoral campaign and even in his early days as SYRIZA's leader.

In 2010, when the economic crisis in Greece forced the radical reconsideration of the Greek 'social contract', Tsipras found himself leading a radical left party with parliamentary representation and an active presence in the emerging anti-austerity social movements including the *Indignants* of Syntagma Square (Tsakatika and

Eleftheriou 2013; and [Chapter XX here](#)). Adopting the broader perspective of the coalition he was heading, he directly addressed the injustice and inequalities that had become exacerbated by the severe austerity measures and were affecting extended social strata in Greek society. He began to attack the 'Memorandum of Understanding' attached to the bail-out agreement, the invasive presence of the lenders' representatives (the 'Troika' of the ECB, European Commission and IMF) in Greek politics and institutions and the Greek political parties that had lent their support to both. In Parliament, he called for an end to the Memorandum and the abolition of a large part of the country's debt.

As the prospect of government became more realistic in the aftermath of the 2012 elections, SYRIZA, led by Tsipras and his inner circle, abandoned the programme of radical economic and social transformation it had set out in 2009 (SYN 2009) in favour of a strategy that had been followed by Sweden's social democrats and US New Deal Democrats in the 1930s (Moschonas 2013). The Thessaloniki Programme, i.e. the measures that Tsipras personally promised to implement if elected in the 2015 January elections was designed to address a crisis. It involved immediate support measures for the alleviation of extreme poverty, scaling back austerity measures, rebuilding the welfare state, addressing unemployment, putting forward a new plan for the country's 'reconstruction' and reforming the state in a democratic direction. The longer-term aim would be to eventually rebuild the country's economy on a just and productive basis with the support of a 'new social and political coalition' while remaining in the European Union and the Eurozone (SYRIZA 2014).

Signing the Third Memorandum of Understanding in the summer of 2015 after seven agonising months of negotiation with the lenders (Tsatsanis and Teperoglou 2016) was a defeat of Tsipras' objectives as these had been articulated in the Thessaloniki Programme, particularly in what concerned the scaling back of austerity measures. As a consequence, mustering sufficient resources to fund the welfare state and promote public investment in order to stimulate job creation proved to be a difficult task. Nonetheless, Tsipras won the September 2015 elections, a fact that forced a major compromise with regard to his declared policy project. He had to turn from the politics of opposition to the business of governing and salvage as much as he could from the policy project he had put forward in the Thessaloniki Programme.

Upon his re-election Tsipras promised a 'parallel programme' to alleviate the effects of austerity. Once in government, he indeed prioritised social exclusion. Some examples include introducing a Social Solidarity Income scheme covering about 700,000 people subject to extreme poverty; universal access to health care for all residents and denizens of Greece; free school meals for deprived areas; and free use of public transport for the unemployed. On two occasions (December 2016 and November 2017), where the budget surplus was higher than expected in the context of the terms of the Third MoU, he symbolically ordered a social dividend of the surplus to be distributed to low earning pensioners, the unemployed and the young. Nonetheless, during the best part of his second term in office he was unable to resort to demand-side economic policies to any significant extent. In line with the Third Memorandum he had signed up to in August 2015, his was a programme of continued wage restraint, austerity budgets, continued benefit and pension cuts, high taxation and limited public investment. Consequently, the under-performance of the economy, flight of skilled labour and slow economic growth continued.

At the same time Tsipras prioritised and pushed through issues involving social and political rights that he considered essential, such as the regulation of same-sex partnership and fostering, gender recognition and citizenship law. On the other hand, while he took the lead in defending a humane and open approach to the public's reception of the refugee crisis in Greece, the practical implementation of his government's asylum policy has been controversial. Despite the obstacles set out by his government coalition partner, the nationalist right ANEL party, Tsipras boldly pushed forward the separation of church and state and a new bilateral Treaty between Greece and FYROM whose main purpose would be to settle the question of FYROM's name in return for Greece lifting its veto on its EU and NATO membership. Finally, Tsipras set the fight against corruption, modernising public administration, constitutional reform, and media regulation as priorities for his second term in office with only moderate success.

Tsipras primarily wants to be known as the leader that 'took Greece out of the Memorandum', i.e. out of the grasp of economic guardianship and set it on an autonomous course of development and national reconstruction along socially progressive and democratic lines as an equal partner in the EU. He also wants to be known as a peacemaker, a 'safe pair of hands' in a troubled and unstable

geopolitical region. In September 2015 Tsipras found himself overpowered in his negotiation with the lenders and in the uncomfortable position of being under obligation to implement a Third MoU that went against his programme and vision for the country's politics and economy. He also found himself in need of again forming a government coalition with ANEL, a political party that shares none of his values and priorities over social rights and core foreign policy issues. These formidable constraints have not allowed Tsipras to pursue his long-term policy project or political and economic 'vision' for the country to the extent that he would have liked. Nonetheless, he did demonstrate that where constraints could be overcome or bypassed his policy commitment to the socially progressive and egalitarian agenda he put forward in the 'Thessaloniki programme' on the basis of which he was elected, was deep and consistent.

Legacy

Pronouncing on Tsipras' legacy in terms of his policy project for Greece is a tall order. In terms of the impact of his leadership on the Greek political system, without a doubt his contribution to party system change, i.e. the end of the two-party system that characterised post-authoritarian Greece and the displacement of PASOK, cannot be overstated. In relation to the quality of democracy in Greece, Tsipras' leadership invites a discussion about the populist discourse that he espoused to win power, on one hand, and his ascendancy as a PM of the radical Left, on the other hand; while the former can be argued to build on and perpetuate a negative trait of Greek democracy that partly draws its inspiration from the legacy of the early days of PASOK (Pappas 2014: 21), the latter can be argued to strengthen Greek democracy by breaking a historical barrier of exclusion that had not allowed the Left to lead a national government.

Finally, the effect Tsipras' leadership has had beyond Greek politics can be approached through his role as an international figurehead of the movement against austerity. Between June 2012 and July 2015, Tsipras became known to the world as the radical left firebrand representing a small, indebted country labouring under a heavy regime of conditionality that 'stood up' to European and international neoliberal policies (van Esch 2017: 231-233). However, the policy shift Tsipras

performed by agreeing to the adoption and implementation of a Third Memorandum of Understanding in July 2015 may well turn out to constitute a major setback for the ideas he advocated as a representative of the European radical left. His time in government confirms the European radical left's social democratic turn, the continued emphasis of significant sections of it on office-seeking, and the fact that personalisation and a shift towards a more conventional leadership style affect the radical left as much as other party families that start from the margins and enter the mainstream.

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Interview 3: SYRIZA Minister A, Athens 26, May 2016.

Interview 4: SYRIZA Minister B, Athens, 13 July 2017.

