

# The Greek left and the question of the European Union

On the exit from the Euro and anticapitalist disengagement from the EU

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Since Greek capitalism has entered the whirlwind of the global financial crisis and particularly from the point that the debt crisis in Greece broke out, the questions of the European Union (EU) and the Euro have emerged as some of the most important debates among the forces of the Left and the working class movement who attempt to shape radical political and movement responses to the crisis of the system. This debate has gained an even bigger importance among those political currents and forces that want to forge a clear revolutionary political proposal targeting the socialist transformation of the society.

This is a very important discussion. Membership of the EU and the Eurozone constitutes a strategic choice of the Greek capitalists. It is the concrete way that Greek capitalism is integrated in the global imperialist chain. It is the concrete process through which the Greek capitalism is taking part in the international capitalist competition and the global sharing of the surplus values and the profits. Therefore, it cannot exist a contemporary revolutionary program and an actual revolutionary perspective without analyzing this particular way of participation and function of the Greek capitalism in the international capitalist division of labour and without including the demand of overthrowing this participation. Because it is exactly on these strategic choices of the ruling class that the political and social blocks of power who take over the governmental offices are forged and it is exactly on these choices –the so-called “national objectives”– that they try to gain the allegiance and the consensus of the working class.

Without any doubt, participation in the EU and the Eurozone is the new “Great Idea” of the Greek capitalism; in the name of which they call –especially now, during the crisis– the subordinate classes to suffer terrible sacrifices, which are imposed through the Memorandums and the Programs of Stability.

This involvement with the EU empowered Greek capitalism to play the role of a peripheral force –a local imperialism– in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean region. Participation in the EU made Greek capital the necessary partner of the big European imperialist forces alongside with the US to their interventions in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe (an example is the fact that the expansion of Coca-Cola in the above regions through the Greek company 3E). Even today, in the period of the crisis, China has selected Greece to be its entrance in the European markets. The introduction of the Euro enriched the Greek ruling class with the necessary hard currency and the needed low interests rates in order for them to obtain the appropriate capital funds and be able to take part in the theft of public property of the countries of Eastern Europe, thus making Greece an exporter of capital all the

last decade.

Without its participation in the EU and in the Eurozone, Greece could not play this role in the region. The difficulties that Turkish capitalism is facing in playing such a role –because of its exclusion from the EU– make very clear the reasons why the Greek ruling class insists on maintaining their status as a hard-core country of the Eurozone at any price. If Greece is forced to leave euro, the results will be destructive for the Greek ruling class. They will lose their strategic geopolitical role, they will lose their access to important funds, and they will lose some important advantages in their conflict with Turkish capitalism.

Furthermore, they will lose their most important available weapon in their endeavour to subordinate the proletariat. The institutions of the EU are the main organizers of the neoliberal attack all over the European continent and put the combined weight of all the European ruling classes in the service of each one. The example of the privatization of Olympic Airways –where the Greek state and the Greek capitalism systematically used the pressure from the Commission and of the European Court in order for them to implement their policy– illustrates the role of these institutions. The very same Euro is an instrument for the subordination of the working class and the dissolution of the trade unions through their exposure in the competition of the “free market” of the unified currency. The fights which have marked the class struggle in Greece from 2001 (the fight against the neoliberal reform of the pension system) up to now have the same feature: the attempt of the ruling class to transfer the cost of the hard currency – that is the Euro – to the backs of the working class. Probably, the best example of this is the permanent demand of SEV (the association of the Greek industrialists) that the increase of the wages in the SSE (the annual contract between the trade unions and the capitalists that defines the wages) be ruled by the average inflation rate of the Eurozone and not by the much bigger inflation rate of Greece. This demand was finally fulfilled with the shameful reconciliation of GSEE (the Greek Confederation of the Trade Unions in the private sector) in 2010.

However, the worst and most terrifying thing for the Greek ruling class is that a possible exit of Greece from the EU could mean also the beginning of the dissolution of the very same Union. Under these circumstances an exit of Greece from EU could provoke a series of instability events, tendencies for the exit from Euro and, very possibly, the kickoff of a collapse. The result would be that Greek capital would be without the support of the international imperialism in all of their offensive endeavours in the region; starting from their intimidation of the neighbouring Republic of Macedonia on the question of the name and going to the new alliance with the Israeli state in Eastern Mediterranean region and the new conflict with the Turkish capitalism over the control of the oil resources in the same region.

This is why for the time being the bourgeois think tanks have not produced an alternative strategy on how to control the crisis; a strategy that could include the exit from the Euro and the return to the national currency of the drachmas, in order for the Greek capitalism to obtain some instruments for implementing a currency policy. Such a strategy would deprive from the Greek capitalists all the above advantages. The bourgeois think tanks would be forced –although reluctantly– to think about a mandatory return to drachmas only in the case of a possible total collapse of the Euro or of the possibility that Greek capitalism would lose control over the banking system.

However, if Greek capitalism is forced leave the Euro and the EU, this will have as a result an enormous systematic crisis and an inevitable crisis of governance.

This exit from EU would mean gains for the working class only under the condition that it was the result of the actions of a working class movement fighting for a total transitional overturn; for demands that challenge the capitalist property and the capitalist management of the economy. On

this basis the balance of the forces would change decisively in favour of the working class through the making of a political crisis. The workers' consciousness would make some steps forward towards the case of emancipation, since it would break with one of the most fundamental arguments of the bourgeois ideological domination; that is the argument of the "European paradise". The European working class movements would get rid of the burden of the "European one way", since the Greek case would have been an inspiring example.

## **The "Europeanists" of the Greek Left**

Very often various currents of the Left make a series of false objections on the need that a demand for the exit from Euro and EU should be incorporated in a contemporary transitional program.

A) The first and main objection is related to the concept that the EU, as a supranational institution, plays objectively a progressive role, since it is somehow an overcoming of the bourgeois national state.

A preliminary remark is that the concept that the supranational bourgeois institutions could be the counterweight to the national state is bourgeois cosmopolitanism and not proletarian internationalism. Proletarian internationalism has been condensed in slogans like "Proletarian of all countries, unite!", "National unity is a trap, the proletarians do not have a country", "The enemy is at home", "The defeat of "our" government in a war is the lesser evil"; these are slogans that break with the bourgeois national consensus and promote the internationalist workers' solidarity. Internationalism has nothing to do with the defence of the UN, the Hague International Court and other European bourgeois institutions.

The response to this false approach on the nature of the EU is given by an important document from the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Fourth International. According to this statement:

"Far from responding to the social and international aspirations of workers, women, youth and oppressed nationalities, the EU reflects on a regional level the globalization of the world economy. It is an instrument of the strongest sectors of big capital for inter-imperialist competition and for an all-out struggle against the European working class and the Third World. [1]

This analysis is based on Lenin's theses on the significance and the role of a possible union of Europe (at his time). Lenin wrote in 1915 about the slogan of the "United European States":

*"From the standpoint of the economic conditions of imperialism—i.e., the export of capital and the division of the world by the "advanced" and "civilized" colonial powers—a United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary.*

(...)

"Of course, temporary agreements are possible between capitalists and between states. In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the European capitalists... but to what end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty against Japan and America, who have been badly done out of their share by the present partition of colonies, and the increase of whose might during the last fifty years has been immeasurably more rapid than that of backward and monarchist Europe, now turning senile. Compared with the United States of America, Europe as a whole denotes economic stagnation. On the present economic basis, i.e., under capitalism, a United States of Europe would signify an organization of reaction to retard America's more rapid development. The times when the cause of

democracy and socialism was associated only with Europe alone have gone forever.” [2]

Just to cast a glance at the function of the very same EU in order to confirm that EU is not by any means an overcoming of the national state. In fact it remains a loose union of independent states, where the basic tools for the implementation of bourgeois policies (courts, army, police, state bureaucracy, and budget) are still in the hands of the national state. It is not even a union with a common economic cycle, since the productivity, the competition and the various levels of escalation of the crisis are still uneven. And of course there is still not a European capitalist class that is above the national states.

What is true is the fact that EU constitutes the coordinator of the national capitalist classes' actions against their working classes, against their international competitors and against the people of other countries. Common actions which feed and are fed by a parallel process of subversion even of elementary bourgeois parliamentary democracy at the level of the national states, since the important decisions for the actions of each of the bourgeois state separately are taken in the EU Council meetings, while at the same time the EU institutions are used as an obstacle to workers' claims. In that sense participation in the EU and in the Euro is a national strategy for the capitalists, and not a supranational one, that is supposed to be in conflict with the national-level solutions.

EU is not an objectively progressive development, but a reactionary development that needs to be overthrown; that is to be dissolved.

And because of the fact that the class struggle is carried out mainly at the national level -for the reason that we have already described- and therefore in an uneven way among the various movements and various countries, the dissolution of EU cannot be a simultaneous process in the entire Union. It will pass through overturns at national level and through the exit from EU of those countries where the struggle of the working class could overturn the policies of the ruling classes, undermine the foundations of the function of the national bourgeois state and cause a crisis in the apparatus of the EU.

B) There is another objection; that the demand for exit from the EU is not a transitional one, since it can be adopted by bourgeois political forces as well.

In theory this position expresses the wrong concept that transitional demands are those that can never be adopted by a bourgeois government. This is not true. A transitional program includes in a unified and combined way several types of demands. Demands that aim at the real transfer of the wealth from the capitalist class to the labour; demands that could be integrated into capitalism in a general view, but in the actual context are in conflict with the strategic choices of the bourgeois class and provoke some important cracks and destabilization in the system; demands that challenge directly capitalist property and the entire management of the economy; demands that undermine the fundamentals of the bourgeois state. The combined promotion of these demands from the working class movement creates an anticapitalist dynamics that leads the two main classes of the society in conflict and open the debate of power.

There are demands that in a general overview can be integrated in capitalism, but in the actual context they are against the main choices of the bourgeois class and provoke important cracks and destabilization of the system. The demand to leave from the EU is the crucial transitional demand for the period we speak about; of course only under the condition that it is incorporated in a greater anticapitalist program -this is why we speak about an anticapitalist disengagement from the EU.

The fact that the same demand is presented also by left patriotic forces in a reformist way does not mean that it should not be raised by the internationalists as well. In the very same way the exit from

NATO for the internationalists has an internationalist-anti-imperialist dimension -while for the Communist Party of Greece and for Synaspismos/SYRIZA it is mainly a demand for a more effective defence of Greece against Turkey.

And of course the exit from NATO could be also an option for the Greek ruling class as well. Let's remember that K. Karamanlis pulled Greek capitalism out of the military wing of NATO in 1974, eight years before De Gaulle did the same with the French capitalism. Today Le Pen supports the exit of France from EU and NATO as well. But this fact did not prevent the revolutionary left in France supporting the "No" to the European Constitution (which was the position of the far right as well) or leaving NATO.

C) In the same logic it is also the objection that the demand for the exit from the EU and Euro is a kind of subordination of the revolutionary strategy to the reformist theory of interim bourgeois stages in the discourse for socialism.

As we have highlighted above, a transitional program can include and elements that could be integrated into capitalism; that is to include elements that could be present in a left reformist programme of stages.

The difference is that the transitional programme struggles for these demands in a combined way with the demands that undermine the fundamentals of the capitalist property and the capitalist state and, above all, together with the slogan for the workers' control.

No demand -even the demand for unilaterally stopping payment and cancellation of the debt; with which of course OKDE is in accordance- is alone in favour of the interests of the working class people, if it is not accompanied by the workers' control and if it is not clear who will have the control of the imposed measures (the proletariat) and who will suffer the prices of such an option (the capitalists).

With exactly the same logic we are dealing with the exit from the EU. We can conceive it only as the result of a movement that is fighting for and is imposing an anticapitalist programme of action on "their" capitalist class. Thus, we conceive it as an "anticapitalist break", which is the result of a more general anticapitalist struggle, and not as a "necessary stage" that it should be implemented in order for the working class movement to struggle under better conditions or an "objectively better" situation for working class people.

For example, because exactly the exit from the EU must be the consequence of an anticapitalist struggle, we would never give our support to a government because they would lead Greece out of the EU but at the same time they would carry out neoliberal policies and transfer the cost of this choice to the backs of the working class.

On the contrary, the patriotic left -for whom the exit from the EU is a necessary strategic stage- would really be in a dilemma in supporting such a government. A good example is the support that the patriotic left gave to the government of Tassos Papadopoulos in Southern Cyprus only because he opposed the Anan Draft in the Referendum that was organized in 2004. Bound to the theory that Greek capitalism is subordinated to the imperialist countries and has lost national sovereignty, the patriotic left see Greece's membership of the EU as a kind of dependency of the Greek capitalist class, and not as a tool for the Greek capitalists in order for them to carry out an offensive policy in the region. The patriotic left consider the exit from the EU as a precondition for a successful outcome of the working class struggles and not as the result of these struggles. So, from this standpoint the exit from the EU means actually a reformist proposal which aims at creating some better conditions for policies with a more pro-working class profile.

However, things are different. We cannot advance in our struggle for the socialization of the banks without compensation and under workers' control and at the same time stay within the EU. It is not possible to advance in the workers' control over the monetary-credit system and at the same time the flow of the currency, the exchange rate policy and the interest rates are defined by the European Central Bank. There cannot be workers' control over the currency and at the same time staying in the Eurozone. There is no chance for a government of workers' parties that implements an anticapitalist programme or for a revolutionary government of the workers' councils to stay in the Stability Programme, in the Maastricht and Lisbon frameworks. And of course this rupture with the basic Treaties of the EU means also an exit from this Union.

From all the above it is clear that a programme of expropriations against the capitalist class and a programme of workers' control are not possible in the frame of the EU and the Eurozone. Any advance of such a programme will create the conditions for the exit from these institutions. For this reason a contemporary anticapitalist programme should include in a clear way the exit from the Eurozone as a demand that will be linked with the workers' control over the economy.

D) Those who still keep their objections say that in that case it would be better for the very same EU to expel the country instead of us promoting the slogan for the exit.

But why should a government of the workers' parties who implement an anticapitalist programme or a revolutionary government of the workers' councils tolerate the humiliation of elimination by the imperialists?

Only on one occasion: if the exit from the EU on its own initiative would expose this government before the working classes of the rest of the Europe.

But this is not the case. The EU is in a process of a rapid delegitimization in the eyes of European workers. Support for the Euro and EU is steadily declining and the struggles against the measures that are commanded by the European Treatments are steadily increased.

Under these circumstances, if a workers' government concedes the right of expulsion to the capitalists by not asking for exit on its own initiative means that it legitimates the EU as an institution (in fact asking the EU keep it in the Union, even when the capitalists want to drive this government out) and this would be an irreparable blow against the European workers' movement.

### **Our aim: Dissolution of the EU**

The aim of the European and Greek workers' movement should be the dissolution of the EU. The deep structural crisis of capitalism brings at the surface the incompetence of capitalism to unify the people of Europe and smash the reformist illusions that the European capitalisms could overcome their competition and unify peacefully the European continent. It confirms the positions of revolutionary Marxism that the unification of Europe can be occurred only through the socialist revolution that could smash the EU and dismantle the bourgeois state.

The strategic slogan for Europe should be "NO to Europe of capital, war, racism and repression - YES to Europe of working class and the social movements"; it is the slogan of the "United Socialist States of Europe".

The materialization of this slogan could not go through the reform of the EU, but only through its dissolution and the building of a new union, based on the institutions of direct democracy which could emerge in the struggle against the neoliberal programs that EU and Eurozone promote.

We state decisively the strategic need for developing close and organic links between the workers and social movements in Europe, since no overturn of neoliberalism can survive –even in countries outside the EU– without the expansion of this overturn in the rest of Europe. We are aware of the fact that no revolution could last for long without the expansion in the rest of the continent.

But in any case we need to specify the steps that lead to the dissolution of the EU.

Since the main weapon of the capitalists for the implementation of the attacks against the working class is the national state and the class struggle is being developed unevenly and mainly in a national level, an anticapitalist program should specify the demands that trigger this dissolution in a national level.

And since the EU is not a single state but a union of states, the way that the EU can be dissolved is through the exit of its members.

The demands for disobedience and rupture with the EU, the anticapitalist disengagement and the simultaneous call to the European movements for a common action aiming at the dissolution of the EU are the specification in the current political context of Greece.

Nevertheless, it's time for the Greek left to locate this political question in the right place. Not as a necessary stage for the Greek people to get rid of their “dependence”, not as a vehicle for the development of a new capitalist production that will lead to better conditions for the working class movement, but as the logical sequence of the struggle for the anticapitalist overthrow and the workers' control over economy and society.

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## **P.S.**

\* From International Viewpoint <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] See on ESSF (article 23979), [The European Union - Document adopted at the 14<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the FI](#)].

[2] See on ESSF (article 23980), Lenin “[On the Slogan for a United States of Europe](#)”.