

# Greece: An equilibrium that is precarious and full of dangers

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There is one “economic” forecast which is unlikely to be proved wrong as far as Greece is concerned: the one regarding unemployment. ELSTAT (the Greek Institute of Statistics) has just published the “results” for October 2012: the official number of unemployed amounted to 1,345,715; an increase of 36,000 in a month. As a reminder, the number of unemployed stood, for the same month of October, in 2007, at 398,085; at 375,528 in 2008; at 498,211 in 2009; at 694,508 in 2010 and 977,614 in 2011. An increase in one year of 368,701.

Ernst & Young “predict” a rate of 28 per cent for late 2013 and the research centre of the private sector union, GSEE, forecasts at least 30 per cent. The rate of unemployment in October 2012 is 56.6 per cent for the 15 to 24 age group. In 2010, it was 34.7 per cent, and 46.7 per cent in 2011. For 25-34 year olds, the evolution is as follows: 34.1 per cent in October 2012; and respectively 27 per cent and 18.9 per cent for the corresponding months of the previous two years.

## “Recipes” for employment

The region of Athens (Attica) is the hardest hit: 28.3 per cent in October 2012 (20.4 per cent in October 2011). After that, the region of Epirus-Macedonia: 28.2 per cent (20.9 per cent in October 2011). The German government has announced that in the year 2012, 123,000 people from Greece sought work in Germany. This flow is part of the new configuration - between zones of the European Union - of the industrial reserve army, with its various components. It increases the competition between workers, along with the “flexibilisation” of “the labour market regulations”.

It is true that in Greece, as in other European countries, one method of bringing down the unemployment figures is well-known: according to the newspaper Democratia, in 2013, 60,000 jobs will be “created”, in the form of so-called training courses. They will cater for those under 35 and last for six weeks, for which those participating will be paid 480 euros. They are to be financed by the European Union (ESPA) for a total cost of 35 million euros. Experience has already shown the sterility of this kind of measure, apart from its effect on the monthly unemployment statistics.

Admittedly, the social imagination of some leading politicians who remember history goes beyond these gimmicks. Thus, the former Minister of Finance Petros Doukas of New Democracy - who exercised his talents in 1992-93 when Konstantinos Mitsotakis was Prime Minister (from April 1990

to October 1993) and from 2004 to 2007 under Konstantinos Karamanlis (2004-2007) - has used his web site to launch a bold proposal that synthesizes a whole political culture. It proposes the establishment of "voluntary work", without pay. This is part of his "90 proposals for a Greek New Deal II". These "voluntary workers" would be at the service of the state, municipalities and also the private sector. Doukas refers to the RAD (Reichsarbeitsdienst) [1] experience, according to which "work makes you free". In less brutal forms, "experiences" of this type are starting to inspire projects among sections, admittedly a minority, of the ruling class. It would be a mistake to ignore it.

It is true that there are gaps in Doukas's memory: did he forget to declare at least a million euros (nearly two, according to some sources) in his tax returns? A case of slowness that has become the rule, according to him, with bank transfers!

This indolence is not isolated. The Bloomberg agency, on December 24, 2012, estimated the total of unpaid taxes at 54 billion euros, of which two-thirds was the responsibility of 1,500 Greeks. Bloomberg - using sound information - considered that the amount recovered would 20 per cent at best. "Forgetting" to pay social security contributions is also commonplace (and this is not a Greek specialty). Doesn't the boss of Real Media, Andreas Kouris, the former owner of the TV channel Alter, owe a debt of 9 million euros to the social security authorities?

### **Pauperization is on the increase**

The increase in and the duration of unemployment, massive cuts in wages, pensions and other benefits, combined with a brutal increase of various taxes, has precipitated hundreds of thousands of people below the "poverty line" and towards "exclusion", to use the language officially employed by the World Bank and the OECD. For 2011, 21.4 per cent of the population is considered to be obliged to survive on less than 5,951 euros a year. The poverty threshold keeps going down, since it is measured from the median wage, which is declining. Thus, it was situated at 7,178 euro in 2010.

The ELSTAT report, made public on Tuesday, January 8, 2013, insists on the fact that the figures for 2012 will be much darker. The "shock absorber cushion" represented by various forms of "social assistance" no longer works, because they have been either abolished or reduced. The number of households "with a low intensity of work" - in other words, in which all members are unemployed or only do odd jobs - went from 619, 000 in 2010 to 979,000 in 2011. The percentage of people unable to provide in 2011, for a number of basic needs (four out of a list of nine) came to 28.4 per cent (24.1 per cent in 2010). Among these basic needs, there are mentioned: the obligatory fixed expenses (rent, mortgages, etc.); adequate food; a telephone (including mobile); adequate heating...

Women (especially single-parent families) are the hardest hit: the rate for this "category" was 43.2 per cent in 2011 (33.4 per cent in 2010).

According to a recent trade union study, 50 per cent of new entrants to the "labour market" earn 300 euros per month. The press has just published the new wage contracts of Greek seafarers (who have qualifications and responsibilities on the ships): they go down from 2,500 euros a month (with bonuses for overtime) to 850 euros, with no payment for overtime. The journalist, with bitter irony, said: "Greek seafarers have become Filipino seafarers." He must be overestimating the wages of the Filipinos.

The number of homeless in Athens is estimated by NGOs involved "on the ground" at 20,000; with all the hardships specific to what is today called "this population".

## **The government's "law and order" offensive**

In this context, the government of Antonis Samaras (New Democracy) - supported by the PASOK of Evangelos Venizelos and DIMAR (Democratic Left) of Fotis Kouvelis - has launched for several weeks now a very violent daily campaign against SYRIZA. It is aiming, with a certain success for the moment, to set the political agenda and to put SYRIZA in a strictly reactive position.

From a certain angle, this offensive of the governmental Right and its state apparatus, with its relays in the media, is following in the tracks of the large-scale police operations (multiple arrests, detention camps, etc.) against migrants [2]. This is sometimes overlooked by a part of the European left, which focuses its "reflections" strictly on Golden Dawn, whose breakthrough should admittedly not be underestimated. These political-police operations are placed under the banner of Xenios Zeus, from the name of the king of the ancient gods Zeus, protector of guests!

On January 9, 2013, the police attacked two historic squats in Athens, the best known of which (also to those who stormed it!) was Villa Amalia. The second is located at the crossroads of Patission and Skaramanga streets: Villa Skaramanga. Finally, the "forces of order" continued the operation on Tuesday, January 15, at 1 p.m., dislodging the occupants of another historic squat (Villa Leila Karagiani), in the District of Kypseli. The deployment of police was spectacular: the entire neighbourhood was surrounded by police, helicopters were used, etc. Eight women and six men were arrested. The demonstration on Sunday, 13 January in solidarity with the squatters, and against the methods of the police, was quite big. It was preceded by a demonstration, politically important, against the destructive mining project of the Canadian mining company El Dorado in Skouries, which is situated in the region of Halkidiki. The support of the left forces of Athens to these 2,000 demonstrators, who were distributing material that was well-produced and pedagogical, was barely visible. A missed opportunity.

The Interior Minister, Nikos Dendias - who directs the Xenios Zeus campaign - said: "We will not back down on the issue of squats." He said that 40 squats in Athens would be "cleansed". Following the rules of this kind of "cleansing of squats", the police - backed by the TV channels - produced photos of bottles of beer that "are used to make Molotov cocktails", and of batons "useful for attacking the police".

By a divine stroke of luck, on the night of Monday, January 14, at 2.30 a.m., shots were fired at the headquarters of New Democracy (ND) from a "Kalashnikov". And a warning of the possible explosion of a bomb was given, with evacuation of the building of the Supreme Court. Other "attacks" on premises of parties (PASOK, among others) have been mentioned.

## **Squatting the political space**

The aims of these authoritarian government initiatives and "the effect of these events", rushed forward, may be declined thus:

1) To "provoke" (with the different meanings that this term covers) a reaction from what is called the anarchist milieu, which was the case. After the evacuation of Villa Amalia, the "occupiers" reoccupied the premises, briefly, and then chose a short-lived "appropriation" of the headquarters of DIMAR. The political and media campaign was reinforced in order to increase the "legitimacy" of the (more than 140) arrests, of the subsequent convictions and of the "war on squatters".

2) To put the question of violence - "law and order" as the political editorialists put it - at the centre

of the political debate. This goes together with a theme presented with this tone: "We are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, with the assistance of the EU; however the radical Left is trying to fan the flames". The editorial in Kathimerini, dated January 14, said: "The turbulence (social and political) is still there, but the public now knows that the crisis has invaded many other countries and that there is no magic solution. People have also understood that the antidote to rising unemployment does not lie in a mixture of instability and endless demonstrations."

3) The debate should no longer be centred, above all, on the austerity plans and their effects or on the unprincipled nature and the corruption of the political class. For example: the "Lagarde list" (the names of the Greeks who had accounts at the subsidiary of HSBC in Geneva). The debate, with twists and turns, on this theme has revealed the behaviour and the social network peculiar to the PASOK-ND system. The repercussions of this current scandal are far from being exhausted. It is therefore necessary to attempt to hide it and to shift the attention of the "citizens" elsewhere.

Isn't the real question on the agenda not in the conditions of social and political stability that will enable "us" to emerge from this crisis at the end of 2013 or the beginning of 2014, as the ECB (Draghi on January 10) has indicated the possibility?

4) Therefore SYRIZA "must" clearly take a position before the population: is this coalition of the radical Left in favour of violence or not, in favour of order or not? Must it not stop fanning the flames of the terrifying social violence that results from the diktats of the Troika and its government allies, who are the voice of the rich?

It is therefore unacceptable that one of the SYRIZA members of parliament says, frankly, that anarchists, in their own way, are for direct democracy, a value he shares.

All the media and government officials question Alexis Tsipras. He must be "absolutely clear" about violence and not just declare that the government "is creating an artificial polarization" and "violence or threats to human life are not in harmony with the values of the Left". This was all the more so as he was preparing his visit, on Monday, January 14, to the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. Moreover, Schäuble simply reaffirmed his credo. Predictably. That will not contribute much to the governmental stature of Tsipras, who will also travel to the United States.

The attacks against SYRIZA combine the denunciation of its "intolerance", the cover it gives to "confrontations" with an assertion that is repeated ad nauseam: "You are unable to clearly present the objectives and modalities of running things if you were in government." This is a reference to conflicting pressures on the question of the left government and its definition, in terms of alliances and initiatives, within the ranks of SYRIZA.

### **Trying to dictate the political agenda**

5) The theme of violence is all the more incisive in the media because explosive devices, very amateur, did some minor damage, on Friday, January 11, in front of the entrances to the buildings of five journalists: Antonis Skyllakos, leader of the Athens News Agency, the presenter Giorgios Oikonomenas of the influential Mega TV, one of the channels that unleashes attacks against SYRIZA, Antonis Liaros, formerly an influential figure in the Mega group, Petros Karsiotis of Alpha TV and Christos Konstas, formerly with Alpha TV and now head of the economic newspaper Ependitis.

On Sunday, January 13, in the daily Kathimerini, the spokesperson of the Government, Simos Kedikoglou, renewed the attacks against SYRIZA, following a Molotov cocktail being thrown at the entrance to the home of his brother Giorgos. The formulas were carefully chosen: "The differences

between inflamed declarations and inflamed attacks are very small. There must be a clear denunciation of violence and verbal abuse.”

The Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras repeated the same theme in a long interview published on Sunday, January 13, in the important daily *To Vima*, which is today the journalistic channel of the government. The “events” of Monday morning, 14 January, mentioned above, were the first point on all the radio and TV programmes.

6) Press articles began spreading an “analysis of the historical roots of the current violence in Greece”. To sum up, it was said to be the result of society becoming used to the violence of the “left” and “terrorist” groups (such as the November 17 Revolutionary Organization, the date referring to the massacre committed by the army against the students in 1973).

This violence, according to these professionals of propaganda built up from a slanted chronology and from reality turned upside down, is said to have created a favourable terrain for actions by the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn. “Extremes feed on each other”, we must fight them with determination. Let’s remain silent about the links between Golden Dawn and some sectors of the state apparatus, let’s focus on the real danger: the squatters and those who do not denounce them and do not approve of the police operations.

7) So the government has been able to dictate, for the time being, part of the political agenda. Following on from that, it is increasingly bypassing parliamentary procedures on austerity measures (among other things, on taxes). It is in fact governing by decree, under the direction of the Eurogroup which is scheduled to meet on January 21. Because, as the spokesman for the government said: “We cannot terrorize democracy!” So, on Monday, January 14, 21 laws were to be adopted without debate.

The most elementary features of parliamentary democracy are being effaced, as was highlighted by Panagiotis Lafazanis, one of the sharpest parliamentarians of SYRIZA. He declared on 11 January, facing the Minister of Finance who controls the levers of the austerity plans: “You are introducing a new form of government. Ministers impose laws which abolish the rights of Parliament and laws will in no way be discussed. You are responsible for turning parliamentary democracy into a parliamentary junta.” In other words: the present majority of the 164 MPs of the coalition government (who were 179 following the June elections) vote for decree-laws, unanimously and without discussion.

8) To this must be added various measures, widely publicized, against tax evasion, including some arrests, revealed at just the right moment, of some fraudsters. This deployment, which is carried out with the help of “European specialists” reflects a marked solidarity: the French will take responsibility for inspecting the richest individuals; the Spanish, as specialists in the matter, will investigate suspicious real estate transactions; the Swedes will develop a system of electronic control of the highest incomes; the Belgians and Dutch will create a telephone switchboard to call taxpayers who are slow to pay their taxes! The government’s justification is that since it is difficult to reduce wages any further, the emphasis should be on taxes! Of which the repeated increases are raining down thick and fast on wage-earners and their income, including their fictitious wealth, for example, the fact of buying a car on credit. In addition to the VAT paid, the repayment of interest on the loan, the annual taxes to pay on the car, it becomes the sign of a fortune that must be subject to tax.

This rain of taxes mimics that of the carcinogenic particles caused by the use of firewood (from all sources) which is partially replacing fuel oil due to its unaffordable price [3]. But electricity rates will strongly increase in 2013 and 2014. And state institutions have accumulated a debt of 170

million euros to the public electricity corporation, which is on the list of companies to be privatized.

Behind these provisions against the fraudsters we can see the outline of a political campaign: admittedly the “political class” and a part of the civil service were not very concerned about the “public good”. But now a new generation is beginning to occupy important positions and is directing, in the image of the “European technicians”, the state machine, whose “technical decisions” do not brook discussion, because they come from detailed financial necessities and from “universal measures, applied without exception”. . Following on from there, it is obvious that there is being prepared, given the crisis of PASOK and New Democracy, the establishment of a modern political party, doted with authority and a European profile, capable of “modernizing” Greece.

#### SYRIZA and taking back the political initiative

In the coming phase, SYRIZA must be able to regain the initiative by imposing, in the public space, the social and political themes that preoccupy the vast majority of the population, and to do so in concordance with the multiple and permanent social struggles, work stoppages, strikes, workplace occupations, and the various forms of active resistance by sectors of the population. This resistance expresses the rejection of government decisions whenever they come down. And there are many more still waiting in the wings. This rejection expresses not only the deterioration of working conditions, the liquidation of collective agreements, the decline in wages, but all the facets of conditions of life that have been disrupted by three austerity plans (memoranda). The movement *Den plirono* - “I do not pay” - concretizes in its own way the principle: “we will not pay for their crisis”. However, these struggles have not resulted, as a rule, in gains. That must be taken into account.

In this connection, it seems exaggerated to use, without precision, the formula of “general strike”. The reference to the “19 general strikes” in Greece is, in part, misleading. For the most part, it was a question of “strike days” (24 hours, much more rarely 48 hours); some of them were massive. Admittedly, more than once, they were baptized “general strikes”. From there the meaning of the term “general strike” tends to lose its connotation of large-scale and relatively centralized (more or less directly) confrontations with the political regime in power.

This is not to underestimate the significant rise of social conflict. But the not very precise use of the term “general strike” can lead some people - most often outside Greece - to characterize the situation as pre-revolutionary, if not more than that (and, therefore, to denounce the “traitors”, who are always lying in waiting). However, to speak precisely, the dimension of the social crisis, the numerous struggles, often scattered as they unfold in the course of a day, and the rejection of austerity have not, for the time being, led to a fusion between a political radicalization - expressed in the rapid and massive electoral support for SYRIZA - and a broad social mobilization acquiring a degree of autonomy and independence, *de facto*, in relation to the trade union apparatuses.

On the other hand, this has led to clashes within the unions between the fractions (PASKE) linked to PASOK and those (DAKE) linked to New Democracy. A crisis of considerable proportions has opened up between these trade union fractions, their representatives (some of them have had to resign) and the parties of the government coalition.

This opens up a field of action for SYRIZA, whose influence on this level is not commensurate with its electoral audience (the one recorded in June). Some questions flow from this: what should the priority be: the development of a rank-and-file class-based trade unionism - where unity of action with members of the KKE and Antarsya is needed - or winning over cadres coming from PASOK, in order to change the relationship of forces at the top? Which, of course, is not always contradictory. However, where the emphasis is placed counts for a lot in the dynamics that can be unleashed and in the ability to link up with a sector of the unemployed, the student youth and other social

movements.

Another important question is also posed: the building of a social front capable of winning over a sector of small peasants thrown into poverty and small entrepreneurs (in the most basic sense of the term) strangled by the crisis. The GSVEE (Confederation of industrialists and traders of Greece) supported a one-day strike backed by the GSEE (private sector trade union confederation). These small “entrepreneurs” are immediately hit by the austerity measures, as well as by tax and banking policies.

These two social layers are mainly captured by the Right and by nationalist forces. Without a more pronounced political affirmation of the “radical Left”, of proposals and initiatives that mark the rhythm of the political agenda and affirm the proposals of SYRIZA, the junction between different social movements and a more consistent and renewed class-based trade unionism, there is a risk of a political slide towards proposals for “productive reconstruction of the country, necessitating a government of “social unity” becoming strong, or stronger.

Although it is clear that there is no cost-free alternative – given the depth of the crisis, the specific features of Greek capitalism, the European and international economic and political context – to the policies of the Troika, one decisive question is crystal-clear: what classes will pay the real cost? The social majority, which is already paying a price similar to what was the norm in the 1930s, knows this from its living experience. A fraction of the so-called middle classes is contemplating it, even though it can still escape from it, partially.

The priority is therefore to offer convincing answers to the most socially active sections of workers and the unemployed, as well as pensioners and invalids. Because they are all affected by real “confiscatory taxes”, in every imaginable form.

It is from this angle that there can and must be presented a set of proposals dealing with the refusal of the memoranda, the refusal to pay the debt, the establishment of a really dominant public banking system, with an investment policy and with the programmatic core of a government of the Left in a “non-revolutionary situation”, to use a non-traditional formula.

The recent declaration by the secretary of SYRIZA, a member of Synaspismos, Dimitris Vitsas, whereby, if SYRIZA was in government, all the privatized firms would be renationalized - including the termination of the lion-sized contract with Chinese giant COSCO, which has acquired a decisive share of Piraeus (a key sector of the port centre and the land adjoining it) - expresses not only the effects of popular discontent, but the complex relationships between different positions within this coalition, as well as the attachment of an indisputable sector of the membership to the programme put forward during the elections.

The violent reactions of the media machinery and of members of the government that this statement aroused demonstrate the determination of the ruling class, its government and their European allies.

Therefore the central points of an alternative policy must key into the resistance movements and the various struggles, particularly as a certain desynchronization may exist between these struggles — whose size and dynamics are changing after three years of a terrible crisis - and forms of political radicalization, linked to rejection of the government and marked by bi-polarizing dynamics.

In addition, a Samaras government could, in the near future, play the card of an affirmation of national sovereignty, in alliance with Israel (and Cyprus), over a wide Mediterranean zone that is said to have significant reserves of oil and gas; these resources are presented as making possible “the development of Greece”. Such an adventurist initiative - with the support of Israel which has

asserted its autonomy with regard to the United States - would open up a political conflict with Turkey. This project is at present more difficult to implement given the situation in Syria. But, were it to materialize, nationalist tendencies would flare up in Greece. On January 6, 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, already warned the Greek Government against "prospecting for oil" in these disputed regions. This is another challenge for the forces that make up SYRIZA, specifically for the internationalist current.

In this context - of a precarious and dangerous political and social equilibrium - the latest poll (11 January) for Skai TV and Kathimerini comes at the appropriate moment. New Democracy won the support of 29 per cent of those polled (+ 3 per cent), SYRIZA: 28.5 per cent (-2 per cent). Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgi): 10 per cent; PASOK: 8 per cent; Independent Greeks (very much on the right): 8 per cent; Democratic Left (DIMAR): 7 per cent; KKE (Communist Party): 5.5 per cent.

One result surprised several analysts: the 8 per cent of PASOK, which is in complete collapse.

The drop in the number of people who think, compared to December 2012, that SYRIZA can win the next election is 16 per cent. The rejection of the government remains very strong, even though it has slightly receded. This survey reinforced the political campaign we discussed above. Even though a majority think that the crisis will last another five years, it indicates the decline of the widespread idea of a "probable bankruptcy of Greece" with its «terrible consequences for everyone», if compliance with the austerity plans is not reaffirmed, and if they are not implemented, a theme put forward continuously by Samaras and by Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras.

Antonis Samaras is considered to be more capable of leading the government than Alexis Tsipras, who arrived in third position. In second position comes someone who is absent: "those polled" assert that nobody is able to govern properly. This expresses a significant element of the present political situation. The use of polls is a political weapon, and it is wielded enthusiastically. The pro-government press and the electronic media, which are hegemonic, have not hesitated to do so.

A configuration marked by the (pre) congress

Within SYRIZA, the pre-congress in late November-early December 2012 modified the configuration of relations between political currents. The votes won by the agreement reached during the meeting between the Left Current (represented by P. Lafazanis) and the "left pole" (DEA and the majority of Kokkino, and also AP0), 25.71 per cent of the 2987 delegates who voted (a number of the 3308 delegates - one for every ten members - had had to leave the congress, since the vote took place very late on Sunday night) caused astonishment in the "presidential group" of Tsipras.

Tsipras, feeling the climate, made a long late intervention - not provided for on the agenda and not really accepted by a certain number of delegates - in the middle of the debate on the question of the future organizational structure of SYRIZA. He was clearly opposed to the presentation of two lists for the election of the leading bodies, in the name of the "new democracy to be exercised individually by each member". In fact, this "presidential centre", made up essentially by a generation in their thirties and forties, seeks to play a Bonapartist role. But it is trying to do it in a very unstable internal situation and in a context where the Samaras government has taken, for the time being, the initiative, even though its parliamentary base remains weak and may break faced with the emergence of events that are specific to the multi-faceted crisis in Greece.

The position of the "presidential group" - with its partially informal characteristics - nevertheless acts today to block the most right-wing dynamic of an influential sector of Synaspismos. This is often not taken into account by those who denounce SYRIZA. The "presidential group", in this Bonapartist function that is difficult to control, sometimes plays, faced with the left of SYRIZA the card of its co-

optation, and especially that of its neutralization.

This is all the more so as the link between the “Left Current” and the “left pole” has continued and been consolidated following the conference. The formation of an executive secretariat of SYRIZA, which was established on Thursday, January 10 and should meet on a weekly basis, leaves less room for manoeuvre for the strongly mediatized Tsipras leadership. It would have had more opportunities to empower itself in relation to a “central committee” that meets only once a month, while Greek socio-political temporality is more compressed than that.

An interview was given by a member of the “presidential network”, Yannis Bournous, responsible for “external relations” to the Australian magazine Links on December 14, 2012 and republished in IV here. It gives an idea of the “presidential” discourse at the end of 2012, before the relaunch of the government initiative of the past few weeks.

**Charles-André Udry**, January 15, 2013

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**P.S.**

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

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## Footnotes

[1] The RAD was introduced under the Nazi regime in Germany.

[2] An organ of justice devoted to infractions of the law in the town of Igoumenitsa, in the North-west of Greece, has just acquitted 17 undocumented migrants who had escaped from their cells because the conditions of detention were so disastrous and horrific. They were arrested again. Their escape was considered as justified. In fact, the state of the prison violated three articles of the European Convention on Human Rights.

[3] The number of registered firewood sellers has gone, according to the Chamber of Commerce of Athens, from 5 in 2010, to 19 in 2011 and 32 in 2012. That is an indication of the growth of the economy placed under the supervision of the Troika. At the beginning of January 2013, experts of the Ministry of the Environment said that the limit of 50 micrograms of carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide per cubic metre of air had been exceeded more than 35 times in the preceding days in the city of Athens. The social-spatial distribution is somewhat differentiated. With the winter cold wave, the concentration of pollutants rises to 170 micrograms/m<sup>3</sup>. Consumption of fuel oil fell by 75 per cent. The result is a tax loss for the state estimated at hundreds of millions of euros, an irony of the austerity policy. Moreover, part of the Greek press is filled with the most fanciful proposals for new taxes that the government could invent.