

Back with a mandate

Tsipras rewards loyalty in cabinet and seeks a way forward

By **Panos N. Polyzoidis**

With last week's election result, Alexis Tsipras reasserted his political dominance. By defying opinion polls and defeating his political opponents - he now has the leeway of a full four-year term in government to lead the country through its economic odyssey.

Voters have given left-wing Syriza and its right-wing coalition partner, the Independent Greeks, a second chance, returning them to power with marginal losses. Tsipras' negotiating tactics with the nation's creditors seem to have paid off; the electorate appears fatigued with parties they consider to be the political old guard.

Last Sunday's general election hopefully marked the end of the 'bailout vs anti-bailout' debate in Greece. Anti-austerity parties received only 16% of the votes and are represented in the House with just 34 seats out of 300.

Notably, the radical leftist faction that defected from Syriza to create the breakaway Popular Unity party failed to cross the 3% threshold and as a result has no parliamentary presence.

In forming his new cabinet, Tsipras paid tribute to those who stood by him during the turmoil recent months, ensuring that the team that concluded the negotiation with the creditors maintains the crucial posts



A group shot of Alexis Tsipras, and his cabinet

relating to the implementation of the deal.

Austerity backtrack?

In doing so, he has safeguarded good communications with Brussels and Washington - but reform ownership could still resurface as an issue. Syriza won the ballot by convincing those hardest hit by austerity that it can offer them the best possible protection and alleviate some of the most painful provisions of the agreement his own administration signed.

Critics say that Tsipras' pledge hints that he plans

to undermine the core of the programme he passed through Parliament but publicly disowns; there are concerns as to whether he will enjoy solid support from his party, as a large number of MPs re-elected with Syriza had failed to vote for the deal in the summer and have been voicing objections to some of its key parts.

Embarrassingly, the new cabinet kicked off its life with a resignation just hours after it took office, as a junior minister appointed by the Independent Greeks was forced to resign amidst allegations of anti-Semitic and homophobic comments.

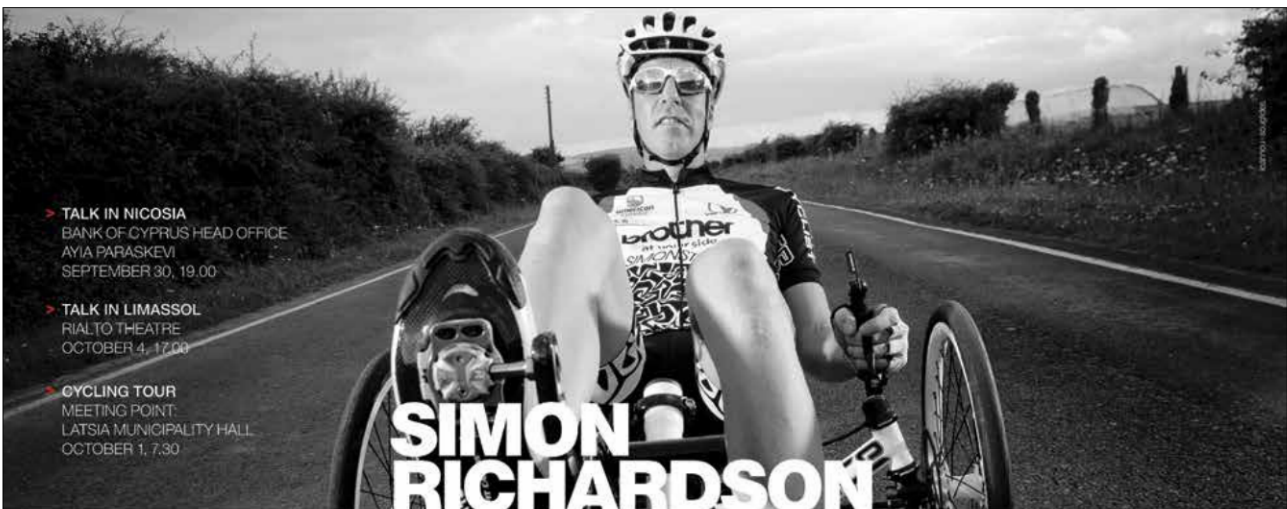
The PM is certain to enjoy some elbowroom with the opposition numbed by its spectacular defeat: ND has already begun the procedure of electing a new leader and developing a new platform and strategy.

But he will not be given a break by creditors or, indeed, the state of the economy.

Brussels will be waiting to see some prior actions implemented in the immediate future in order to release some much-needed chunks of the €86bn in loans over the next few weeks to keep the state afloat and re-capitalise the banks, as capital controls remain in place and keep crippling business.

By the end of the year, Tsipras will have to prove that, besides being a prolific campaigner and election winner, he has the political talent to manoeuvre between the rock of popular discontent with such unpalatable policies as tax hikes and pension restructuring and the hard place of a cash-strapped state saddled by a sluggish economy.

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