



SYRIZA VICTORY IN GREEK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, JANUARY 2015:

Perceptions of Western Balkan Media
& Opinion Makers

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About the South-East Europe Programme

The South-East Europe Programme of the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) was set up in October 2011. Research and policy analysis on Balkan affairs has a long tradition in ELIAMEP going back to its founding in 1988. The recently established South-East Europe Programme intends to follow that legacy of high quality scholarly and policy work. More specifically, the Programme aspires to:

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The South-East Europe Programme publishes policy analyses and research findings through the standard publishing outlets of ELIAMEP. It also reaches wider audiences by publishing short articles and op-eds in prominent Greek and international media and its news are communicated to 15,000 subscribers through the mailing lists of ELIAMEP and the South-East Europe Programme itself. Last but not least, the South-East Europe Programme is associated with the academic journal *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, which is published by ELIAMEP in partnership with Taylor & Francis.

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Preface

In recent years, with slight variations from country to country, political developments in Greece have been closely monitored in the Balkans. Greece's role in promoting and supporting the region's EU accession process, open bilateral issues between Athens and some neighbouring capitals as well as concerns over the Greek sovereign debt crisis' impact on neighbouring economies have contributed to such interest. The most recent major political development in Greece was the victory of the radical-left and anti-austerity SYRIZA of Alexis Tsipras at the 25 January 2015 parliamentary elections. The victory itself, which unseated the New Democracy party and fairly obliterated the centre-left PASOK, left SYRIZA two seats short of the majority it would need in parliament. SYRIZA's victory cannot be considered a landslide, but SYRIZA achieved a remarkable breakthrough by increasing its share of the vote to 36.34 per cent, compared to 26.9 and 4.60 per cent in 2012 and 2009 respectively. The days running up to the election, and immediately after, were rife with speculation on whether SYRIZA would be able to form a coalition government, and if so, with whom. Ultimately the party joined the right wing, populist Independent Greeks (ANEL) led by Panos Kammenos, in order to form a coalition government based on mutual resistance to austerity policies and the bailout programmes. SYRIZA's victory and the formation of a new government once again triggered debate and raised new concerns, it thus became a focus of media attention throughout the Balkan region.

This ambitious two-part study is based on the premise that, beyond the effects of a SYRIZA-led government on domestic developments in Greece, there are likely to be at least some repercussions beyond its borders in the surrounding region of Southeast Europe. The first part of the report is a media analysis, undertaken before and after the elections and making use of local language sources to ascertain the main currents of discourse and general perceptions of SYRIZA, the future of Greece and the consequences for the region. The second piece of the study complements the media analysis with a survey of Balkan opinion makers, examining first their understanding of Greek political developments, their knowledge about and expectations of a SYRIZA-led government, and the effects they anticipate a new government would have on regional dynamics and relationships. The results of the media analysis and the online survey support each other, pointing to extensive coverage of Greek domestic developments but a high degree of uncertainty about the practical implications a SYRIZA-led government might have in Southeast Europe more broadly.

Executive Summary

This report looks into the ways that the Greek parliamentary elections and their outcome have been observed, presented and interpreted in Greece's near neighbourhood. Through a country-by-country analysis, **Part I** of the report sheds light on the question of how the media in the Western Balkans has seen SYRIZA's victory, which issues have dominated the media discourse, and what the reactions in the region's political and academic circles have been. **Part II** of the report presents the findings of the opinion survey which ELIAMEP's South East Europe Programme conducted with Balkan opinion makers in February and March 2015, asking participants to reflect on their views on and expectations of the new SYRIZA-led government, with a special emphasis on the foreign policy area.

Western Balkan media monitoring has revealed an unusually high interest in the Greek parliamentary elections and their aftermath in the whole region. Economic issues dominated the media coverage – especially the potential of a Greek Eurozone exit, followed by SYRIZA's possible ideological influence on regional politics. References to foreign policy were generally limited, due to the assumption that there are more pressing issues for the new Greek government to deal with, at least at the initial stages of its mandate.

The most extensive coverage has taken place in **Albania**, where the most popular newspapers in the country presented an exceptionally large number of analyses and op-ed articles, assessing the potential

impact of SYRIZA's victory on three levels: national, European and regional-bilateral. Taking all this into account, analysts sympathetic towards SYRIZA welcomed what they saw as the end of the decades-long dualism in Greek party politics - drawing parallels with the Albanian political situation, and commended SYRIZA's official platform on immigration, which is presumably going to lead to the improvement of the political climate for Albanian immigrants in Greece. They argued that the party of Alexis Tsipras raised hopes for establishing a European model with more solidarity and human dignity, although some of them still doubted whether SYRIZA, at this particular moment, has the necessary power to inspire radical political changes in Europe. As far as bilateral relations between the two countries are concerned, their initial expectations were optimistic, underscoring the fact that SYRIZA is an anti-nationalist party that will contribute to the revision and modernization of Greek foreign policy, including the issues that exist between Albania and Greece.

On the other hand, those more critical of SYRIZA's party programme, especially its anti-European/anti-German discourse, saw in SYRIZA's victory a presumed threat to European and liberal ideals. They also expressed scepticism towards SYRIZA's choice of government coalition partner. Since the Independent Greeks (ANEL) are seen as a deeply xenophobic party, Albanian analysts were of the opinion that such a coalition agreement could undermine SYRIZA's momentum for progressive policies on immigration. Also,

given the fact that Albania is among the most pro-Western and pro-European countries in the region, both SYRIZA's and ANEL's declarations against NATO and their sympathy towards Russia, frustrated Albanians' hopes for potential improvement in bilateral relations.

Despite the ongoing political crisis, the outcome of the Greek elections was a top story for several news agencies in the **Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)** - both Albanian and Slav-Macedonian, which looked at the events in Greece through the prism of the name issue. Here too the opinions and expectations have not been uniform. One group of analysts (especially in the Albanian-language press and among Albanian analysts in FYROM) showed sympathy to the new Greek Prime Minister who was considered more flexible compared to his predecessor Antonis Samaras. Most analysts, however, did not have high expectations; SYRIZA's coalition with ANEL played an important role in reversing much of the initial optimism, bearing in mind ANEL's uncompromising and nationalistic positions on the name issue. Finally, some analysts did not expect any radical changes in bilateral relations between Greece and FYROM, either due to the fact that the name issue is not seen as a priority of the new Greek government, or because of the presumed similarities between New Democracy and SYRIZA, as far as the strategic aspects of Greek foreign policy are concerned.

Media in **Kosovo**, presumably due to political turmoil and mass anti-government demonstrations which were taking place in the country, provided very little analysis of the Greek elections and

SYRIZA's victory. The coverage was largely a reproduction of reporting from international news agencies and Albanian media. When giving attention to the political developments in Greece, analysts in Kosovo usually discussed the potential implications of SYRIZA's victory for the question of recognition of Kosovo's independence. Bearing in mind the policy of constructive cooperation that made the previous Greek government of Antonis Samaras more popular among Kosovars, the main concern expressed after the January 2015 elections was that the new government could reverse the progress achieved so far and close the channels of communication between Athens and Pristina.

Although they did write extensively on the Greek elections, **Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin and Bosnian** media outlets produced news of mostly an informative, and at times sensationalist, character, largely relying on the regional and international news agencies. The absence of a particularly strong interest in Greek political developments could be explained by a lack of any open bilateral issues between these countries and Greece, or by the existence of traditionally good and friendly relations, as is the case with Greece and Serbia. With the general public being moderately in favour of SYRIZA, analysts in this part of the Western Balkan region were divided in two factions: one sympathetic towards SYRIZA's programme, expecting it to bring positive changes not only to Greece, but also to Europe as a whole, and the other which took a more critical stance. The latter emphasised the new Greek leadership's populist rhetoric, lack of experience and

brash attitude towards their European partners, which could, presumably, negatively reflect on the entire Western Balkan region, especially in the context of the EU enlargement process.

One of the most interesting debates triggered by SYRIZA's victory surrounded the question of the current and future ideological orientation of the Western Balkans. In almost all Western Balkan countries, as well as in the wider region of Southeast Europe (i.e. Bulgaria), a question of whether there are prospects for new SYRIZA-like political entities to emerge has been largely discussed in media. In some countries, SYRIZA's party programme seemed to be equally attractive to both the governing and the opposition parties, and, more interestingly, equally inspiring to both left-wing and right-wing political structures.

The opinion survey, the results of which are presented in Part II of this report, was designed to elicit the views of Balkan opinion makers (researchers, intellectuals, journalists, individuals working for NGOs or advocacy groups) on Greek foreign policy in the Balkans. The findings of the survey, based on 117 complete responses received, revealed the following:

- 68% of the respondents believed that Greek diplomacy has been somewhat active in the last two decades (and mostly in politics (67%), business sector (55%), economics (40%), culture (24%), and finally, energy sector (7%) - respondents were given up to three choices), with 61% of them believing that Greece is going to play a more active role in the future;
- With the choice of each Greek government in over the last 25 years, respondents chose the three PASOK governments (government of Konstantinos Simitis (20%), George Papandreou (14%) and Andreas Papandreou (11%)) as the most successful when it comes to the foreign policy in the Balkans (they emerge well ahead of the New Democracy leadership);
- Nearly 89% of respondents answered that there had been extensive media coverage of the January 2015 elections in Greece, whereby more than half of the respondents noted that the coverage had been rather neutral (informative). Also, 89% answered that the coverage had been focused on economic issues, followed by leadership qualities, foreign policy issues, and domestic issues;
- The survey results indicated that SYRIZA and its leader, Alexis Tsipras, enjoyed the most media coverage in the Balkans, with 90% of respondents choosing that option;
- 50% of respondents answered that they had neither a positive nor negative opinion of both leaders, New Democracy's Antonis Samaras and SYRIZA's Alexis Tsipras. However, when it comes to positive and negative opinions, Tsipras is clearly more popular than Samaras: 41% had a positive opinion of Tsipras, while only 15% had a positive opinion of Samaras. On the other hand, just 6% of the respondents answered that their opinion of Tsipras was negative, while 31% responded with a negative opinion of Samaras;

- The findings revealed that media coverage of SYRIZA and Tsipras was rather positive in the Balkan countries (34% answered with neither positive nor negative, 43% believed the coverage was positive). Also, when asked how well informed they are with particular aspects of SYRIZA's programme, the results indicated that participants were much better informed about economic issues, less about foreign policy, and even less about domestic policy;
- Balkan opinion makers were not very well informed about SYRIZA's coalition partner: only 8% of respondents were well informed about ANEL, 46% felt somewhat informed, and 46% not at all informed. More than a quarter (26%) thought that ANEL would not be influential at all on the new government's foreign policy positions, while just 4% believed ANEL would be very influential;
- When asked about their specific expectations of a SYRIZA-led government, for the most part, around half of the respondents believed that it would have a minimal (neither positive nor negative) impact on all the issues that were given as choices. Somewhat more positive impact is expected in bilateral relations with Serbia (49%), 30% hoped for a positive impact on bilateral relations with Turkey, while 37% believed a SYRIZA-led government would bring positive developments in Greek relations with Albania. In the sphere of Europeanisation/EU Enlargement Prospects for Balkan countries, respondents were neatly divided between 26% who believed in positive impact, and 26% who believed the impact would be negative; on regional cooperation in the Balkans the general outlook is positive: 44% thought the impact would be positive and another 44% that there would be no impact; in terms of the name dispute with FYROM, 52% of respondents believe the issue will not see much substantive change, and 27% believe a SYRIZA-led government will negatively affect the issue; with regards to the likelihood of Greece recognizing Kosovo, nearly half of respondents (48%) believed that the issue would not be impacted by a SYRIZA-led government, while 34% believed in negative impact on the issue;
- The survey demonstrated that most respondents (65%) do not feel that the government change in Greece would improve Greek diplomatic relations with their respective countries;
- Balkan opinion makers did not feel very informed about SYRIZA's foreign policy agenda beyond the Balkan problems. However, when providing the answer, 51% of respondents anticipated that SYRIZA government would have a negative effect on Greece's role within NATO. On the question if they believed the new government would lead to closer relations between Greece and Israel, 24% of respondents answered with no, and only 4% with yes;
- The survey participants were split exactly 50-50 when it came to their belief that the rise of SYRIZA, as a radical left party, could be a blueprint for similar movements in other Balkan countries. Moreover, there was not a

clear division among participants' country of origin;

- Finally, as far as SYRIZA's implications for the rise of a European left is concerned, the responses leaned significantly towards the positive side, with 61% of respondents answering that the rise of a European left was somewhat likely and 31% believed it was very likely. Just 7% thought there was no prospect for the rise of a European left, after SYRIZA's coming to power in Greece.

Overall, both the Western Balkan media monitoring and the survey of opinion makers from Southeast Europe confirmed that the January 2015 parliamentary elections in Greece enjoyed exceptionally widespread media coverage in the Greek

neighbourhood. Also, SYRIZA and its leader, Alexis Tsipras, have attracted huge attention not only in the Balkan media, but amongst the region's academia and general public as well. Interestingly, the results indicate that, shortly after the elections and in the early days of the new government's mandate, media coverage, as well as opinions on the new Greek Prime Minister, were generally more positive than negative. However, there were somewhat higher expectations of the ideological impact of SYRIZA's programme on Balkan and European politics, while in the area of SYRIZA's foreign policy positions and bilateral relations with the Western Balkan neighbours, expectations remained rather limited.

PART I - The January 2015 Parliamentary Elections in Greece: Perceptions of Western Balkan Media

Introduction

Since Greece found itself at the epicentre of a financial storm in 2009, international media have been closely covering the economic and political developments in Athens. Unsurprisingly, SYRIZA's milestone victory has also attracted large media attention all around the world, Greece's Balkan neighborhood being no exception. What has been common for the whole Western Balkan media space is that reports on the Greek elections and the SYRIZA-led government became so frequent and newspaper articles so numerous, that some observers made an ironic remark of how, suddenly, almost everyone in the Western Balkans had become an expert on Greek politics. Certainly, economic issues dominated the region's media coverage. Subsequently, debates on SYRIZA's ideological influence have also been widespread, with special emphasis on the question of whether the new Greek government had the capability to bring change not only to Greece, but also to Europe as a whole, and whether these changes represent a potential danger to European ideals. References to foreign policy issues were generally limited due to the assumption that the new cabinet will have a more domestic than international/regional focus, with bilateral issues not considered a high priority on SYRIZA's agenda. Despite these common points, the intensity of debate, diversity of opinions and depth of analyses varied from country to country.

Media coverage in Albania

The large number of Albanian immigrants in Greece and the Greek minority in Albania, which act as a barometer for Tirana-Athens relations, explain the Albanian media's interest in political developments in Greece. However, the wide coverage of the recent elections was unusual and unprecedented. Many analysts in Albania, not only from the left, reacted to SYRIZA's electoral win with approval. SYRIZA's anti-establishment line and its socially progressive agenda that supports the integration of immigrants in Greek society were key to this positive reception. With regard to the likelihood of implementation of SYRIZA's political programme, most analysts were not optimistic and agreed that its electoral pledges were vague or too ambitious to be considered credible. What follows is a brief overview of the Albanian media analysis as they interpreted the potential impact of SYRIZA's victory at the national, European and regional-bilateral level.

National Level

A significant portion of Albanian media coverage framed the parliamentary elections through its effects on Greece, emphasising the domestic significance and whether the shift in power would signal a change of atmosphere in Greece. One might expect Albanian media to be highly sceptical of SYRIZA since the country's communist past has instilled a deep mistrust of far-left political formations. However, SYRIZA's anti-establishment approach was welcomed as a development that could rid Greece of the decades-long dualism in party politics. Many Albanian political analysts are sympathetic to this prospect due to the dominance of two political formations in Albania, which has contributed to the spread of corruption and has undermined the quality of democracy. Thus, SYRIZA's moral-political battle against the "Greek oligarchs" and the "corrupt political system" were seen with sympathy in political and academic circles (e.g. *Armand Shkullaku* in *Gazeta Mapo*, *Andi Bushati* in *Gazeta Tema*, *Fatos Lubonja* in *Gazeta Panorama*, *Kesiana Lekbello* in *Gazeta Dita*). This is why many op-eds in Albanian newspapers and analyses on television talk shows maintained the argument that SYRIZA brought hope that things could be done differently in Greece; they also stressed the fact that SYRIZA's leader is a young politician not hailing from one of the well-known Greek 'political dynasties' (e.g. *Moikom Zeqo* interview in *Gazeta Dita*). Albanian analysts also welcomed SYRIZA's emphasis on strengthening democracy and social justice, which were characterized as the appropriate tools to bring political and social changes to Greece (e.g. *Sokol Shameti* in *Gazeta Shqip*).

Satisfaction with SYRIZA's victory can also be explained by the party's official platform on immigration and its generally tolerant and anti-racist policies, which became a focus of Albanian media. SYRIZA's outlook on the matter opens up the possibility for many Albanian immigrants to gain Greek citizenship, or otherwise have their rights protected by the Greek state. Albanian media stressed these aspects of SYRIZA's programme as a positive step for curtailing the rise of far-right extremism that targets immigrants. Some Albanian analysts argued that Greeks' turn to the left created an opening for progressive politics that invalidate the logic that economic hardship inevitably leads to a rise in xenophobia, chauvinism and Golden Dawn-type political phenomena. Thus, Albanian media expect positive political change in Greece that will be epitomized in the improvement of political climate for immigrants (e.g. *Top-Channel*, *Albanian Screen TV*, *Shqip Media*, *Focus News*, *Vizion Plus TV*). Albanian media also welcomed the fact that the new government quickly demonstrated their commitment to immigration issues by creating a special government portfolio, and also appreciated the new Minister of Immigration's announcement that all second-generation immigrants may receive Greek citizenship. Many Albanians also expect that the new government will introduce legislation that will improve their status in Greece and the recognition of pensions through their social contributions. In contrast, the Albanian media (e.g. *Gazeta Shqip*, *Gazeta Panorama*, *Gazeta Tema*, *Gazeta Mapo*) were highly skeptical of SYRIZA's choice of government coalition partner, since they see the Independent Greeks as a deeply

xenophobic party and many wondered whether this move could undermine SYRIZA's momentum for progressive policies on immigration.

Several right-wing and liberal newspapers and analysts focused on perceived threats to European and liberal ideals that SYRIZA's victory may signal. Analysts were critical of SYRIZA on two levels: firstly, that SYRIZA constitutes a far-left populist force, strengthened due to Greek citizens' disappointment with mainstream political parties and European policies (e.g. *Koha Jonë*, *Gazeta 55*, *Rilindja Demokratike*, *Gazeta Shekulli*), and secondly, that SYRIZA poses a populist danger to Greece's reforms and its capitalist economy which could lead to unpredictable consequences. Analysts (e.g. *Tritan Shehu* in *Koha Jonë* and *Kastriot Islami* in *Gazeta Panorama*) held positive views of the previous Greek government, arguing that former PM Antonis Samaras started a painful but necessary process for Greece and managed to lead the country in the right direction, calming the situation despite the tough austerity measures. Critics of SYRIZA also referred to the party as a "neo-communist force" (e.g. *Kastriot Islami* in *Gazeta Panorama*) and attributed the Albanian euphoria about its victory to those who remain nostalgic for communism (e.g. *Mero Baze* in *Gazeta Tema*).

Interestingly, political figures from Albanian parties aligned with different Greek political options in public debates. The Democratic Party MP Tritan Shehu in an op-ed called for the re-election of New Democracy, praising the leadership qualities of Antonis Samaras. On the other hand, the Socialist MP Ben Blushi in an article entitled "Why I am voting for SYRIZA" gave a number of reasons for his vocal support of Alexis Tsipras. This electoral partisanship was an indication of the great interest shown in Albania for the Greek elections. At the same time, the open support for various political options was criticised by some analysts as an unnecessary and partisan exaggeration (e.g. *Ilir Yzeiri* in *Gazeta Tema* and *Adrian Thanu* in *Gazeta Dita*).

European Level

One of the key angles of Albanian analysis of the Greek elections (e.g. *Mero Baze* in *Gazeta Tema*, *Artur Zheji* in *Gazeta Mapo*) was the potential impact on the European Union's future; in several cases analysts expressed concern at SYRIZA's victory largely reflecting the critical coverage of Greece in international media. Sokol Shameti in *Gazeta Shqip* summarized a common pattern that appeared in many Albanian observers' analyses: "Greece is suffering an economic crisis; Europe and especially Germany are making efforts to resolve the problem; untrustworthy and deceptive Greeks, as we know them from their nationalistic discourse, are biting the hand that feeds them". The analysts who adopted a pro-austerity discourse typically discussed the Greek crisis in terms of corruption, responsibility, and debt, downplaying the human cost of the austerity measures in Greece. Consequently, SYRIZA's intention to completely change gears was seen as a potential danger for the monetary union or European ideals in general. Furthermore, the anti-European/anti-German discourse of SYRIZA became a

cause of great concern for some Albanian opinion makers, especially given the fact that Albania is among the most pro-Western and pro-European countries in the region.

Other analysts (e.g. *Fatos Lubonja* in *Gazeta Panorama*, *Mustafa Nano* in *Gazeta Shqip*) downplayed SYRIZA's potential negative impact for Europe. For them, SYRIZA represents Europeans who are deeply disappointed by the EU. They saw the Greek electorate's choice of a radical leftist party as a response to many European officials' failure to address their demands that prosperity to be measured by the quality of citizens' lives and closing the gap between rich and poor, not by economic indicators like GDP. Furthermore, they argued that the party of Alexis Tsipras raised hopes for change not only in Greece but also in Europe, for a European model with more solidarity and human dignity (*Fatos Lubonja* in *Gazeta Panorama*). This pro-SYRIZA argumentation is based on the assumption that policy errors should be corrected in order to build healthy societies and a stronger EU. Therefore, they were supportive of SYRIZA's promises to reverse austerity whilst keeping Greece in the Eurozone. However, many among those analysts do not believe that SYRIZA has the power to inspire radical political changes in Europe, but Greece's example could be an excellent lesson for the Balkan societies in order to avoid similar problems in the future (e.g. *Ilir Yzeiri* in *Gazeta Tema*). The 'Greek lesson' approach by some analysts reflects a growing critical approach to the Albanian economic model, its weaknesses and its future.

Regional-Bilateral Level

As one of the most strategically important Balkan countries, Greece has played an important role in the process of stabilization and integration of the region. However, since the debt crisis erupted in late 2009, Greece has been less active regionally. On the occasion of the recent parliamentary elections the Albanian media tried to present Greece's new political environment in regional terms and to identify elements of continuity and change. Albanian analysts do not expect the government of Alexis Tsipras to take major regional initiatives due to the demands of domestic politics, open foreign policy issues (FYROM name issue, Cyprus, relations with Turkey and Russia) and pressing macroeconomic and social problems. Despite the fact that SYRIZA's anti-nationalist credentials are seen as a positive sign for regional cooperation, most view the timing as not conducive to change in foreign policy. Some media viewed Athens' poor regional engagement as being to the benefit of other countries, like Germany, Turkey and Italy, which desire a stronger regional presence (*Top Channel, Klan TV, Vizion Plus TV, Albanian Screen TV*). Similarly, it is common among Albanian analysts to seek a stronger German or Turkish presence in the region over Russian or Greek.

A number of issues, whether raised by Athens or by Tirana, are important parameters for bilateral relations in general. These issues range from, for example, the settlement of the sea border, to the Cham issue, the cemeteries of Greek soldiers and the law of the state of war (although, importantly, not all issues are considered bilateral disputes by both sides). Although the Albanian media and public were concerned about the influence

that a SYRIZA government could have on bilateral relations, the issue did not garner as much coverage as expected because of the lack of information coming from Albanian correspondents in Greece. The open issues with Albania, and bilateral issues in general, were not on SYRIZA's electoral agenda and therefore Albanian correspondents did not have much to report. In the absence of any meaningful information, the analysts in Albania tried to make tentative predictions. Initially, they were optimistic, arguing that Athens's new governing team will bring a new model of behavior and a more collaborative spirit to Greek foreign policy (e.g. *Mentor Nazarko* in *Gazeta Panorama*, *Shpëtim Zinxhiria* in *independent.mk*). The supporters of this argument underscored the fact that SYRIZA is an anti-nationalist party that will contribute to the revision and modernization of Greek foreign policy. Especially in relation to Albania, some viewed traditional Greek policy as based on old doctrines that are not in line with the interests of both nations and their European future (e.g. *Ksenofon Krisafi* in *Gazeta Mapo*).

However, SYRIZA's decision to form a governing coalition with Independent Greeks frustrated Albanians' hopes for potential improvement in bilateral relations. Albanian media (e.g. *Gazeta Shqip*, *Gazeta Panorama*, *Gazeta Tema*, *Gazeta Shekulli*, *Koha Jonë*) pointed out the statement by ANEL politician and member of the new government Terens Quick who directly connected the question of Greek minority rights with Greek support for Albania's European perspective. That statement was in line with the traditional perception in Albanian media of Greece using Albania's EU membership hopes as a foreign policy tool for dealing with bilateral issues or Greek grievances towards Albania. Additionally, both SYRIZA's and ANEL's declarations against NATO and sympathy towards Russia, a country not very popular among Albanians, are generally seen with great suspicion or concern by Albanian media. Generally, however, Albanian officials do not expect any significant change in relations between the two countries. According to the Albanian ambassador in Greece, who was interviewed by Albanian media, "there may be new negotiations and a new spirit in the talks to resolve some of the open issues, but in general in the foreign policy area significant change is not expected" (Ambassador *Dervishi*, interview in *Ora News TV*).

Media coverage in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Despite the ongoing political crisis, the outcome of the Greek elections was a top story for several news agencies in FYROM - both Albanian and Slav-Macedonian (e.g. *independent.mk*, *24 Vesti*, *AlsatM*, *Lajm Maqedonia*, *Zhurnal*). FYROM's media focuses on SYRIZA's position and approached the question of the possible consequences of the governmental change through the prism of the name dispute. The comments of some political analysts (e.g. *Alajdin Demiri* in *Radio Evropa e Lirë*) implied a potential for improvement on the name issue, showing sympathy to the new Prime Minister who is considered more flexible compared to his predecessor Antonis Samaras. The leader of New Democracy is not popular in FYROM since he's considered the person who not only created the name dispute, but also pushed Greece to uncompromising positions during

his tenure as PM. Expectations of a different approach were based on the perception that, given Greece's position in recent years, things simply cannot get worse. Having said that, most analysts do not have high expectations for a solution in the foreseeable future and instead argue in favour of careful moves to improve the climate of bilateral relations. This is also in line with the official position of Skopje, which calls for more cooperation preceding the resolution of name issues, implying that Greece's informal veto to the opening of FYROM's accession negotiations should be lifted.

Some top headlines showed optimism but also concern about the composition of the new Greek government. Most journalists and analysts expressed their concern for what SYRIZA's cooperation with ANEL could mean for the negotiations on the name dispute (e.g. *Вечер, Сумел, 24 Вестму*). The coalition with ANEL reversed much of the initial optimism after SYRIZA's victory. Concerns typically revolved around questions of whether SYRIZA would follow its own positions on foreign policy issues, given the fact its coalition partner maintains uncompromising and nationalistic positions on these issues, including the name dispute. Some analysts argued that the trade off for ANEL's support on the anti-austerity agenda will be tougher policies on foreign issues, possibly including a freeze in negotiations with FYROM. On the contrary, some analysts do not expect radical changes on the name dispute. For example, veteran socialist politician and critic of the Gruevski government,

Ljubomir Frckoski, stressed that he does not see any real differences between New Democracy and SYRIZA on the strategic aspects of Greek foreign policy and also that the name issue is not a priority of the new government, which aims mainly to re-structure Greece's relationship with international institutions (e.g. *Risto Nikovski in Radio Evropa e Lirë*). Thus, no real changes should be expected on the name dispute (*Ljubomir Frckoski in Portalb and Risto Nikovski in Radio Evropa e Lirë*)).

Optimism about SYRIZA was greater in the Albanian-language press and among Albanian analysts (e.g. *Semi Mehmeti and Sergjan Kërimin in Lajm Press*) who expect SYRIZA to show more readiness for negotiations with Skopje since, as they stress, the left in Greece has more compromising positions on foreign policy issues and is influenced less by the Orthodox Church. Other analysts argued that since the new government appears uncompromising on the question of the Greek debt and bail out agreement, which could result in Greece losing European support for the question of the name issue, the new government may be obliged to close this chapter (*Nano Ruzhin in Portalb*). However, Albanian analysts (e.g. *Mersel Bilalli in Portalb*) believe that the ball is in FYROM's court. They blame the government of Nikola Gruevski for what they see as setbacks on the name issue and consequently on the country's prospects for EU and NATO membership. For some of these Albanian analysts (e.g. *Alajdin Demiri in Radio Evropa e Lirë and Semi Mehmeti in Lajm Press*), the Skopje government's nationalistic line has not only derailed the negotiation process for a compromise with Greece, but also has used every opportunity to annoy Greece and put FYROM's allies in an awkward position. The recent decision of FYROM's government to rename the Universal Hall in

Skopje to “Alexander the Great” is mentioned as one such example. Ethnic Albanian analysts believe that VMRO-DPMNE’s nationalism will continue to irritate Greece, preventing resolution and impeding the country’s progress towards joining Western institutions.

Media coverage in Kosovo

Kosovar media provided very little analysis of the Greek elections and SYRIZA’s victory. The coverage was largely reproduction of reporting from international news agencies and Albanian media. It is likely that a key reason for this lack of analysis was the fact that Kosovo was at the time of the Greek elections in political turmoil. Mass anti-government demonstrations calling for the resignation of Kosovo-Serb Minister Aleksandar Jablanović for ostensibly insulting ethnic Albanians resulted in violent clashes with the police. Similarly, government and opposition clashed over the fate of the country’s largest mining conglomerate Trepca. At the same time, manifest frustration with post-independence situation in Kosovo led tens of thousands of Kosovars to attempt to migrate to Schengen-area countries looking for better economic conditions abroad. Thus, the Kosovar media failed to analyse the Greek elections possibly because of this turbulent situation.

For Kosovo, the main stake in the Greek elections is the future of Athens-Pristina relations and the prospect of Greece’s recognition of Kosovar independence. Thus, there were few references in Albanian and Kosovar media focusing on the potential implications of SYRIZA’s victory for the question of recognition of Kosovo’s independence (e.g. *Arlind Qori* interview in *lapsi.al*, *Gazeta Express*, *Gazeta Zëri*, *Koha Ditore*, *Albeu*, *Fakti News*, *Gazeta Dita*, *Radio Kosova e Lirë*). The main concern for Kosovars is that the new government could reverse the progress that has been achieved and close the channels of communication between Athens and Pristina. Although Greece remains one of the five EU member states that have not recognized Kosovo’s independence, Athens has followed a policy of engagement with Pristina and the bilateral governmental communication has been quite intensive in the last three years. The previous government gave positive signals to Kosovo when it agreed to put Schengen visa stamps on Kosovo citizens’ passports and when it accepted the opening of a trade representation office by the Kosovar government in Athens. More recently, a statement made by the Head of the Greek Liaison Office in Pristina, Konstantina Athanassiadou, that “Greece does not exclude the possibility of recognizing Kosovo” circulated in all Kosovo’s mainstream newspapers (e.g. *Koha Ditore*, *Express*, *Zëri*, *Bota Sot*) and raised expectations. It is exactly this policy of constructive cooperation that has made Antonis Samaras and his government more popular among Kosovars. On the contrary, Kosovars are wary of SYRIZA’s intentions fearing that the new government will not only avoid the recognition of Kosovo but will even halt the progress achieved so far. One source of these concerns is Alexis Tsipras’s visit to Belgrade in December, when SYRIZA’s leader vocally expressed his disagreement with the independence of Kosovo.

It is also interesting to note the controversy that resulted from the fact that media in Albania extensively covered developments in Greece. The Albanian public's exposure to reporting and analyses of the Greek elections amidst the above-described Kosovar crisis infuriated many Albanian analysts who posed the dilemma as 'Kosovo or SYRIZA', targeting the perceived lack of interest among Albanian media about the developments in Kosovo (e.g. *Agron Gjekmarkaj* in *Gazeta Panorama*). These analysts argued that Albanian media should have devoted more attention to Kosovo's political tensions since Tirana is considered the regional point of reference for Albanians living in neighboring countries and a source of support and protection for all Albanians.

Media coverage in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Media in the rest of the Western Balkan region (Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina) gave an unusually significant amount of attention to the developments surrounding the January 2015 parliamentary elections in Greece and SYRIZA's victory. Initially, the newspapers and web portals in these countries published mostly short, informative articles, based on coverage by international and regional news agencies, and they concentrated on economic questions, such as the effects of SYRIZA's victory on the Eurozone. Hence, with only slightly modified headlines, media content across this part of the Western Balkans was almost identical. Broadly speaking, these included two opposing viewpoints. One perspective presented SYRIZA as an anti-establishment political entity that will put an end to entrenched corrupt politics, and its leader, Alexis Tsipras, as a charismatic idealist fighting for a European social model that would bring positive changes not only to Greece, but also to Europe as a whole. Another viewpoint characterised SYRIZA's leadership as neo-communists who articulate a populist rhetoric and offer empty promises, endangering the norms and ideals that Europe has been built upon. The region's analysts and opinion makers who participated in numerous television and radio talk shows (e.g. *OKO Magazin* in *RTS*, Serbia; *Stav Srbije* in *TV Prva*, Serbia; *Zumiranje* in *Nedeljnik Vreme*, Serbia; *Otvoreno* in *HRT*, Croatia) devoted to the political changes in neighbouring Greece, were also roughly divided among these two viewpoints, depending on their individual ideological orientations.

The general public, however, leaned moderately towards SYRIZA. In Serbia, for example, one of the abovementioned television talk shows (*Stav Srbije* in *TV Prva*, 1 February 2015) conducted a phone-in poll on the question "Will Tsipras and SYRIZA succeed in changing the creditor agreement with the EU?", in which 72 per cent of the audience voted in favour of SYRIZA and only 28 per cent against. Serbia's Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, who has comfortably been the most popular political figure in the country in the last several years, made a remark in *Tanjug* that Alexis Tsipras is the only politician who seems to enjoy more popularity among Serbian citizenry than himself.

In some instances, reporting on the Greek elections and the SYRIZA-led government took on the contours of media sensationalism, reflected in headlines such as: "SYRIZA is

winner of the elections in Greece: austerity policies went down in history” (*Večernji List*, Croatia), “The bogey of SYRIZA circles across Europe” (*Vreme*, Serbia) or “SYRIZA Ante Portas” (*RTS*, Serbia). New Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, has been described as the “first anti-capitalist in Europe,” “the most dangerous man in Europe”, “a politician who defies the establishment,” “Prime Minister who loves Partisans,” but also as “Greek Che Guevara”, “Harry Potter” and “Robin Hood” (*Srbija Danas* and *Politika*, Serbia; *RTRS* and *Poskok*, Bosnia and Herzegovina; *Vijesti*, Montenegro; *Direktno*, Croatia). Serbian national broadcaster, *Radio Televizija Srbije* (RTS), investigated the life of a small community of Greek Communists which for a short period of time settled in Yugoslavia after World War Two, entitling the reportage as: “Tsipras’ political fathers in Bačka [region in North Serbia].” Following a pattern of similar interest in SYRIZA worldwide, some reporters entered the zone of tabloid journalism, elaborating on family origins, childhood stories, lifestyle and fashion preferences of the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and the Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis. Several Serbian dailies, quoting the British *Daily Mail*, even reported that in a church near Corinth in Greece, presumably due to the atheism of the country’s new Prime Minister and his strained relationship with the Greek Orthodox Church clergy, “an icon of Christ on the cross has been crying since the general election victory for SYRIZA” (*B92* and *Večernje Novosti*).

While the initial reports were largely superficial, sensationalist, and at best reproduced from regional and international news agencies, when the new Greek government was formed and started confronting its creditors and EU partners, media outlets in this part of the Western Balkan region shifted their attention to the possible consequences such political developments could have for the Balkans. For example, Serbian dailies *Informer* and *Blic* analysed the question of what impact possible deterioration of relations between Brussels and Athens could have on the EU Enlargement process in the Western Balkans. Analysts raised concerns that growing political and economic problems within the European Union could push enlargement policy to the margins of the EU’s priorities, and further tighten membership conditions imposed upon the aspiring countries. They also stressed the potential rise in EU citizens’ scepticism of enlargement. Under the title “SYRIZA hinders our plans too,” the major Serbian daily *Politika* analysed the question of whether SYRIZA’s plans to block privatisation of Greek strategic assets, including Piraeus Port, could prevent Chinese investors from proceeding with their infrastructural projects in Serbia, especially in the transportation sector. However, such in-depth analyses were limited in number, and in one case (Bosnia and Herzegovina) virtually non-existent.

New SYRIZAs mushrooming in the Balkans?

SYRIZA’s victory has generated great media interest and has given rise to inspiring debates about the current and future ideological orientation of the Western Balkans. A question which has certainly triggered the most intense debates in regional media was: does SYRIZA have a successor in a particular movement or a political party in other

Balkan countries? In other words, what are the chances for new Balkan SYRIZA(s) to emerge? The discussion was apparently provoked by SYRIZA's sudden popularity among the wider public as well as by attempts of various political actors to take advantage of this momentum to promote their own political agenda and score points in domestic political competition.

In an article entitled: "SYRIZA win lifts hopes of Croatian Leftists", *Balkan Insight* wrote that at least three Croatian political parties, Labourists-Labour Party (*Hrvatski laburisti-Stranka rada*), the Living Wall (*Živi Zid*) and the initiative Workers' Front (*Radnička fronta*), are claiming to be "Croatian SYRIZA." Under the headline "We are Croatian SYRIZA. No, we are! So are we!," Croatian *T-Portal*, through interviews with the parties' representatives, revealed the animosity that exists among these political entities, as the party leaders went as far as claiming that their political rival is ideologically closer to Greek neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. In Montenegro, an opposition MP from the Democratic Front (*Demokratski Front*) and a former trade unionist Janko Vučinić formed a new left-wing Workers Party, modelled on Greece's SYRIZA. In an interview for Montenegrin daily *Dan*, Vučinić said that his country's political scene needs a "Montenegrin SYRIZA," which would be a party of all "disempowered" and "humiliated" citizens, and congratulated SYRIZA for "lighting the torch of freedom and justice and bringing light into the heart and soul of every robbed and humiliated man in the world". Nermin Nikšić, leader of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Socijaldemokratska Partija Bosne i Hercegovine* – SDP BiH, successor of the League of Communists), congratulated SYRIZA on its victory in the name of SDP members, addressing the Greek Prime Minister as "Comrade Tsipras" (*Nikšić twitter handle*). Likely inspired by SYRIZA's victory, Nikšić and the leader of the Democratic Front party (*Demokratska Fronta*), Željko Komšić, spoke at a public debate entitled: "Does Bosnia and Herzegovina need a united Left?". They agreed that the unification of political forces of the left is a necessity in Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is only a question of time before this is realised (*Tačno, Radio Slobodna Evropa, Oslobođenje*).

In Serbia, both the governing and the opposition parties have been vocal in expressing their support to the Greek Prime Minister and showing their sympathies towards his party's programme. Aleksandar Vulin, Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy and leader of the Movement of Socialists (*Pokret Socijalista*), was among the first to congratulate SYRIZA on its electoral victory, emphasising ideological similarities, close cooperation and friendly relations that exist between the two parties and their leaders. Minister Vulin and his Movement of Socialists hosted Tsipras in Belgrade in December 2014. Probably most media space in Serbia has been given to Borislav Stefanović, the vice president of the opposition Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka*- DS), who, in numerous statements for the Serbian press and TV broadcasters, stressed that the Democratic Party needs to turn its politics "more to the left" and be the party "that advocates social justice (...) something like the Greek SYRIZA" (*Blic*). Underlining that he does not want to "copy" SYRIZA but acknowledge the good sides of its politics instead, Stefanović announced his plan to make significant changes in his

party programme, which could even imply a shift in its ideological stance (*Tanjug, Radio Slobodna Evropa*). *Večernje Novosti* daily wrote that the opposition in Serbia is considering the creation of an anti-government alliance or “democratic front” led by Stefanović himself, which would be a sort of “Serbian SYRIZA,” but “more pro-European oriented.” In response to these speculations, Serbian Minister of the Interior and member of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska Napredna Stranka*), Nebojša Stefanović, stated that he has nothing against the formation of any political block, but that he believes that “no real and serious politics” stands behind this initiative, but rather an intention of the opposition to “capitalise on the popularity of the Greek SYRIZA” (*Tanjug*).

Interestingly, SYRIZA’s party programme seemed to be no less attractive and its electoral victory no less inspiring to the Balkan right-wing and nationalist parties as well. Volen Siderov, leader of the Bulgarian Attack (*Ataka*), an ultra-nationalist far-right party, was the first Bulgarian political leader to congratulate Alexis Tsipras on his victory. Siderov underlined that his party has “very similar views on government” with SYRIZA, that “so-called austerity” policy should end, that Bulgaria should leave NATO as well as that sanctions against Russia should be lifted, “because they are harmful to all countries of the continent and serve only the US” (*Independent Balkan News Agency*). MP Velizar Enchev, former member of the nationalistic National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (*Национален фронт за спасениена България - НФСБ*), announced his plans to form a “Bulgarian SYRIZA” (*Bilten, Стандарт*). In Serbia, leader of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska Radikalna Stranka*), Vojislav Šešelj, who is indicted for alleged involvement in war crimes and is currently awaiting the verdict of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), held a press conference in which he expressed his “joy” because of SYRIZA’s “magnificent victory.” He claimed that this victory “brings hope” that things “can be done differently in the whole European Union”, whose existence, according to him, “has finally come to an end.” He pointed out that similarities between the Serbian Radical Party and SYRIZA lie in the fact that both parties “advocate social justice” and “anti-globalism”, as well as hold similar positions when it comes to the Ukrainian conflict and relationship with Russia (*YouTube*).

Contrary to the above-mentioned countries, in Kosovo no party claimed to be “a new SYRIZA.” Nevertheless, several media (e.g. *Tirana Times, Indeks Online, Lajm Press, Bota Press, Gazeta Tema*) thought that there are enough ideological similarities between Albin Kurti’s left-nationalist Vetëvendosje and SYRIZA to attract plenty of interest. The most obvious similarity is the anti-establishment outlook of both groups and the fact that they both flourished due to citizens’ frustration with mainstream political parties and their policies. Observers (*Elton Hatibi in Postbllok, Mero Baze in GazetaTema*) also stressed what they saw as similarities in the economic and social agenda. Both parties prioritise the tackling of social injustice, reject austerity policies and the neo-liberal economic agenda and put emphasis on strengthening of welfare state policies. Similarities can also be found in the positions on privatization and the public ownership of strategic sectors

of the economy, such as telecommunications, energy production and mining of minerals. Some observers were also inspired by SYRIZA's anti-bail out and anti-Western rhetoric. They saw an emphasis on national self-determination and popular sovereignty, which can be found also in Vetëvendosje's discourse. The latter stresses questions of Kosovo's sovereignty and dismisses the presence and political role of the international community (United Nation and European Union missions) in the country (*Mero Baze* in *GazetaTema*). Vetëvendosje is also quite anti-NATO and anti-American, which is something of a rarity in wider Albanian politics. Observers, finally, stress that despite these similarities, the two parties seem to have quite opposing agendas when it comes to nationalism and irredentism. SYRIZA's programme is resolutely anti-nationalist, while Vetëvendosje is the only major Albanian party advocating the redrawing of international borders and the unification of Albanian territories.

Unrealistic expectations?

This astonishing attempt to 'bandwagon' on SYRIZA's popularity by a variety of political actors across the Balkans has prompted the Balkan media and opinion makers to question their sincerity. In that context, it is interesting to note the criticism that some opinion makers directed towards their countries' own leftist and centre-left political forces. Observers from various positions of the political spectrum (e.g. *Miloš Baković Jadžić* in *LeftEast*, *Srećko Horvat* in *T-Portal*, *Vesna Pešić* and *Đorđe Vukadinović* in *Vreme*, *Luka Rakčević* in *Vijesti*) stressed that leftist and centre-left parties in the region, especially those with considerable tenures in government, are tainted by their participation in governments that implemented unpopular austerity policies. In fact, some of the region's leftist and centre-left parties have not been vocal in welcoming SYRIZA's victory, and observers noted that this is because the Greek elections showed alternative pathways from the tough economic programmes and austerity measures implemented at home.

In Croatia, some analysts (e.g. *Davor Krile* in *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Srećko Horvat* in *T-Portal*) criticized the Prime Minister Zoran Milanović, leader of the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*, the successor of the League of Communists of Croatia) for doing "less for Croatian people in his three-year long rule" than "what Alexis Tsipras did in only three days." They also criticised his "hesitation" at congratulating SYRIZA on the electoral victory, accusing him of waiting for the German Chancellor Angela Merkel to do so first (*T-Portal*).

When it comes to Serbia, observers (e.g. *Miloš Baković Jadžić* in *Bilten*, *Dragoljub Žarković* in *Vreme*, *Andrej Nikolaidis* in *Žurnal.ba*) noted that leftist and centre-left coalition partners of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (namely the Socialist Party of Serbia-*Socijalistička partija Srbije*, the Social Democratic Party of Serbia-*Socijaldemokratska partija Srbije*, the Movement of Socialists-*Pokret socijalista* and the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia-*Partija ujedinjenih penzionera Srbije*) have implemented IMF-sponsored economic reforms in the country; in addition, some are

tainted by a reputation of being also nationalist. The example that media frequently use to showcase this paradox is the leader of the Movement of Socialist and Serbian Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, Aleksandar Vulin. Despite purportedly being the closest political friend of SYRIZA in the region, Vulin was not only the implementer of tough labour policies, but is also widely considered a staunch nationalist.

It is interesting also to note how government officials in Serbia attempted to distance themselves from SYRIZA's programme and practices. Aleksandar Vulin, in response to criticism of his own government's policies, stated that "previous Greek governments would not have brought the country to the difficult position it finds itself in now, if they had introduced austerity policies six to ten years ago," as well as that, when it comes to this matter, "Greece should look up to Serbia" (*Tanjug*). Similarly, Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, when explaining his view of the new Greek government's economic plans, said that he believes in "structural reforms, hard work and painstaking healing of economy rather than policy that suggests 'we'll do it easily.'" He acknowledged the reputation SYRIZA enjoys among Serbian citizens by saying that "the most popular politician in Serbia at the moment is Alexis Tsipras" (*Tanjug*), but also stressed that the approach Serbia chooses is more similar "to the German, Austrian or Scandinavian people" than to "our brothers and friends in southern Europe" (*Politika*).

Popular perception in some countries, such as in ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, is that progressive politics do not stand a chance of realisation or success in a system that has been entirely built on the mutually opposing ethno-nationalist interests of the country's three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats) and their political representatives. Therefore, progressive and leftist values serve only as a façade for those parties who define themselves as their agents, but are actually devoted to satisfying the interests of a particular ethnic group, rather than of the country's citizenry as a whole. Not surprisingly, when leaders of leftist parties in Bosnia uniformly concluded that the emergence of a "united left" in the country was only a question of time, many found this statement not only unrealistic, but also highly hypocritical (*Starmo.ba, Faktor.ba, Ekran.ba*).

Furthermore, observers (e.g. *Dejan Vuk Stanković, Aleksandar Stevanović* in *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, *Vesna Pešić, Đorđe Vukadinović* in *Vreme*, *Srećko Mihailović* in *Blic*, *Zoran Ćirjaković* in *Politika*) tried to put things into perspective with regards to the future of leftist politics in the Western Balkans. For many critics the problem is not so much replacing the capitalist system, but rather making it more efficient and functional so that it does not benefit only a tiny segment of the population and the political and business elites. Although former communist Balkan states have progressed in their transitions with varying levels of success, it could hardly be said that they have managed to achieve the ideals of democracy and market economy that function in Western countries, including Greece. The existing political, economic and social context in the rest of the Balkans largely differs from the Greek experience, while the region's not-so-

distant socialist past still keeps alive suspicion and distrust towards any radical left ideas. Revolutionary socialist movements such as Workers' Front in Croatia or Left Summit of Serbia (*Levi Samit Srbije*), which stand for political principles of anti-capitalism and are against austerity policies, have been facing great difficulties in their attempts to animate support, as during the recent public gatherings that they organized to express solidarity with SYRIZA and the new Greek government. And even in some of the most significant expressions of dissatisfaction with the current social-economic situation – such as last year's country-wide protests and formation of citizens' assemblies (so-called plenums) in Bosnia and Herzegovina – many were not protesting in favour of a nebulous prospect of return to socialism, but rather for a liberal democracy and a capitalist system that would benefit the entire population.

Conclusions

Because of the open bilateral issues/disputes, media in Albania and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) have given greater attention to the Greek parliamentary elections and, more importantly, to their outcome and possible consequences that SYRIZA's rule could produce on either these particular countries' internal politics or their diplomatic relations with Greece. The most extensive coverage was in Albania due to many pending bilateral issues, which continue to complicate Athens-Tirana relationship. Since the beginning of the crisis, Albanians have paid particularly close attention to the effect that Greek meltdown could have on the key areas in which the Albanian economy is closely linked to Greece, namely: Albanian immigrant remittances, Greek foreign investment (especially in the banking sector), and trade relations between the two countries. Therefore, the Greek economic hardship and country's potential Eurozone exit have been constant themes in Albania's mainstream print and digital media, achieving its peak with the January parliamentary elections and SYRIZA's victory, when the most popular newspapers in the country presented an unusually large number of analyses and op-ed articles, produced by Albania's most well-known political analysts, opinion makers and academics. Judging by their representation in the Albanian media, the Greek elections even managed to overshadow the intense political and social developments unfolding at the same period in Kosovo.

Parliamentary elections in Greece and SYRIZA's electoral win could not go unnoticed by the media and the analysts in FYROM because of the "name" conundrum that has been contributing to the strained relationship between Athens and Skopje. Local media and analysts have focused on the impact that a SYRIZA-led government could have to the name issue, where two prevailing opinions were observed. The victory of SYRIZA created a kind of optimism in country's various political and academic circles. This optimism was particularly evident in the Albanian language press, with some Albanian analysts arguing that SYRIZA will bring a new model of behavior and more collaborative spirit in the foreign policy area, hoping for a more constructive engagement in resolving the name dispute. Despite this sentiment, the majority of analysts did not expect that

change of power in Greece will bring any radical modification in country's official position in relation to the name issue. In general, most of the analyses, which appeared in the FYROM's media were neutral in terms of covering main contenders and the expectations from both political options - SYRIZA and New Democracy.

Kosovo is also in a specific situation bearing in mind that Greece is one of the five EU member states that do not recognize its independence, therefore, Greek political developments largely concern Kosovars. The Kosovar media has covered the Greek economic crisis from its beginning through small informative articles based on the coverage by the international and Greek news agencies. However, not a lot of media attention has been given to the Greek elections, since Kosovo was mainly occupied with the country's internal political and social developments. The coverage dedicated to the Greek elections and to SYRIZA's victory was mostly informative and lacked both background and analysis. The main topical concerns that dominated the Kosovar media coverage did not differ dramatically from those in other international media where a large number of stories focused on economic issues, such as the future of Greece in the European Union and SYRIZA's effect on the Eurozone.

Similarly, before the January 2015 parliamentary elections in Greece, media in the rest of the Western Balkan states (Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina) had not particularly been occupied with this country's political affairs. Newspaper columns and web pages usually consisted of short accounts on the Eurozone crisis and Greek economic hardship, accompanied by sometimes overly dramatic images of the anti-austerity protests in the Greek capital. The framing of the news and interpretations of relevant events as presented in these countries' media had been very similar to the international mainstream media coverage. The absence of a particularly strong interest for the Greek political developments could be explained by lack of any open bilateral issues between these countries and Greece, as well as by existence of traditionally good and friendly relations, as it is case with Greece and Serbia. Although extensively writing on the Greek elections, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin and Bosnian media outlets produced news of mostly an informative character, again largely relying on the regional and international news agencies. Broadly speaking, they portrayed SYRIZA's victory as a potential danger either for the EU monetary union (as reflected in the European mainstream media) or European order as we know it (as presented by SYRIZA's sympathizers on the left side of the political spectrum), providing this way the public with somewhat balanced coverage. The most intense and interesting debates in these countries surrounded the ideological component of SYRIZA's victory. Media has been preoccupied with the question of what such electoral success of the radical-left SYRIZA in the neighbouring Greece could mean for the left political forces in these countries, in other words, what are the prospects for Balkan SYRIZA(s) to emerge.

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PART II - The January 2015 Parliamentary Elections in Greece: Survey of Expectations of Balkan Opinion Makers

Introduction¹

In parallel with the Western Balkan media monitoring, ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme conducted an opinion survey of Balkan opinion makers in February and March 2015. The goal of the survey was to, in the immediate aftermath of January 2015 parliamentary elections, assess the views on and expectations of the new SYRIZA-led government, with a special emphasis on the foreign policy area. The idea was not to attain a statistically representative sample, but rather to read broad indicators of the trends among Balkan opinion makers. Our survey participants included researchers, intellectuals, journalists and individuals working for NGOs or advocacy groups. The respondents were balanced across different professional areas within this categorisation, and the sample had a broad age range. We did not share the survey with state officials, politicians and diplomats in order to avoid "official" positions and better understand the overall opinion of Balkan civil society. While Part I of this report presents findings of the media monitoring in the countries of the Western Balkans, our survey participants come from the wider region of Southeast Europe, including EU member states Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania.

The survey included three major sets of questions.

The first related to general familiarity with Greek foreign policy in the Balkans, whereby the participants were asked to assess Greek involvement in the Balkan affairs in the past, recognize the eras and areas when and where Greek activity was at its height, choose the most 'successful' recent Greek government, in terms of diplomatic activity, compare with the current state of affairs, and express their expectations with regards to Greece's future diplomatic activity in the region.

The second set of questions referred to the January 2015 parliamentary elections in Greece. The participants were asked to answer questions on the elections' media coverage in their respective countries and their attitudes towards the most prominent political parties and political leaders in Greece.

The third set of questions concerned the newly elected Greek government in particular. It included questions on SYRIZA's representation in the Balkan media, Balkan opinion

¹ The authors would like to thank Anastasis Valvis for advice and support of the survey element of the report. Special thanks also go to all the participants of the survey, who devoted their time and effort to answer our questions.

makers' attitudes towards the SYRIZA-led government, awareness of the party programme, as well as knowledge of SYRIZA's coalition partner, Independent Greeks (ANEL). Moreover, participants were asked to define their expectations when it comes to SYRIZA's future foreign policy activities in the Balkans and beyond. Finally, the participants expressed their opinion on the possible implications of SYRIZA's victory in Greece, for social and leftist agendas in the Balkans, and for Europe as a whole.

The survey findings are based on a total of 117 complete responses that provide us with a useful starting point for further analysis and discussion.

Familiarity with Greek politics

The first general question the survey posed was related to the respondents' understanding of Greek politics in general. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the respondents for the most part indicated that they were 'somewhat' familiar, while less than 5% declared no familiarity with Greek politics. These responses indicate that familiarity with political developments in Greece is a matter of course for Balkan opinion makers, reflecting the fairly significant role that Greece has played in the region.

How familiar are you with Greek politics?

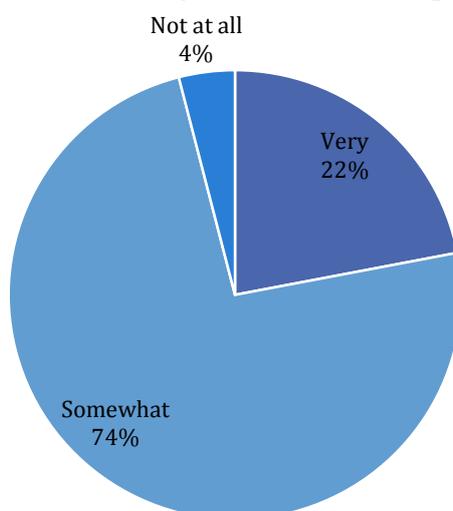


Figure 1

Greek diplomacy in the Balkans

Respondents were asked to give their opinion of Greek diplomacy in the Balkans over the last two decades (Figure 2). 68% of the respondents believed that Greek diplomacy has been somewhat active, while only 11% of respondents are of the opinion that Greek diplomacy has not been active at all in the Balkans.

How would you rate Greek diplomacy in Balkans over the last two decades?

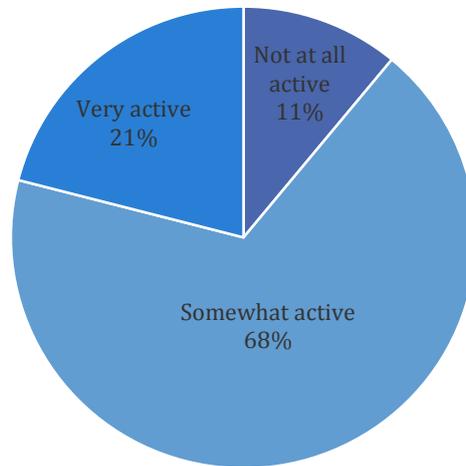


Figure 2

In explaining their responses to this question, respondents were asked to specify in what areas they believe Greek involvement has been the most significant. In these responses, the name issue of FYROM came up frequently, as did EU integration and regional infrastructure. Respondents also noted that the economic crisis has diverted Greece's attention away from the region, and others commented that Greece should be more involved than it is. Many also noted that Greece has been 'periodically' active, with variations in government and policies towards the region.

Furthermore, respondents were asked in which sector they believed Greece has been most active in the Balkans, with the possibility of choosing up to three choices from 'Politics,' 'Economics,' 'Business,' 'Culture,' 'Energy,' or other areas (Figure 3). 67% of respondents chose politics; reasons offered for this response included the name issue and the dispute with FYROM, Greece's role in NATO, the issue of Kosovo independence and Greece's position as a regional 'guardian' on behalf of the EU, in the words of one respondent. Following politics, 55% chose the business sector, citing Greek involvement in infrastructure and banks as explanations. In the same vein, 40% of

'The main involvement of Greece in the Balkans was for political reasons, like protecting the interests of Greeks in the southern part of Albania, blocking Macedonia for its name, not recognizing Kosovo's independence because of the traditional links with Serbia (mostly because of the religion). But, Greece, or at least private companies for Greece, were [also] interested in energy sources, especially in Kosovo.'

Opinion maker from Kosovo

respondents chose the field of economics, citing Greek FDI in the Balkans, the ‘supremacy of Greek capital,’ and the prevalence of Greek banks in the region. Finally, the cultural sector was chosen by 24%, citing reconstruction of cultural heritage as well as shared regional traditions. Only 7% chose the energy sector and another 7% chose ‘other,’ referring to media, tourism and education.

In which of the following sectors has Greece been most involved in the Balkans? (choose three)

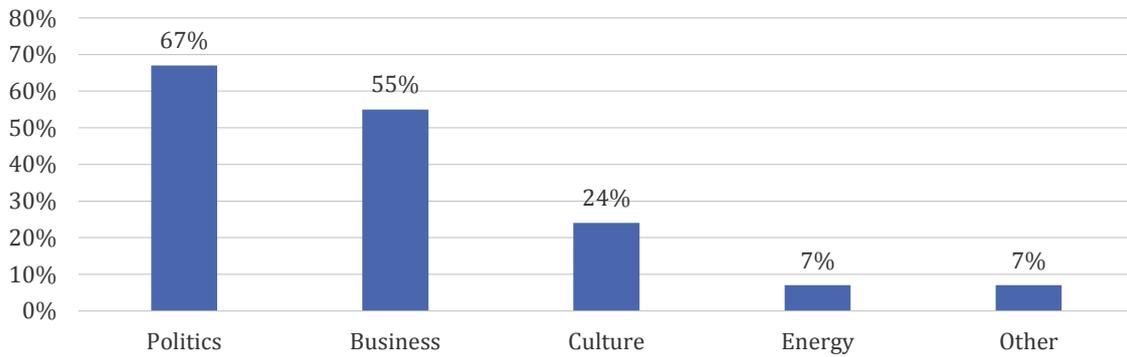


Figure 3

Survey respondents were also asked if they believed Greece has played a more positive role in the region now, or in the past. The result was a surprising split in responses of almost 50-50 between the two options (Figure 4).

Has Greece played a more positive role in the Balkans in the past or in the present?

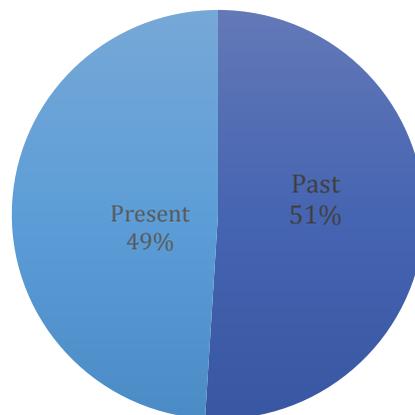


Figure 4

Following this question, participants were asked to get more specific on Greece’s role in the Balkans over the past two decades, as shown in Figure 5. The survey posed the question of which government’s foreign policy in the Balkans was most successful, with the choice of each government over the last 25 years. A significant proportion (45%) of the respondents indicated that they were not familiar enough with Greek politics to distinguish between different governments’ policies. Among those who did answer the question most (20%) identified the September 1996-March 2004 PASOK government of Konstantinos Simitis as the most successful in terms of Balkan foreign policy. The respondents mainly cited the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit and ‘the prominent role Greece has in bringing the Balkans “back to Europe”’ for the choice, while adding that Greece was more ‘visible’ in the Balkans during this time. 14% of respondents chose the October 2009-November 2011 PASOK government of George Papandreou, due to an ‘active approach’ to solving the FYROM name issue and a general ‘normalisation’ of regional relations. The October 1993-January 1996 PASOK government of Andreas Papandreou was chosen by 11% of participants, who wrote as explanation a focus on regional relations, including Turkey and attempts at negotiation. The respondents who chose the April 1990-October 1993 New Democracy government of Mitsotakis (5%) noted the ‘serious attempt at mediation in the former Yugoslavia.’ 3% of respondents believed Greek foreign policy under the March 2004 – October 2009 New Democracy government of Konstantinos A. Karamanlis was the most active, due to business involvement in the region and negotiations with Albania. Finally, the recent New Democracy of Antonis Samaras was selected by only 2% of respondents, who cited the recent Greek EU Presidency. Finally, one of the most interesting conclusions from this data is that the three PASOK governments of the last 25 years emerge well ahead of the New Democracy leadership, perhaps indicating a broader trend of involvement, or at least perceived involvement, in the region under the leadership of the two respective parties.

Under which of the following governments has Greek foreign policy in the Balkans been most successful?

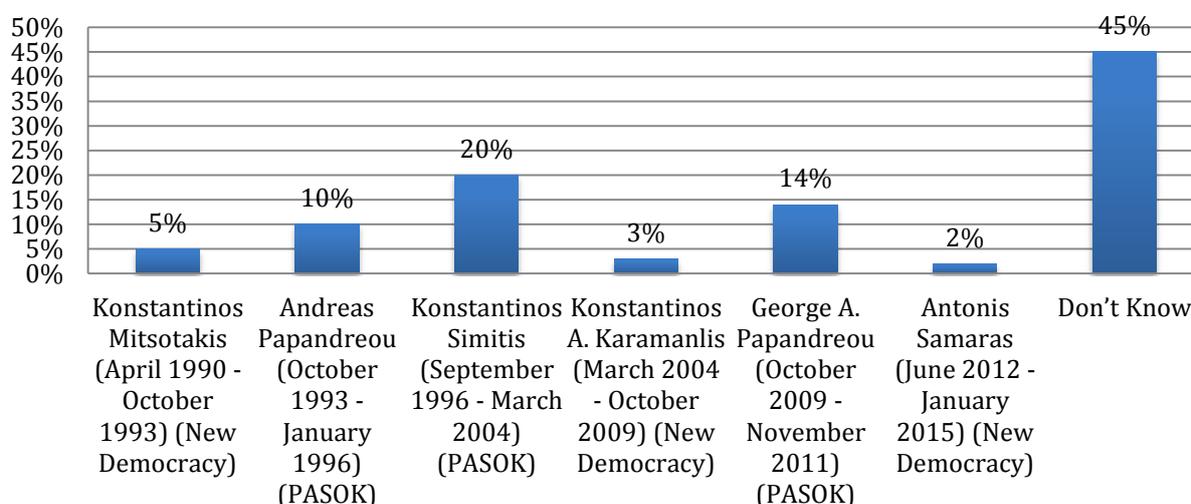


Figure 5

Building on this understanding of Greece's involvement in the region in the past, participants were then asked if they expected Greece to play a more active role in the Balkans in the future (Figure 6). 61% seemed optimistic about Greece's return to the region and answered yes; among these some noted that the economic crisis could create a 'new kind of dialogue,' while reiterating Greece's key regional position and EU membership. Others pointed out that the new SYRIZA-led government is expected to be active, and that any structural changes within the EU will inevitably impact Southeastern Europe, while further involvement may be sought in order to counter Turkey's activities in the region. The 39% that answered that they did not expect Greece to play more active role in the region most frequently cited the Eurozone crisis as a limiting factor for Greece's activity in the region, noting that domestic economic recovery considerations will dominate, not to mention Greece's lack of capacity for significant regional involvement.

Do you expect Greece to play a more active role in the Balkans in the future?

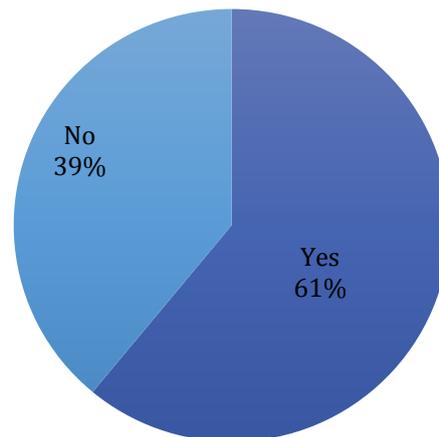


Figure 6

January 2015 elections

The next part of the survey addressed the regional media coverage of the January 2015 parliamentary elections. The first question participants were asked related to the extent of the media coverage of the Greek elections – nearly 89% of respondents answered that there had indeed been extensive media coverage of the January elections (Figure 7). This confirms the findings of the Balkan media monitoring, which were presented earlier in this report.

Was there extensive media coverage of the recent Greek parliamentary elections in your country?

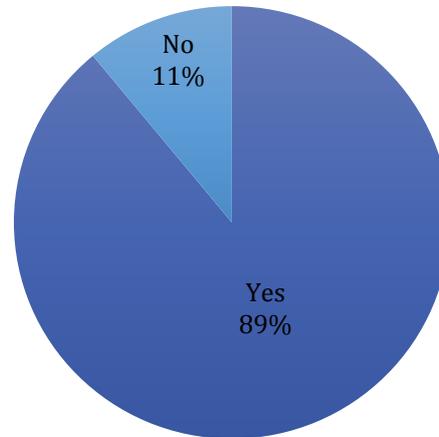


Figure 7

Expanding on that question, the respondents were asked, if they had answered ‘yes’ to the previous question, whether the media coverage was positive or negative. As shown in Figure 8, 33% of respondents noted that the coverage had been positive, while just 15% believed it was negative. More than half of the respondents noted that the coverage had been neither positive nor negative.

Those who answered that the media coverage was negative qualified their answer by mentioning fears of regional or European destabilization, general uncertainty, and the potential of a new Greek government taking a pro-Russian stance. The respondents who observed positive media coverage cited references to the potential for change, new political forces, and the potential to strengthen a general European left. One Albanian participant wrote ‘Albanian media was enthusiastic about Tsipras and SYRIZA, because they saw them as a new phenomenon,’ while another wrote ‘the perception was that it was time for a rather drastic change in the Greek political elites.’ A respondent from Serbia

‘In Bosnia, [for the] last four years the left-wing Social-Democratic Party was the ruling party, but people were disappointed because they did not meet their expectations and... now there are nationalist parties in power. People were happy to see that left-wing party won elections [in Greece]. There was also fear that ‘Golden Dawn’ could win, because people in Bosnia connect them with The Greek Volunteer Guard that fought in the Bosnian war on the side of the Army of the Republika Srpska.’

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

observed that coverage was mostly positive, ‘in the sense that one got the impression that a small country had the courage to oppose bigger countries and corporate interests.’

The more than 50% who answered that the media coverage had been fairly neutral noted that general European coverage was recycled into the local media. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, one respondent noted: ‘They did follow the events in Greece, but mostly the coverage went along the cues picked up from global media outlets, with little or no serious expertise. Hence the media discourse is dominated by brush-stroke stereotypes.’

If so, was the coverage positive or negative?

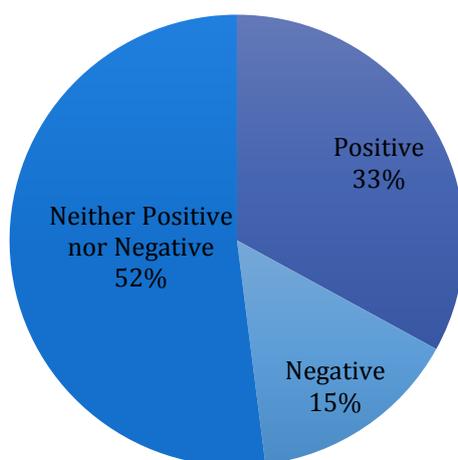


Figure 8

Looking still deeper into the nature of media coverage of the January elections throughout the Balkans, participants were asked to identify the specific focus(es) of the media coverage, with the options of economic issues, such as the Eurozone crisis, foreign policy issues (that could be relevant to a Southeast European audience), leadership qualities of various parties or individuals, and domestic (Greek) issues. Participants were able to choose more than one option. As shown in Figure 9, 89% noted that the coverage had been focused on economic issues, followed by 37% that also observed a focus on leadership qualities. Almost a quarter of the respondents identified a focus on foreign policy issues, but just 10% saw coverage focusing on domestic issues. These responses confirmed the findings of the media monitoring, presented in Part I of the report.

On which area did media coverage focus?

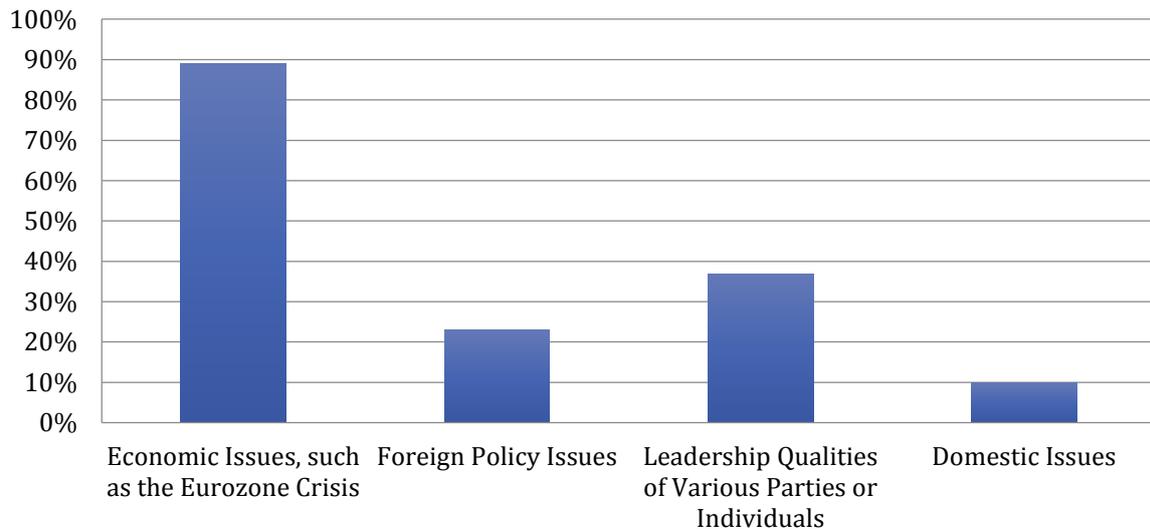


Figure 9

The participants were then asked for more details about the media coverage of the January elections, with a question about which Greek political party enjoyed the most media coverage. The choices given were SYRIZA, New Democracy, PASOK, Independent Greeks (ANEL), Golden Dawn, and ‘To Potami’ (the River). The responses overwhelmingly indicated that SYRIZA and Tsipras dominated the media, with 90% of respondents choosing that option, as shown in Figure 10.

During the recent elections, which Greek political party has enjoyed the most media coverage in your country?

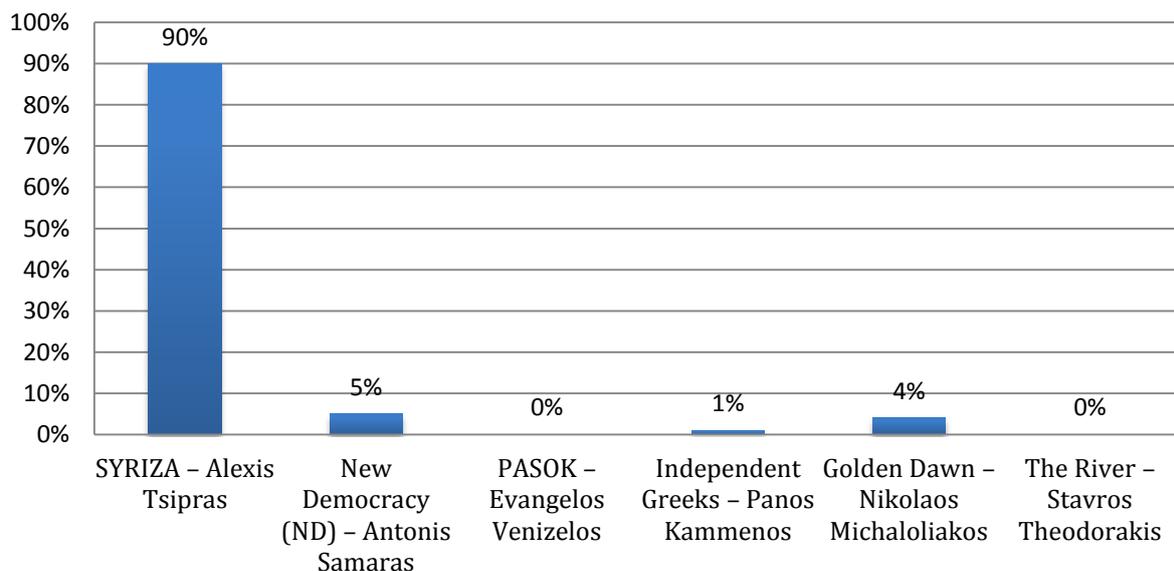
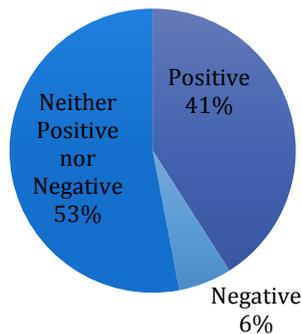


Figure 10

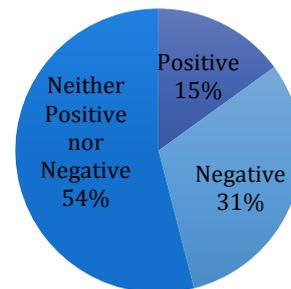
Attitudes towards key political figures

Participants were asked about their opinions of the incumbent leadership, New Democracy's Antonis Samaras, versus the challenger, SYRIZA's leader Alexis Tsipras. The participants were asked whether their opinions of both were positive, negative, or neither, and then they were asked to elaborate on their choice. As Figures 11 and 12 demonstrate, more than 50% of respondents answered that they had neither a positive nor negative opinion of both leaders. This finding is very interesting since it reveals that Balkan opinion makers are generally quite skeptical, or at best uncertain, about both left and right leadership in Greece. However, among those who answered positively or negatively, there was a considerable difference. 41% had a positive opinion of Tsipras, while only 15% had a positive opinion of Samaras. On the other hand, just 6% of the respondents answered that their opinion of Tsipras was negative, while 31% responded with a negative opinion of Samaras. Thus, overall, when it comes to positive and negative opinions, Tsipras is clearly more popular than Samaras.

Your opinion of Alexis Tsipras is:



Your opinion of Antonis Samaras is:



Figures 11 & 12

How is one to account for the fact that more than half of respondents were uncertain about both Greek politicians? Quite a few of those who answered with neither a positive or negative view noted that they simply were not familiar enough with the two politicians to make an informed conclusion. Moreover, a tentative hypothesis that we can make here is that Balkan opinion makers have somewhat unfavorable opinion about Greek politics in general, likely drawn from Greece's past entanglement in the region, which is extended also to Greek political personnel. Likely this attitude is also influenced by specific perceived characteristics of the two political leaders, which, as we will see below, exist in opinion makers' minds.

With regards to Tsipras specifically, some referred to the fact that he was a fairly unknown quantity, and that January was too early to give an informed opinion about him. Positive opinions saw Tsipras as a dynamics new figure who can recalibrate Greek politics. As one participant put it, 'Mr. Tsipras is young, dynamic, and as it seems to me, eager to serve his country to overcome the economic and social crisis.' Yet other were

“Samaras has been offering a steady course of painful reforms, one that is always doomed to be unpopular regardless of its proponents. However, it is reasonable to assume he was doing it in good faith, and perhaps it would eventually have worked.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

optimistic about Tsipras because he does not belong to the Greek political establishment. On the other hand, some participants express hesitancy due to his populist approach, noting that promises of ‘quick fix’ solutions were unsustainable and unlikely to succeed, and his election could create widespread instability. With regards to Samaras, negative opinions of him were linked to the FYROM name issue and intransigence in negotiations as well as

his policies during the current Greek crisis. Positive comments about Samaras related to his pro-European stance and general experience in politics.

“Tsipras offers a fresh perspective. But no one is quite sure what that perspective actually entails, and how “fresh” it really is. Certainly, a leader who rose that quickly is a force to be reckoned with, and he will show his true colours sooner rather than later.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Samaras is a symbol of the nationalist discourse that ignores the neighbours and endorses the politics of the 1990s. Tsipras is a symbol of a new emerging energy for radical restructuring of the old fashioned policies that lack results.”

Opinion maker from the FYR Macedonia

Attitudes towards the new SYRIZA-led government

Questions then shifted towards a more definite focus on SYRIZA and the perceptions of Balkan opinion makers on what a SYRIZA election victory might mean for Southeast Europe. The first of these questions asked respondents how well-informed they felt about the party in general. As shown in Figure 13, 74% indicated that they were somewhat informed, with 22% very well informed and just 4% not at all informed. This data implies that, regardless of whether media coverage was positive or negative, opinion makers have become aware of SYRIZA in light of the recent elections.

How well-informed are you about SYRIZA?

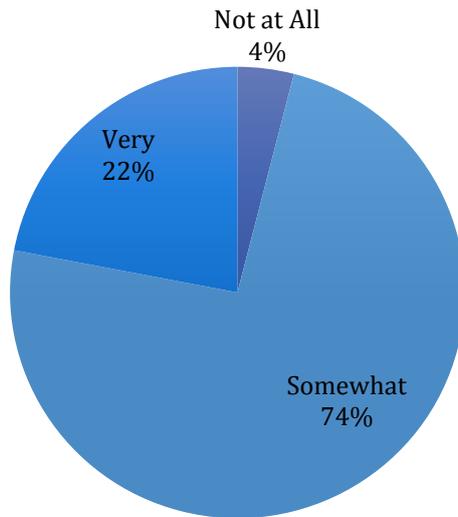


Figure 13

Furthermore, participants were specifically asked about the media coverage of SYRIZA and its leader Alexis Tsipras in their respective country, and whether this coverage was positive, negative or neutral (Figure 14). More specifically, 34% of respondents noted that the coverage of SYRIZA and Tsipras was neither positive nor negative, while 43% believed the coverage was positive. 23% of participants thought media had represented SYRIZA and Tsipras in a negative light. Thus, on average the media coverage of SYRIZA and Tsipras was rather positive.

How has the media in your country represented SYRIZA and its leader, Alexis Tsipras?

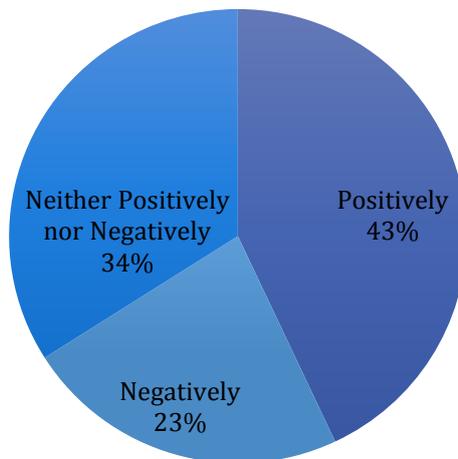


Figure 14

In order to find out more specifics about the opinion makers' knowledge of SYRIZA and its policies, the participants were asked how well informed they felt about SYRIZA's position in a number of different areas, including economy, foreign policy and domestic policies. The findings from this question, seen in Figure 15, indicate that participants were much better informed about economic issues, less about foreign policy, and even less about domestic policy. More specifically, the data shows that the vast majority is either very well informed (45%) or somewhat informed (53%) about SYRIZA's economic policy, with only a 2% of respondents being uninformed about the same. On foreign policy issues, 17% felt very well informed, while 63% felt somewhat informed, with the remainder (20%) not at all informed. On domestic issues, on the other hand, just 17% felt well informed with 55% somewhat informed, and 29% not at all informed.

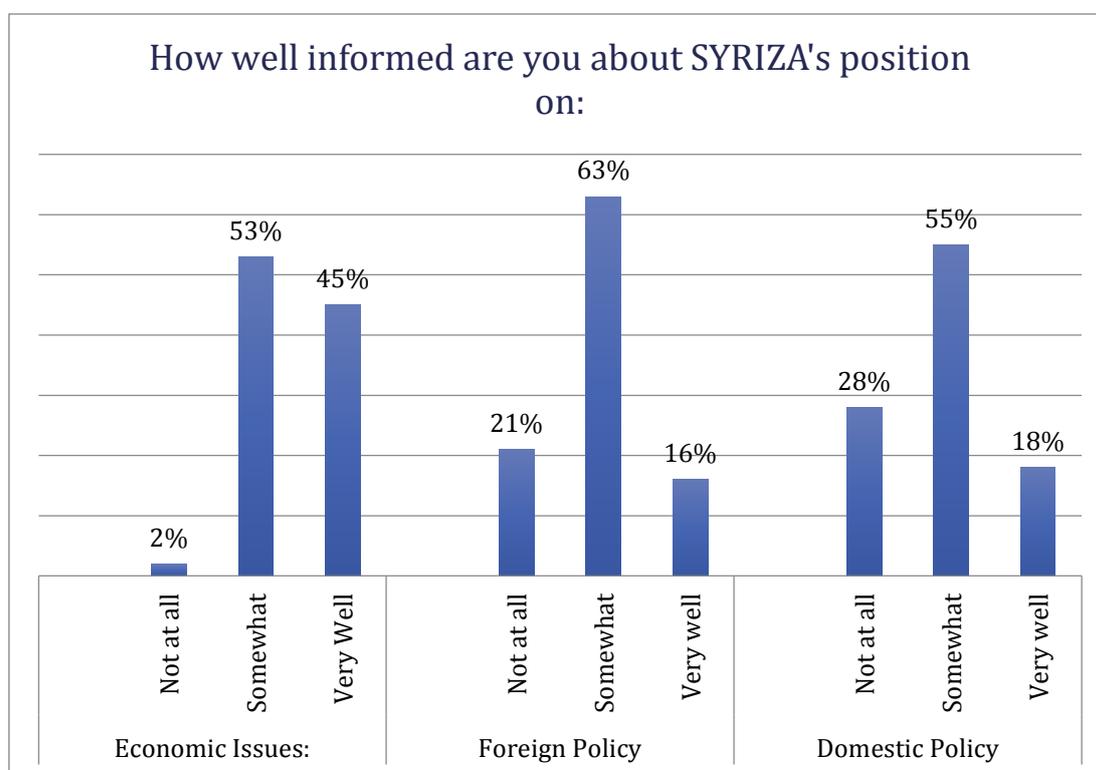


Figure 15

The government that was elected in the January elections was not a simple majority headed by SYRIZA, but ended up as a coalition between SYRIZA and right wing Independent Greeks (ANEL). The survey so far has established that a significant amount of media attention had been focused on SYRIZA, but the participants were also asked how well informed they were about SYRIZA's junior coalition partner. As shown in Figure 16, respondents knew much less about ANEL: only 8% of respondents were well informed, 46% felt somewhat informed and 46% not at all informed.

How well-informed are you about SYRIZA's junior coalition partner, Independent Greeks?

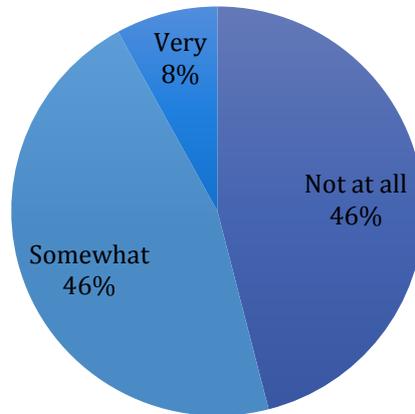


Figure 16

In the same vein, participants were asked how influential they believed the Independent Greeks might be on the new government's foreign policy positions (see Figure 17). The majority of respondents, 70%, believed they would be somewhat influential, but more than a quarter (26%) thought they would not be influential at all. Just 4% believed ANEL would be very influential on the new government's foreign policy positions. It's worth noting here that ANEL's leader became the Minister of Defence in the new government and that ANEL traditionally has strong and quite uncompromising views on foreign policy issues (also called 'national issues' in Greece).

How influential do you believe SYRIZA's coalition partner, Independent Greeks, will be on the new government's foreign policy positions?

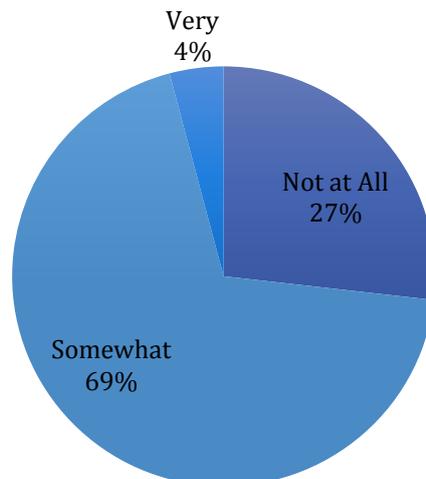


Figure 17

Views of implications for the Balkans

Survey respondents were then asked about their specific expectations of a SYRIZA-led government. They questions focused on different issues, and the participants chose whether they believed the new government would have a positive, negative, or neutral impact on those issues (see Figure 18). For the most part, around half of the respondents believed that a SYRIZA-led government would have a minimal impact on all the issues that were given as choices, but the specific reasons participants gave for the choices were revealing. The first issue was **Europeanisation/EU Enlargement Prospects for Balkan countries**, and respondents were neatly divided between 26% who believed a SYRIZA-led government would have a positive impact on the process, 26% believed the impact would be negative, and 48% believed chose ‘neither.’

“EU Enlargement has never been contingent on any particular national government, least of all the Greek one. SYRIZA is “doomed” to be cooperative in the Balkans, because its “near abroad” offers the sole (partly) viable alternative to the EU dictate it apparently wants to avoid.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

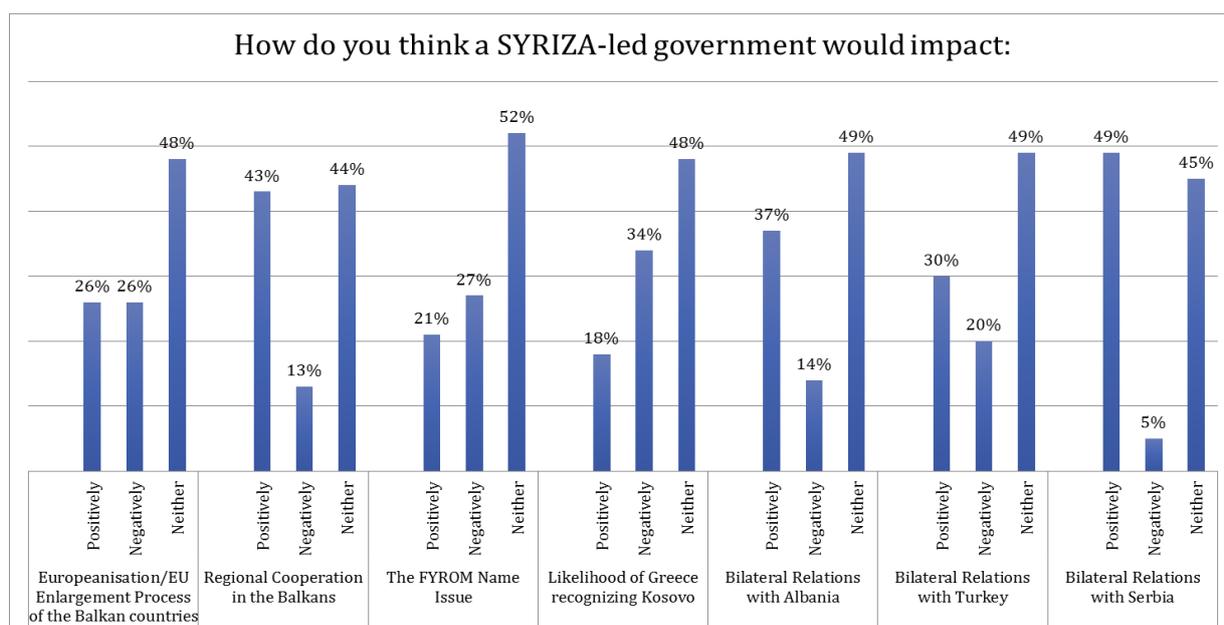


Figure 18

The next issue participants were asked to comment on was SYRIZA-led government’s likely impact on **regional cooperation in the Balkans**. The general outlook is positive: 44% thought the impact would be positive and another 44% that there would be no impact. Those who chose no impact cited as explanation Greece’s domestic problems, while those who expressed optimism stressed the ‘chance for a fresh start’. Others respondents pointed out concern that SYRIZA’s coalition partner ANEL may temper the potential for positive developments in regional cooperation.

“I think the government has its plate full with internal political, social and first of all financial issues. Thus, not because of its composition, but mainly because of the timing, I expect [that] the new government will not have a major impact on foreign policy issues.”

Opinion maker from Kosovo

“This is a proper time and an opportunity for Greece to make a great reshuffle of the old policies and politics. A chance for a fresh start. The signals given from a leftist political party ambitious to make an impact in the whole South Europe must generally have a positive impact. However, there is a jeopardy of disappointment if they leave these issues for the minor government partner-ANEL or they fail to deliver a change as a result of the pressure over the economic issues.”

Opinion maker from the FYR Macedonia

“I think that it can positively influence the regional cooperation and EU enlargement for at least two reasons: even if negatively perceived by the EU, precisely that can shift focus from un-loyal Greece to the Balkan countries still more eager to join the EU, and looking at the Union as the promised land.

On the other hand, the shift of Greece from the EU should naturally re-direct its interests to the countries from the region, although, I believe that, due to the troubled economy and very ambitious economic programme, Greece under SYRIZA will not be to the large extent oriented towards foreign policy goals.”

Opinion maker from Montenegro

“It is crucial to point out that SYRIZA is in a coalition with a right wing, national populist and conservative party that might not be supportive with regards to the...[name issue].”

Opinion maker from Albania

“As for Macedonia, after the stalemate with Samaras, any move will be positive.”

Opinion maker from the FYR Macedonia

In terms of the **name dispute with FYROM**, 52% of respondents believe the issue will not see much substantive change, and 27% believe a SYRIZA-led government will negatively affect the issue. 21% believed the opposite. Thus, it seems that there is a balance between positive and negative opinions, but the clear majority foresees no change whatsoever. SYRIZA’s coalition partner ANEL was generally considered key to the potential negative impact on the name issue.

With regards to the **likelihood of Greece recognizing Kosovo**, nearly half of respondents (48%) believed that the issue would not be impacted by a SYRIZA-led government, while 34% believe that such a government will have a negative impact on the issue. The option of a positive impact on the recognition question attracted very few responses. Again, the ANEL seems to be the main reason participants anticipate possibly negative developments, as ‘the coalition partner's policies will put limits on policy.’

“I'm still not entirely clear what SYRIZA's stance on Albania & Kosovo is to give a clear answer. However, I do worry that radical politicians make radical choices and offer hard-line simple solutions to complicated issues”.

Opinion maker from Albania

Survey participants were more optimistic in terms of expectations of the **relationship between Greece and Albania**. 37% believed a SYRIZA-led government would bring positive developments, with just 14% believing the opposite, and 49% expecting no change. An interesting comment by a respondent from FYROM stressed that there would be a ‘passive approach’ towards Albania, while a respondent from Albania noted the lack of coherent regional policy and the danger of populism in times of domestic uncertainty, which could create problems in bilateral relations with Greece’s neighbours.

With regards to **relations with Turkey**, 49% of survey respondents believed that relations with Turkey would remain unchanged, while 30% hoped for a positive impact and 20% foresaw a negative impact with the election of a SYRIZA-led government. One respondent noted ‘I see no reason why SYRIZA should not want to play a generally positive role,’ but it seems many believe that domestic concerns will dominate any possible change in bilateral relations.

Finally, with regards to **relations with Serbia**, the picture is more optimistic. 49% expect a positive impact in relations between the two countries, while 45% expect no change. Expectations of negative impact are almost non-existent. The explanation ‘historic friendship’ between the two countries was often cited by respondents for justifying their position.

Views on implications for Greece’s bilateral relations with Balkan countries

Respondents were asked whether they believed that a SYRIZA-led government would improve Greek diplomatic relations with their respective countries. As figure 19 shows, the general response (65%) was negative and thus most respondents do not feel that governmental change in Greece would improve the picture in bilateral relations with their countries. There is, however, a 35% of respondents who feel that bilateral relations will improve. It’s interesting to compare this finding with the 61% (see above) who feel

that Greece will be more active in the region in the future. We can draw the conclusion that the majority of respondents expect a more active Greek diplomacy but do not think that this activism will contribute to resolution of bilateral disputes or the improvement of bilateral diplomatic relations.

Do you think that a SYRIZA-led government will improve Greek diplomatic relations with your country?

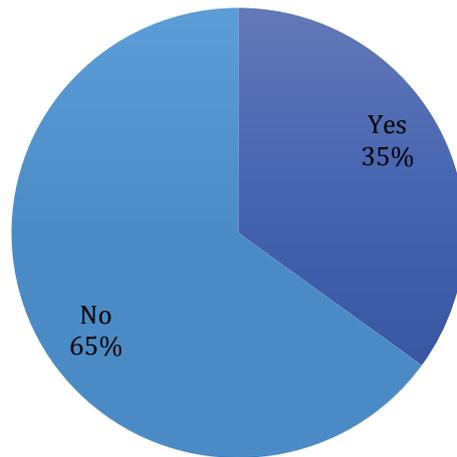


Figure 19

The following were some of the opinions expressed on the issue of bilateral relations with opinion makers' respective countries:

"Serbian government has neoliberal ideology and are doing everything "troika" orders them, so they already started showing animosity in their statements towards new Greek government."

Opinion maker from Serbia

"Both governments are currently formed by a leftist party and our economic situation is sadly very similar, so Croatia will have its eyes on Greek solutions. I believe the ties between two countries will be closer."

Opinion maker from Croatia

"Relations between Greece and Kosovo are often characterised as 'the best they could be' given the fact that Greece hasn't recognised Kosovo's independence. I don't agree. Thus, while I am quite sure that a formal recognition will not be of a high priority for the Tsipras government, I think there's quite some room for improving and expanding current relations."

Opinion maker from Kosovo

“To re-start bilateral meetings on high level and hopefully engage more constructively in resolving the name dispute”

“Abandoning of the nationalist and underestimating attitude endorsed by Samaras.”

“Opening the floor for negotiations over the name dispute with this or some future Government of Macedonia/FYROM.”

“Sending positive signals to the business and civil society of Macedonia regardless the nationalistic discourse of Gruevski's Government.”

Various opinion makers from the FYR Macedonia

“I think Greece does not view Bosnia as a relevant partner, regardless of the political faction that's leading Greece. As far as I can notice, there aren't enough symbolical, political or any other connectors to make Bosnia relevant to Greece and vice versa.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

“The political orientation of current leaderships of the two countries are opposite. Romania's is widely pro-Atlantic and anti-Russian, while SYRIZA's are pro-Russian and anti-US.”

Opinion maker from Romania

“The correct option is: there will be no changes. Our governments have two parallel priorities. Greece is facing economic challenges and a new role of Greece in the euro zone. Albania seeks political and economic stability, and a stronger partnership with the EU, as well as benefit from the new German role in the region. Issues between governments, such like border problem, the Cham problem, the problem of Kosovo, etc., do not believe that will take solutions or to mark important steps during the current term.”

Opinion maker from Albania

Views on implications for Greece's foreign policy beyond the Balkans

The survey also focused on participants' expectations of Greece's foreign policy agenda beyond the Balkan problems, and how it might change under the new SYRIZA-led government. The first question asked was about **Greece's role within NATO**. This was an interesting question given that SYRIZA, while in opposition, maintained a lukewarm, or even at times hostile, attitude towards the Alliance. As seen in Figure 20, 51% of respondents anticipate that the new government will have a negative effect on Greece's role within NATO, while 37% anticipate no effect. Just 12% believe the effect will be positive.

How might a SYRIZA-led government affect Greece's role within NATO?

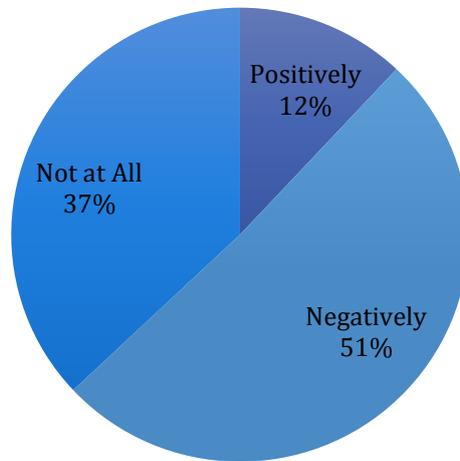


Figure 20

It seems that many of the respondents were familiar with SYRIZA’s position on NATO, as one participant from Croatia noted, ‘As far as I know, SYRIZA has some issues with some of NATO’s positions.’ Several observers appeared worried about the consequences of SYRIZA’s stance on NATO. For example, a respondent from Bosnia and Herzegovina mentioned: ‘Apparently SYRIZA plays on anti-NATO sentiments, long seething in Greek society. Should it translate in concrete policy moves, it might have broad consequences.’ While another added, ‘Tsipras seems to be climbing into bed with Putin.’ Unsurprisingly, given Albania’s staunch pro-NATO position, critical views were expressed by Albanian opinion makers. Albanian media gave quite negative coverage of SYRIZA’s pro-Russian stances. And one Albanian observer stressed that if the new Greek government is critical towards Western measures against Russia this will create problems and distrust between Athens and Allies. Finally, opinion makers from FYROM emphasised in their responses Greece’s stance on Skopje’s NATO entry.

“From the perspective of NATO, SYRIZA’s somewhat pro-Russian views are a concern. All the same, Greece has traditionally maintained good relations with Moscow so a major change is perhaps unlikely. Nevertheless, given the war in Ukraine, ostensibly pro-Russia governments in Europe will be under greater scrutiny.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Leftist parties, by definition, have negative approach towards military alliances. However, Greece will continue to be the only obstruction for further enlargement (having in mind Macedonia and the Greek position state to become NATO member). This is a good enough proof for its negative role.”

Opinion maker from the FYR Macedonia

Participants were also asked if they believe Greece will play a more active role in the **resolution of the crisis in Ukraine**, now that a SYRIZA-led government has come to power. A significant portion of respondents answered ‘don’t know’ (38%), while 54% responded negatively (Figure 21). Some noted, ‘As in some previous answers, I don’t think that SYRIZA will place foreign policy at the top of its priorities.’ Others observed that Greece doesn’t have the capacity to become heavily involved, even if it wanted to.

Do you think Greece will play a more active role in the resolution of the crisis in Ukraine, now that a SYRIZA government has come to power?

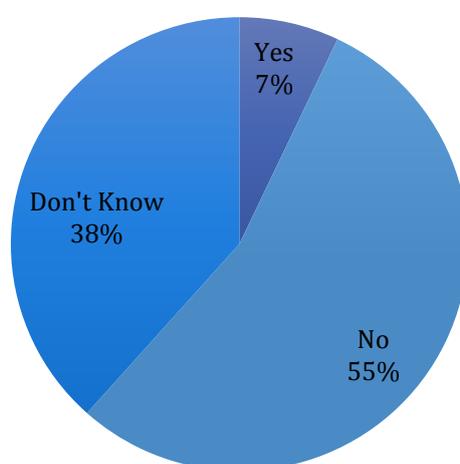


Figure 21

When asked about whether SYRIZA-led government will change **Greece’s position on the Syrian war**, 59% of respondents responded that they do not know, 33% responded negatively and only 9% responded positively.

“I think that the new government will try to provide better humanitarian aid to asylum seekers and refugees from Syria. So, their position will be much better compared to the last government.”

Opinion maker from Serbia

Finally, participants were also asked if they believed the new government would lead to closer **relations between Greece and Israel**. That was an interesting question to ask given the fact that Greek governments in recent years have strengthened links with Israel, while SYRIZA, while in opposition, has been very critical on Israel and particularly supportive of the Palestinian cause. A majority of respondents (70%), as seen in Figure

22, did not feel well enough informed to respond, while 24% answered no and 4% yes. As with previous questions, some participants noted that Greece will be busy with domestic problems, but one Bulgarian respondent also noted, ‘A coherent foreign policy vision yet to emerge.’ Respondents from Croatia answered, ‘SYRIZA has issues with Israel’s use of force and has expressed negative views on its policies in the past,’ and ‘No, although if Greece feels left out, there may be a possibility for Greece seeking stronger partnerships elsewhere. Also, the energy issue may play a part in the two countries closer cooperation.’ Bosnia participants also expressed an opinion, noting, ‘I understand SYRIZA’s position on the conflict in the region to be broadly pro-Palestinian,’ and ‘Not sure of Tsipras’ views on Israel - like all left-wing politicians though, probably anti-Zionist, bordering on Anti-Semitic...’

In your opinion, will the SYRIZA-led government lead to closer relations between Greece and Israel?

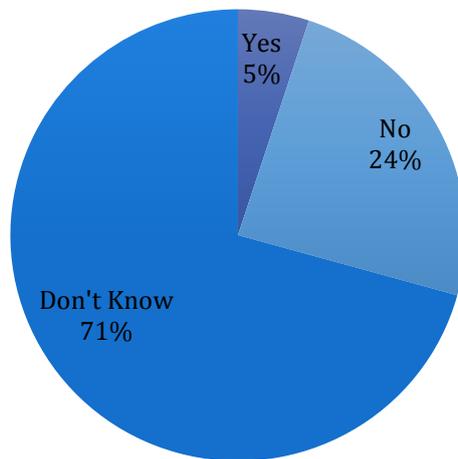


Figure 22

Views on implications for social and leftist agenda

Next, survey participants were asked whether they believed that the rise of SYRIZA, as a radical left party, could be a blueprint for similar movements in other Balkan countries. Interestingly, the responses to this question were split exactly 50-50, as seen in Figure 23. Moreover, there was not a clear division among participants’ country of origin.

Do you think the rise of SYRIZA, as a radical-left party, could be a blueprint for similar movements in other Balkan countries?

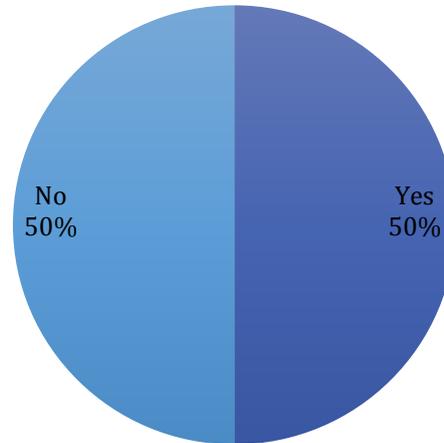


Figure 23

Interesting elaborations were provided by respondents who saw SYRIZA as a blueprint for similar movements in the Balkans:

“A newspaper title day after the elections in my country was “Do we have a Tsipras?”. That says a lot about how high the expectations are from the new Greek government. Our government is also a coalition led by a leftist party, but one which has been, according to the popular opinion, too close to the centre and more capitalist than socialist. SYRIZA could be an incentive for other leftist parties to strengthen as well as making already strong leftist parties to stand their ground and gain popularity.”

Opinion maker from Croatia

“The societies of the Balkans are quite frustrated and economic policies are one of the sources of this frustration. There’s already a growing trend of radical leftism throughout the Balkans. In some cases, like Kosovo, this is instrumentalised through a political entity (Vetevendosje). In other cases, particularly in Serbia, Macedonia (FYR) and Bosnia and Herzegovina it still remains informal.”

Opinion maker from Kosovo

“The inspiration about radically left programme that undermines the basics of the current system is very high. SYRIZA has demonstrated that it is possible to win the elections with such a manifesto. The crisis has dominated in all the Balkan countries so the ground is fertile for dissemination of such energy.”

Opinion maker from the FYR Macedonia

“A). The masses all over the Balkans share the same resentment that propelled SYRIZA to power. Only the degree and reach may differ. So some “SYRIZA” clones will probably grow to take a chance with governance, while others will likely remain the butt of a regional joke. B). Emulating has been the favourite sport in the Balkans for some 200 years now.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Lots of sympathy for SYRIZA can already be heard in Serbia, for example, coming also from the political parties and leaders looking for the catchy and motivating mottos and figures. However, this will depend on the actual ‘success’ of SYRIZA to actually deliver on what they promised and which is, I believe, unrealistic.”

Opinion maker from Serbia

The arguments of those not believing that SYRIZA can become a model for the region are also interesting:

“The political environment from Greece is different from other Balkan countries, which are in the phase of post-communism. It is more similar with that of Southern Europe.”

Opinion maker from Romania

“Only maybe in the long term it can have such effect, but, currently, left and right divisions in the Balkans have been blurred by the national identity issues, facing the past and Europeanisation agenda which diminishes the influence of domestic bottom-up initiatives in politics and economy.”

Opinion maker from Montenegro

“There aren’t big movements that can be classified as radical leftist in other countries of the Balkans. In Albania, there is a centre-left party in power. In Kosovo there is only one party that can be classified as centre-left. So, in the near future, I don’t see any possibility that other countries of the Balkans will follow the Greek example.”

Opinion maker from Kosovo

“Although there is quite substantial historical background (socialism, communism) to be like that, I don’t think there is critical mass in other Balkan countries for creation of such movements, neither the economic situation is so bad to provoke mass mobilisation for change.”

Opinion maker from the FYR Macedonia

Next, participants were asked a similar question, but with reference to a European left. More specifically, respondents were asked whether SYRIZA would help the rise of the European left. The responses to this question leaned significantly towards the positive side, as seen in Figure 24, with 61% of respondents answered that the rise of a European left was ‘somewhat likely’ and 31% believed it was ‘very likely.’ Just 7% thought there was no prospect for the rise of a European left, after SYRIZA’s coming to power in Greece.

In your opinion, what are the prospects for the rise of a European left now that SYRIZA has come to power in Greece?

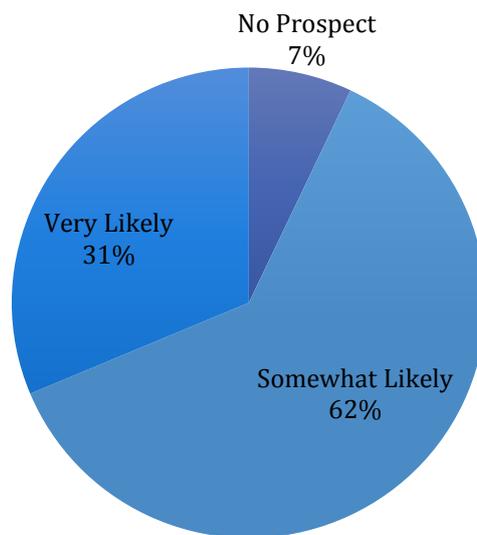


Figure 24

The written responses were more sobering in tone:

“I don’t see a Europe-wide rise of radical left. But if Podemos’ showing later this year is as impressive as the polls suggest, we may see in the coming years an archipelago of such movements, mainly in the south, leaving a significant mark on how politics is conducted in Europe.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Promise for social policy is positive, but keeping promises for finding new financial resources and employment growth and investment is a very difficult challenge.”

Opinion maker from Albania

“Everyone will want to escape from austerity, does not want to pay back debt or make difficult choices in cutting deficits. They prefer the escapism of the left or the racism/othering of the right.”

Opinion maker from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Conclusion

Overall, this timely survey captured opinions and perceptions at a crucial moment of change for Greece and the Southeast Europe neighbourhood. The survey reveals that opinion makers throughout the region believed the January 2015 elections to have the potential for broader regional impact, in a number of different areas. The survey also provided some interesting conclusions about the efficacy of Greek foreign policy in Southeast Europe over the past two decades. The general picture was positive, but an interesting figure emerged that showed the opinion makers that were surveyed seemed to favour the three PASOK governments rather than any New Democracy leadership. Opinions about the future of a SYRIZA-led government were also revealing, demonstrating general optimism in regional relationships, though the majority of respondents did not expect that the new government would significantly improve diplomatic relations with their respective countries. The respondents also noted a general unawareness about the actual positions of SYRIZA's junior coalition partner, ANEL, while those who were familiar with the party expressed concern about its possible influence on SYRIZA's potential to effect change. There was also slight optimism toward SYRIZA's potential to influence similar left wing developments in Southeast Europe and in Europe more broadly. On the other hand, there was uncertainty about the possible developments in the relationship between SYRIZA and the European Union, raising concerns in the Balkans that there might be cause for instability. In general, many respondents noted that SYRIZA's potential to impact meaningful change in the region would by necessity be limited due to domestic concerns, despite general feelings of optimism.

General Conclusions

Taken together, the media analysis and the opinion maker survey confirm similar conclusions. They both tell us that, at a basic level, the January 2015 Greek elections received significant attention in Southeast Europe. Beyond this, both also reveal that SYRIZA received considerable positive coverage in the region, tempered by a degree of uncertainty. Both media reports and the online survey showed that although there was optimism about the potential a SYRIZA-led government might have to enact positive change beyond Greece, most media reports did not specify SYRIZA's foreign policy positions, and the opinion makers who were surveyed noted that in many cases they hoped for positive developments, but were not familiar enough with SYRIZA's position to make an informed judgement. Both pieces of research also pointed to an underlying uneasiness about the effects that SYRIZA might have on Greece's relationship with the European Union, and the possible implications this might have for the EU Accession perspective of the region. In the same vein, concerns about SYRIZA's anti-NATO stance and apparent pro-Russian leanings were raised in media and in the survey, especially in areas like Albania that are historically very pro-Western. In addition, both pieces revealed concern about the potential right wing influence of ANEL, SYRIZA's junior coalition partner, even though not much was generally known about the party beyond its nationalist and populist orientation. There was a fairly even balance in terms of neutral media coverage, from the first part of the report, and neutral opinions of both Alexis Tsipras and Antonis Samaras. There were a number of opinion makers who noted that they did not have enough specific information about past Greek government policies or leaders to effectively assess the efficacy of previous governments, but 68% of respondents believed Greek diplomacy had been somewhat active in the region in the last two decades. In general terms, most respondents believed Greece would be more active in the region in the future.

Appendix I: Survey Methodology

In defining the sample set for the survey, the main factor considered was professional affiliation. The goal of the survey was to collect responses from key Balkan opinion makers, so the survey was sent to journalists, researchers, and those working for NGOs or advocacy groups. We did not share the survey with state officials, politicians and diplomats in order to avoid ‘official’ positions and better understand the civil society position. The respondents were balanced across different professional areas within this categorisation, and the sample had a broad age range.

We received a total of 117 complete responses, between February and March 2015. The goal of the survey was not to attain a statistically representative sample, but rather to get insights and understand the trends among Southeast European opinion makers. The respondents did represent a broad balance across the countries of Southeast Europe, and their responses provide us with a useful starting point for further analysis and discussion.

The survey same itself consisted primarily of individuals between the ages of 27-39 (56%), followed by individuals between 40-59 (36%) (see Table 1). This implies that the individuals who responded to the survey have likely reached a relatively high level of education, and are likely connected with the Internet as a source of international news, which contributes to their knowledge about Greece and its foreign policy, pre- and post-election.

Age	
18-26	4%
27-39	56%
40-59	36%
60+	4%

Table 1

With regards to the survey’s gender distribution (see Table 2), two thirds of the respondents were male.

Gender	
Male	66%
Female	34%

Table 2

The professional affiliation of the respondents indicates a fairly general balance among different groups of opinion makers (see Table 3). From the responses that were collected, individuals from a think tank or research centers, Media and NGOs/Advocacy Groups made up roughly one quarter respectively. University-affiliated opinion makers

and those with other similar affiliations made of the rest of the sample. We should clarify that by the term “research centre” we refer to institutions and foundations that focus on politics and political research.

Institutional Affiliation	
University	18%
Think Tank/Research Centre	24%
NGO/Advocacy Group	23%
Media	24%
Other	10%

Table 3

Finally, we hoped to achieve a relatively balanced sample size by country, and thus sent the online survey to opinion makers from throughout Southeast Europe. The completed surveys that we received (see Table 4), did provide representation from each country in the region, with a concentration on the Western Balkans, and then a further concentration on those countries that have yet to join the European Union. We did also include responses from individuals originating from Southeast Europe but working outside the region, as long as their area of focus was closely linked to Balkan politics.

Country Breakdown	
Albania	23
Bosnia-Herzegovina	26
Bulgaria	6
Croatia	5
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	12
Kosovo	10
Montenegro	4
Romania	1
Serbia	28
Slovenia	2
Total	117

Table 4

Appendix II: Online Survey

Greek Foreign Policy in the Balkans

A Survey of Regional Expectations

Personal Information

1) Name

2) Organisation and Title

3) City

4) Country

5) Email

6) Gender	
Male	
Female	

7) Age	
18-26	
27-39	
40-59	
60+	

8) Institution	
University	
Think Tank/Research Centre	
NGO/Advocacy Group	
Media	
Other (Please Specify)	

9) How familiar are you with Greek politics?	
Very familiar	
Somewhat familiar	
Not at all familiar	

General Greek Foreign Policy in the Balkans

10) How would you rate Greek diplomacy in the Balkans over the last two decades?			
Not at all active	Somewhat active	Very Active	Please explain your choice:

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11) In which of the following sectors has Greece been most involved in the Balkans? (Please choose up to three options)	
Politics	
Economics	
Business	
Energy	
Culture	
Other (Please Specify)	

Please explain your choice

12) Has Greece played a more positive role in the Balkans in the past or in the present?	
Past	
Present	

13) In your opinion, under which of the following governments has Greek foreign policy in the Balkans been most successful?	
The government of Konstantinos Mitsotakis (April 1990 - October 1993) (New Democracy)	
The government of Andreas Papandreou (October 1993 - January 1996) (PASOK)	
The government of Konstantinos Simitis (September 1996 - March 2004) (PASOK)	
The government of Konstantinos A. Karamanlis (March 2004 - October 2009) (New Democracy)	

The government of George A. Papandreou (October 2009 - November 2011) (PASOK)	
The government of Antonis Samaras (June 2012 - January 2015) (New Democracy)	
Don't know	

Please explain your choice

14) Do you expect Greece to play a more active role in the Balkans in the future?	
Yes	
No	

Please explain why

Greek Parliamentary Elections, January 2015

15) Was there extensive media coverage of the recent Greek parliamentary elections in your country?	
Yes	
No	

If so, was the coverage positive or negative?	
Positive	
Negative	
Neither positive nor negative	

Please explain your answer	

16) Did media coverage focus on:	
Economic Issues, such as the Eurozone Crisis	
Foreign Policy Issues	
Leadership qualities of various parties or individuals	
Domestic Issues	

17) Your opinion of Alexis Tsipras is:	
Positive	
Negative	
Neither positive nor negative	

Your opinion of Antonis Samaras is:	
Positive	
Negative	
Neither positive nor Negative	

Please explain why	

18) Regarding the recent elections, which Greek political party has enjoyed the most media coverage in your country?	
SYRIZA – Alexis Tsipras	

New Democracy (ND) – Antonis Samaras	
PASOK – Evangelos Venizelos	
Independent Greeks – Panos Kammenos	
Golden Dawn – Nikolaos Michaloliakos	
The River – Stavros Theodorakis	

Has this coverage been:	
Positive	
Negative	
Neither positive nor negative	

SYRIZA-led Government

19) How well-informed are you about the party SYRIZA?		
Not at all Informed	Somewhat Informed	Very well Informed

How has the media in your country represented SYRIZA and its leader, Alexis Tsipras?	
Positively	
Negatively	
Neither positively nor negatively	

20) How well informed are you about SYRIZA's position on:			
	Not at all Informed	Somewhat Informed	Very Well Informed

Economic Issues			
Foreign Policy Issues			
Domestic Policy Issues			

21) How well-informed are you about SYRIZA's junior coalition partner, Independent Greeks (ANEL)?		
Not at all Informed	Somewhat Informed	Very well informed

22) How do you think a SYRIZA-led government would impact:			
	Positively	Negatively	Neither Positively nor Negatively
The Europeanisation/EU Enlargement Process of the Balkan countries			
Regional Cooperation in the Balkans			
The Dispute over the name of FYROM			
Likelihood of Greece recognizing Kosovo			
Bilateral Relations with Albania			
Bilateral Relations with Turkey			
Bilateral Relations with Serbia			

Please explain your choices

23) How influential do you believe SYRIZA's coalition partner, Independent Greeks, will be on the new government's foreign policy positions?

Not all Influential	Somewhat Influential	Very influential

24) Do you think the rise of SYRIZA, as a radical-left party, could be a blueprint for similar movements in other Balkan countries?	
Yes	
No	

If yes, please specify why

25) In your opinion, what are the prospects for the rise of a European left now that SYRIZA has come to power in Greece?			
No prospect at all	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Comments:

26) Do you think that a SYRIZA-led government will improve Greek diplomatic relations with your country?	
Yes	
No	

If yes, please specify why and in which field you expect this improvement:

27) How might a SYRIZA-led government affect Greece's role within NATO?	
Positively	
Negatively	

Not at all	
------------	--

Please explain your choice:

28) Do you think Greece will play a more active role in the resolution of the crisis in Ukraine, now that a SYRIZA government has come to power?	
Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please explain why

29) In your opinion, will the SYRIZA-led government lead to closer relations between Greece and Israel?	
Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please explain why

30) Do you believe Greece's position on and involvement in the Syrian Civil War will change under a SYRIZA-led government?	
Yes	

No	
Don't know	

Please explain why and how