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Maja Maksimović

**›Greece returns to the Balkans‹?
Assessing Greece's Western Balkan
Policy under SYRIZA-led Government**

Edited by Ninja Steinbach-Hüther





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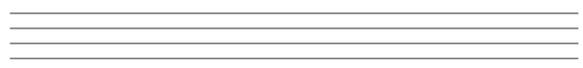
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Preface

In June 2014, the project “Repositioning Greece in a Globalizing World: Transatlantic relations between Africa, the Middle East, Russia and Asia and their meaning for Greece” started as a joint partnership project of the Global and European Studies Institute, University of Leipzig, and the Faculty of Turkish and Modern Asian Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) within the DAAD initiative “Hochschulpartnerschaften mit Griechenland” and coordinated at the Global and European Studies Institute (University of Leipzig), the project is now looking back at two and a half fruitful years during which various research stays and exchanges between German and Greek academics (both senior and junior researchers) have contributed in various ways to an academic climate of mutual enrichment. The research and cooperation has led to a better understanding of the geopolitical changes within Southeastern and Eastern Europe that occurred after the Cold War, being one of many examples for the study of the connections between processes of de- and reterritorialization in global history.

The project focused on Greece and furthermore dealt with different conflict and tension fields at the beginning of the 21st century that Southeastern and Eastern Europe has been confronted with after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Colour Revolutions, and the Arab Spring respectively.

On the whole, it comprised a thematic conference in Leipzig (“The Meaning of Transatlantic Relations between Africa, the Middle East, Russia and Asia” in 2014) and two workshops in Athens (“Global Repositioning with emphasis on Russia and Asia” in 2014 and a twofold workshop on “Greece’s Transatlantic Relations” and the “Preparational Phase of the Final Publication” in 2016) as well as a workshop (“Repositioning In A Globalizing World – The Case of Greece in Comparative Perspective” in 2015) within the broader frame of the XIV. International Summer School of the Graduate School Global and Area Studies “Respatialization of the World – Actors, Moments, Effects” in Leipzig. To this end, the project has advanced academic exchange between many researchers of both countries within an international working environment. Additionally, the project included, among others, doctoral training and initiated 14 research stays funded by the DAAD for young doctoral and post-doctoral scholars from Greece and Germany, who spent one to four weeks in the respective partner country.

As the former coordinator of the project, I am happy to present Maja Maksimović’s working paper in the working paper series of the Graduate Centre Humanities and Social Sciences at the Research Academy Leipzig as a preliminary result of our project. Maksimović’s paper emerged out of her research stay at the Global and European Studies Institute in Leipzig in 2015. Her paper investigates Greece’s Western Balkan policy under the SYRIZA-led government from different perspectives. Sharing one of our reviewer’s remarks, Maksimović is very well informed about internal and external Greek politics; moreover, in a very compelling manner the author not only analyses the SYRIZA Balkan policy but also compares it to its coalition partner ANEL (“Independent Greeks”) while, at the same time, includes the perception that the Balkan states have of SYRIZA.

My thanks go to Adamantios Skordos as one of the members of the German part of the research team who reviewed Maja Maksimović’s paper. I would also like to thank Forrest Kilimnik for his editing work and Brett Spencer for his editing of the English version of the text.

We are now looking forward to the final publication of the project, which includes the texts of both research teams that have emerged during the creative phase of the bilateral project. And while the project officially finishes with the end of this year, it has built bridges for further academic collaboration in the future.

Ninja Steinbach-Hüther
Leipzig, 21. 11. 2016

«Greece returns to the Balkans»?

Assessing Greece's Western Balkan Policy under SYRIZA-led Government

Abstract

This paper explores the question of what have been SYRIZA's foreign policy positions with regards to the Western Balkan region—before and after it came to power—and to what extent it has influenced the Greek Balkan policy in general. Also, it looks into expectations of the SYRIZA-led government among the Western Balkan public and political elites alike, especially after SYRIZA's landmark victory in the January 2015 parliamentary elections. The paper argues that the new government coalition in Greece has not demonstrated any major policy shifts in comparison to the previous Greek governments, trying, instead, to continue foreign policy that was inherited from its predecessors.

About the author

Maja Maksimović is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki where she holds a fellowship from the Hellenic State Scholarships Foundation (IKY). She received her first degree in Law from the University of Belgrade and an MA degree in Southeast European Studies at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Her research focuses on issues of identity, inter-ethnic relations and nationalism in post-conflict societies, primarily in her native Bosnia and Herzegovina. Latest publications: “Unattainable past, unsatisfying present. Yugonostalgia: An omen of a better future?” (*Nationalities Papers*, forthcoming 2016); “Memory and the uses of wartime past in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina: The case of the Bosniak campaign for the October 2013 population census” (*Science and Society: Journal of Political and Moral Theory*, October 2014).

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Introduction

On 25 January 2015, the radical left-wing SYRIZA (*Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras* — Coalition of the Radical Left) won the Greek parliamentary elections, attracting 36.34% of the Greek vote, which translated to 149 seats — two seats short of forming a majority government. This was a great success for SYRIZA and its leader, Alexis Tsipras. Not only has the party considerably increased its electoral base (SYRIZA won 4.60% in 2009, 16.78% in May 2012 and 26.89% in June 2012), but it has also become the first party since the re-introduction of democracy in 1974 to surpass in the electoral race the two parties which have constituted the pillars of the Greek political party system — the centre-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the centre-right New Democracy (ND). Consequently, SYRIZA's rise to power put an end to “one of the most stable two-party systems in Europe” (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014). The victory of SYRIZA has also cemented the replacement of the Greek-style left/right cleavage with an anti-memorandum/pro-memorandum division — a process that started to reconfigure the Greek party system with the bailout agreements (memoranda) in 2010 and 2011 and two ‘earthquake elections’ in 2012 (Dinas and Rori 2013, Tsiaras 2015). It is these newly-established divisions within the Greek political system that made SYRIZA's surprising government coalition with the right-wing party, Independent Greeks (*Anexartitoi Ellines* — ANEL), way more natural and logical, given their populist character and a common anti-memorandum stance (Pappas 2015).

The January 2015 parliamentary elections have not marked a turning point for Greece only, but also for Europe as a whole. SYRIZA's victory meant the election of the first anti-austerity radical left government within the European Union (EU). Under the slogan ‘Hope is coming’, SYRIZA won the elections on the promise to reverse many of the austerity measures adopted by Greece since 2010, and it attempted to do so through renegotiation of the country's debt with its largest international lenders — the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (the so-called Troika). Radical left forces believed that Tsipras' victory could signal the beginning of the end of neoliberal hegemony in Europe and a shift in the old order of things, hoping for a potential domino effect within the EU. The others feared such a scenario, seeing Alexis Tsipras as a dangerous populist whose policies could lead to unpredictable consequences. Markets worried about a Greek debt default and a possible exit from the Eurozone (the so-called Grexit). The whole world watched with great interest and anxiety how the cabinet of Prime Minister Tsipras handled the negotiations with Greece's official creditors.

A year later, a Harvard University list gave these negotiations the title of the “worst negotiation tactics in 2015”, surpassing even NATO's standoff with Putin over Crimea (Shonk 2016). After six months of negotiations, not only did Tsipras not break free of the bailout terms, he even signed a third bailout deal in August 2015, although 61.31% of Greek voters gave a firm ‘no’ to creditor-imposed austerity conditions at the surprising referendum Tsipras called in July. Soon after, in September 2015, Tsipras called for snap elections. Despite the fact that some leading MPs within SYRIZA split to form a separate pro-Grexit party, Popular Unity (*Laiki Enotita* — LAE), and despite the Greek economy collapsing under the weight of imposed capital controls, leaving SYRIZA's electorate disappointed, if not frustrated and insecure, SYRIZA managed to come out first with 35.46% of the popular vote and renew its government coalition with ANEL. Months later, many analysts argued that SYRIZA and Greece are “more isolated than ever” (Mudde 2016), while the Greeks have lost faith in their government after it “sold its soul for power” (Lapavistas 2016) and “turned their hope to despair” (Polychroniou 2016).

The urgent domestic issues that focused on Greece's economic survival have largely overshadowed foreign policy questions, which seemed to be of secondary importance for the SYRIZA-led government. Observers acted similarly: the majority of the initial reactions and analyses about SYRIZA's rise to power had concentrated on the issue of the Greek debt, while little attention had been paid to its possible impact on Greece's foreign policy, and even less in relation to Greece's immediate Balkan neighbourhood. Since

the beginning of the economic crisis, Greece has been less diplomatically active than in the past with regards to the Western Balkan countries' accession to the EU and NATO, relations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) have deteriorated, some key initiatives (such as the delimitation of sea borders with Albania) have stalled, while overall bilateral diplomatic activity has weakened (Panagiotou and Valvis 2014). Many were surprised or even disappointed when Greece, one of the firmest supporters of the Western Balkans' EU integration process, decided not to specify EU enlargement as one of the country's key priorities during its 2014 EU Presidency (Koktsidis et al. 2014). Nevertheless, the soft security threats which kept Greece involved in the Western Balkan region in the past — such as economic underdevelopment, weak civil society, corruption, crime rate growth, and a lack of strong democratic institutions (Triantaphyllou 2005), are a source of concern today as well. Given its proximity to the region, established economic ties, and its consistent attempts to play an important role in efforts to consolidate peace and assist reconstruction processes across the region, Greece has remained interested in promoting itself as an important player in the Western Balkan political, economic and social reality. Additionally, bearing in mind the open bilateral issues with some of its Balkan neighbours (i. e. the name dispute with FYROM, Greece's non-recognition of Kosovo independence), Greece's foreign policy course in the Western Balkans is, at least to some extent, influencing the region's future developments and dynamics.

This paper aims to explore the question of what have been SYRIZA's foreign policy positions with regards to the Western Balkan region — before and after it came to power — and to what extent it has influenced the Greek Balkan policy in general. Also, it looks into expectations of the SYRIZA-led government among the Western Balkan public and political elites, especially after SYRIZA's landmark victory in the January 2015 parliamentary elections.

SYRIZA — Bad News for the Greek Foreign Policy?

The initial expectations of SYRIZA's foreign policy have been concentrated around two major themes, each of them being a source of concern that the new government in Greece means bad news for Greek foreign policy.

The first concern was based on assumptions that SYRIZA and many of its prominent members are strongly Eurosceptic, anti-NATO, anti-Israeli and pro-Russian leftist nationalists. This stands in a sharp contrast with SYRIZA's predecessor, New Democracy-PASOK government, which had seen Greece's EU and NATO membership as an integral part of Greek international identity. SYRIZA represents a coalition of various, often mutually competitive left-wing parties, some of which (i. e. the Left Platform (LP) which split from SYRIZA in August 2015 and formed Popular Unity party) were holding more radical stances within SYRIZA and pushing for more extreme solutions in the party's policymaking (Nikolakakis 2014). Such views are visible in SYRIZA's programmes and stances while acting as an opposition party prior to January 2015 parliamentary elections, as well as from some positions taken right after taking office. Thus, the 2012 40-point Manifesto¹ stated that Greece's independence, peace and security were endangered by the "capitulation of Greek foreign policy to the desires of the US and the powerful states of the European Union". Therefore, SYRIZA proposed a "multi-dimensional and peace-seeking foreign policy" which would include, among other, disengagement from NATO, withdrawal of Greek troops from Afghanistan and the Balkans, closure of foreign military bases on Greek soil, and termination of military cooperation with Israel. Similarly, the guidelines of SYRIZA's foreign policy declared in the political resolution adopted at SYRIZA's first (founding) congress as a single party in July 2013², were set as: support to the Republic of Cyprus

1 SYRIZA, 40-point programme, available at: <http://links.org.au/node/2888> [Accessed 11 November 2016]

2 The political resolution of the 1st congress of SYRIZA, available at: www.syriza.gr/article/id/53894/The-political-resolution-of-the-1st-congress-of-SYRIZA.html#.VrPdqLrLIV [Accessed 11 November 2016]

for the settlement of the Cypriot problem (within the framework of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with a single citizenship, sovereignty, and international personality), respect for international conventions and relevant UN resolutions, withdrawal from NATO, closure of all foreign military bases, termination of military cooperation with Israel, and the application of the principle ‘no Greek soldier at war fronts outside Greece’s border’.

SYRIZA has often not aligned with EU’s policies and sanctions towards Russia. The party members of the European Parliament (EP) voted against the Association Agreement with Ukraine in 2014, and abstained in the vote on Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova. In autumn 2014, SYRIZA’s former foreign-affairs spokesman, Kostas Isychos, described EU sanctions on Russia as “neo-colonial bulimia” and greeted the “impressive counterattacks” of the Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine (Neuger and Chrepa 2015). During his official visit to Moscow in 2014, Alexis Tsipras supported the internationally unrecognized referendums in the separatist-held territory in Ukraine, stating that “the Ukrainian people should be sovereign and should decide with a democratic manner and with referendums on its future” (Gilson 2014). The day after his election as Greece’s new Prime Minister, Tsipras objected to calls for new EU’s sanctions against Russia, while the first foreign official he met after taking the office was the Russian ambassador, Andrey Maslov. Nikos Kotzias, the Foreign Minister, and Panos Kammenos, Defence Minister in the SYRIZA-ANEL government, have both been considered to have a very close relationship with Russian president Vladimir Putin’s inner circle (Coalson 2015, Kounalaki 2015).

However, despite this initially opposing rhetoric, the SYRIZA-led government gave consent for new EU sanctions on Russia, and has abandoned the anti-NATO rhetoric. Already in January 2015, SYRIZA’s officials underlined that the party’s immediate priorities are not to raise the issue of a possible NATO exit, neither to “kick the U.S. military out of Crete” (Neuger and Chrepa 2015). As some analysts stressed (i. e. Bechev 2015, 2015a), the initial worries that Greece might completely alienate from Europe by turning towards Russia and becoming its new strong ally in the region had been premature and too alarmist, as Greece does not have neither plans nor the capacity to single-handedly overturn key Western policies. Greece sees Russia as a “difficult neighbour for Europe”, but also as an “essential element of the European security architecture” (Dokos 2016). Attempting to position itself as a “bridge” between the West and Russia, the Greek government’s intent has been to try to improve bilateral relations with Russia while honouring its EU and NATO commitments, rather than turning against them (Dokos 2015).

The second source of concern regarding its impact on Greek foreign policy, defence and security, was SYRIZA’s decision to enter into coalition government with the right-wing populist party, Independent Greeks (ANEL), and appoint the ANEL leader, Panos Kammenos, as a new Defence Minister. Many feared that through this coalition SYRIZA would get a needed support in opposing the economic and political reform programme imposed by the creditors, but this would also mean watering down many of its important policies, including a number of foreign policy issues (Gkasis 2015, Sofos 2015, Sotiropoulos 2015, Tsarouhas 2015).

What has been uniting SYRIZA and ANEL — the party which won 4.75% of the Greek vote in January 2015, and only 3.69% in September 2015, is their anti-austerity stance, attempt to overthrow the rule of the two traditional parties, New Democracy and PASOK, and a common view of Greece “being subjected to external anti-social and anti-national forces” (Komsopoulos and Chasoglou 2014). The dissimilarities, arising from their different ideological origins, seem to be much more apparent. SYRIZA and ANEL have opposing viewpoints on key social-cultural issues, including religion, nationalism and immigration. While SYRIZA opposes nationalism, gives a strong support for international solidarity and cosmopolitanism (Grigoriadis 2015), retains an inclusive platform on minorities (which made the party very popular among Greece’s officially recognized minority group, the Muslims of Western Thrace), has pro-immigration stance, supports the same-sex marriage and calls for the separation of church and state, ANEL is a xenophobic, radical right party, conservative authoritarian, which strongly emphasises the motto ‘fatherland, religion and family’ (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2015).

During campaign for January 2015 elections, ANEL asked for a stricter immigration policy, explicitly opposed any attempt to loosen the close ties between church and state, stood against cuts of the defence budget and military spending, and held a strong, patriotic stance on national affairs (*ethnika themata*), including Greece's relationship with Turkey, settlement of the Cypriot problem, and the name dispute with FYROM (Tsirbas 2015). ANEL perceives Turkish foreign policy towards Greece as "hostile and aggressive", and with regards to Cyprus, which is seen as "the cornerstone of the Greek nation", the party stresses that any acceptable solution should be based on the principle of majority, thus, unlike SYRIZA, it rejects any plans for the establishment of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal settlement.³

SYRIZA-ANEL Government and the Western Balkans: Foreign Policy Positions

The SYRIZA's 2014 manifesto (the 'Thessaloniki Programme')⁴ has mostly remained silent on foreign policy issues, including in relation to the Western Balkan countries, concentrating instead on a set of policies oriented towards fulfilling the party's priority task, and that is reversing austerity measures and introducing the new national reconstruction plan. The 2013 political resolution declared that SYRIZA promotes a "multidimensional pro-peace policy for Greece, with no involvement in wars or military plans, a policy of independence and friendly peaceful cooperation with all countries, especially our neighbours".⁵ SYRIZA is in favour of a sub-regional cooperation, especially in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, as well as a "peaceful dialogue based on international law and of resolving the problems in Greek-Turkish relations to the benefit of both peoples and peace in our region".⁶

SYRIZA's view is that the economic crisis has forced Greece to constantly withdraw from its positions and its leading role in the region, and to continuously keep adapting to the positions of other, more powerful countries.⁷ 2013 political resolution stated that Greece is a Balkan country, as well as the "hot zone" of the Eastern Mediterranean, which is therefore "directly affected by the claims and the conflicts of power developing in relation to the economic and geostrategic interests at issue." It furthermore stressed that "Greece's position in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean necessitates the resolution of all open issues of foreign policy on the basis of law and peace, to the benefit of the common interests of the peoples in the area."⁸

SYRIZA perceives the Balkans as a "field of intense rivalry between great and regional powers", where nationalism, irredentist policies, and increasing levels of organized crime and corruption, represent a continuous risk for regional stability. Some of these phenomena, in SYRIZA's view, are result of the neoliberal policies and international community's involvement and interventionism. SYRIZA is highly critical of nationalism throughout the region, including Greece, which has often been used by its opponents to discredit the party through accusations of collusion with nationalists within the country's minorities. The

3 ANEL, Foreign Policy and National Defence, 2nd Party Conference, available at: http://anexartitoiellines.gr/files/ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ/ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΗ%20ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ_ΕΘΝΙΚΗ%20ΑΜΥΝΑ.pdf (in Greek) [Accessed 11 November 2016]

4 SYRIZA, "The Thessaloniki Programme", available at: www.syriza.gr/article/id/59907/SYRIZA---THE-THESSALONIKI-PROGRAMME.html#.VrOifLrLIU [Accessed 11 November 2016]

5 The political resolution of the 1st congress of SYRIZA, available at: www.syriza.gr/article/id/53894/The-political-resolution-of-the-1st-congress-of-SYRIZA.html#.VrPdQLrLIV [Accessed 11 November 2016]

6 SYRIZA in brief: From an electoral alliance to a single party, Foreign Relations, available at: www.syriza.gr/page/who-we-are.html#.V2kPPvI97IU

7 SYRIZA, Electoral Programme 2012, available at: www.syn.gr/gr/keimeno.php?id=26945 (in Greek) [Accessed 11 November 2016]

8 The political resolution of the 1st congress of SYRIZA, available at: www.syriza.gr/article/id/53894/The-political-resolution-of-the-1st-congress-of-SYRIZA.html#.VrPdQLrLIV [Accessed 11 November 2016]

party of Alexis Tsipras supports an active policy for the Balkans which would promote peace, stability, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation, with emphasis on the inviolability of frontiers and full respect for human rights. Furthermore, SYRIZA stresses its willingness to develop closer economic and political ties with the Western Balkan countries and support their prospects for EU integration.⁹

The party's programme rarely singles out a particular Western Balkan country while stating SYRIZA's foreign policy positions. Regarding Kosovo's recognition, SYRIZA positioned itself against Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and endorsed the conclusion of a mutually acceptable solution (for Serbia, too) in line with international law principles.¹⁰ During his speech at the Law University in Belgrade in December 2014, Alexis Tsipras explained that his party's stance is that the recognition will not guarantee stability in the region, and the EU must realize that only through looking for a solution acceptable for both Pristina and Belgrade, could new crisis and further tensions be avoided.¹¹ SYRIZA's coalition partner ANEL explains its refusal to recognise Kosovo's independence through comparing the situation of Kosovo with that of Cyprus, whereby the party's stance has been that the recognition of Kosovo would effectively legitimise "an illegal military occupation on the land of a sovereign country". Additionally, ANEL dismissed the possibility of recognising Kosovo due to the special relationship between Greece and Serbia, based on historical friendship between the two countries and a common cultural and religious heritage (Armakolas and Triantafyllou 2015).

With regards to Greece's relations with FYROM, SYRIZA promotes a mutually accepted solution for the name dispute, within the framework of the UN, on the basis of a composite name with a geographical qualifier of the term Macedonia, for all purposes (*erga omnes*, i. e. applicable to all domestic and international use).¹² Immediately after SYRIZA's victory in the January 2015 parliamentary elections, many raised hopes that its rule might bring positive developments in Greek-FYROM relations. Firstly, this was because there was a general (albeit cautious) assumption that SYRIZA's foreign policy towards Greece's Balkan neighbours has a potential to become more conciliatory and more collaborative when compared to its political predecessors. Secondly, and in relation to the dispute with FYROM in particular, some analysts stressed that SYRIZA has an active youthful constituency among its electorate, which, among other, advocates a swift resolution of the name dispute by recognising the right of the people in FYROM to self-designation and self-determination (see, i. e. Sofos 2015). Tsipras' decision to form a coalition government with ANEL had largely dispelled this optimism. Considering the name dispute with FYROM as one of the most serious problems for Greek foreign policy, ANEL rejected any negotiations between Athens and Skopje, seeing the use of the term 'Macedonia' as non-negotiable and unacceptable even as a part of an appellation with geographical qualifier.¹³

While SYRIZA's programme consists of only a few general remarks on Albania, mentioning the need to protect the rights of the ethnic Greek minority based on Albania's relevant international and European commitments, ANEL's stance is more critical. ANEL argues that Albania actively pursues a revisionist policy towards Greece and other Balkan countries, including FYROM, Serbia and Montenegro, in order to realise its vision of 'Greater Albania'. The party's Foreign Policy and National Defence programme states

9 SYRIZA, Foreign Policy Positions, available at: www.syriza.gr/theseis/pros_diavoulefsi_exoteriki_politiki.pdf (in Greek) [Accessed 11 November 2016]

10 Ibid.

11 Alexis Tsipras' Speech at the Law University in Belgrade, 6 December 2014, available at: www.syriza.gr/article/id/59310/Omilia-toy-Proedroy-toy-SYRIZA-Aleksh-Tsipra-sto-amfitheatro-ths-Nomikhs-Scholhs-toy-Panepisthmioy-toy-Beligradiou.html#VrZPgPkrLIV (in Greek) [Accessed 12 July 2016]

12 SYRIZA, Foreign Policy Positions, available at: www.syriza.gr/theseis/pros_diavoulefsi_exoteriki_politiki.pdf (in Greek) [Accessed 11 November 2016]

13 Panos Kammenos, Press Briefing, ANEL, 14 December 2014, available at: http://anexartioiellines.gr/post.php?post_id=5389 (in Greek) [Accessed 11 November 2016]

that Albania clearly promotes this vision through the education of its youth and the creation of false and inaccurate maps of the Balkans.¹⁴

Western Balkans and SYRIZA-ANEL Government: Foreign Policy Expectations

In recent years, fearing the negative side effects of the Greek sovereign debt crisis on their own economies and societies, the countries of the Western Balkans have been closely observing political developments in neighbouring Greece. However, no political event has attracted more attention than SYRIZA's victory in the January 2015 parliamentary elections. With certain variations from country to country, the Western Balkan political elites, media, and general public have all showed an unusually high interest in the election of the radical-left SYRIZA, focusing primarily on the economic issues, and, to a lesser extent, on its foreign policy positions and a possible ideological influence on the region.

An online survey conducted by the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) in February and March 2015, targeting 117 opinion makers (researchers, intellectuals, journalists, NGO activists, etc.) from the Western Balkan region, has shown that there was an extensive media coverage of the Greek January 2015 elections and that the media representation was rather neutral (informative). SYRIZA and its leader, Alexis Tsipras, enjoyed the most media coverage in the countries of the Western Balkans, with as many as 90% of respondents choosing that option. More interestingly, Alexis Tsipras proved to be much more popular among Western Balkan opinion makers than his predecessor, Antonis Samaras. More than 50% of respondents answered that they had neither a positive nor negative opinion of both leaders, but, among those who answered positively or negatively, 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 (Maksimović et al. 2015).

One theme has generated a particular media interest and has given rise to inspiring debates throughout the whole region, and that was the influence of SYRIZA's rise to power on the current and future ideological orientation of the Western Balkans. The regional media was preoccupied with the question whether SYRIZA has a successor in a particular movement or a political party in other Balkan countries, as many of them — although mostly marginal political entities with negligible political influence — claimed close ideological links with the party of Alexis Tsipras. Thus, in Croatia, 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*), were claiming to be "Croatian SYRIZA" (Milekić 2015, Polšak-Palatinuš 2015). In Montenegro, an opposition MP from the Democratic Front (*Demokratski Front*), Janko Vučinić, formed a new left-wing Workers Party (*Radnička Partija*), modelled on Greece's SYRIZA (*Dan* 2015). In Serbia, the then vice president of the opposition Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka — DS*), Borislav Stefanović, was advocating for adaptation of his party's programme in order to turn its ideology "more to the left" and become "something like the Greek SYRIZA" (Jelovac 2015). Failing to do so, he founded his own party, The Left of Serbia (*Levica Srbije*), which claims to have many similarities with Greek SYRIZA.¹⁵ The Left of Serbia participated in the parliamentary elections in April 2016, but failed to gain any significant support (the party won only 0.95% of the vote). Also, leader of the nationalist, right-wing Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska Radikalna Stranka — SRS*), Vojislav Šešelj, expressed his "joy" because of SYRIZA's "magnifi-

14 ANEL, Foreign Policy and National Defence, 2nd Party Conference, available at: http://anexartitioellines.gr/files/SYNEΔΡΙΟ/ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΗ%20ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ_ΕΘΝΙΚΗ%20ΑΜΥΝΑ.pdf (in Greek) [Accessed 11 November 2016]

15 The party's manifest and programme can be found at: <http://levicasrbije.rs/> (in Serbian) [Accessed 9 November 2016]

cent victory”. Šešelj, who has been accused (and later on acquitted) of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), stressed that his party shares numerous similarities with SYRIZA, as both parties “advocate social justice”, “anti-globalism”, and hold similar positions on the Ukrainian conflict and relationship with Russia (SRS Press Conference, YouTube). Several media outlets in Kosovo reported that there are ideological similarities between SYRIZA and Albin Kurti’s left-nationalist Vetëvendosje, which has attracted plenty of interest and media attention (Maksimović et al. 2015).

Analysts sympathetic towards SYRIZA were of an opinion that drawing such parallels and raising questions of the rise of the Balkan ‘left’ occurred naturally and expectedly, given the general discontent with leftist and centre-left parties in the region, which are seen as being tainted by their participation in governments that have been implementing widely unpopular austerity policies. On the other side, those more critical of SYRIZA and its programme explained these debates as being provoked by the mere attempts of various political actors to take advantage of SYRIZA’s sudden popularity among the wider public, in order to promote their own political agenda that targeted domestic audience (Maksimović et al. 2015).

With regards to perceptions of SYRIZA-ANEL’s foreign policy positions, and based on Western Balkan media monitoring which was carried out by ELIAMEP in the aftermath of the January 2015 elections, what had been common for the Greek election’s coverage in all these countries is that a big majority of observers did not expect any radical changes in Greece’s Balkan policy. A predominant assumption had been that the internal issues, derived from the country’s economic hardship, are going to be the main concern for the SYRIZA-ANEL government. This especially applies to the expectations regarding Greece’s relations with Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which could be explained by lack of any open bilateral issues between these countries and Greece, or by existence of traditionally good and friendly relations, as is the case with Greece and Serbia. Little progress was expected in relation to the open bilateral issues with Albania (i. e. the Cham issue, the settlement of the sea border, the cemeteries of Greek soldiers, law of the state of war), while SYRIZA’s progressive policies on immigration had raised optimism that many Albanian immigrants will finally be able to gain Greek citizenship. In relation to the question of Greece’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence, the main concern was that the new government could reverse the progress achieved under the previous Greek government of Antonis Samaras, which had advocated the policy of constructive cooperation with Kosovo. On the other side, many analysts implied a potential for improvement on the name issue with FYROM, showing sympathy to the new Prime Minister who was considered more flexible in comparison to his predecessor, Antonis Samaras. SYRIZA’s decision to form a governing coalition with the right-wing ANEL, as well as their declarations against NATO and expressed sympathy towards Russia, have generally frustrated the initially raised hopes for improvement in bilateral relations, especially amongst largely pro-Western and pro-European Albanian population in the Balkans (Maksimović et al. 2015).

SYRIZA-ANEL Government: Balkan Policy Assessment

According to Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias, the SYRIZA-ANEL government’s stance has been that, despite its weaknesses in the financial sector, Greece remains to be the country “with the largest capacities, skills and capabilities in the Balkans, the country that has the cultural, political, historical capacity and the expertise and experience of the EU to contribute to a better tomorrow for all the Balkan states” (Sideris 2015a). Therefore, through setting the tone of the Greek foreign policy in the Balkans with the phrase ‘Greece returns to the Balkans’, the Greek government’s vision has been to support cooperation in the region, assist its EU integration process, as well as to “rediscover a way to create an ‘internal Balkan space’”, which would facilitate the future position of the Balkan states within the EU (Sideris 2015a).

In this context, the Greek Foreign Minister carried out visits to all Western Balkan countries in June and July 2015, including FYROM, with whom Greece has strained relations due to the name dispute, and Kosovo, whose statehood Greece does not recognize. As Greece does not have any open issues with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the meetings concentrated on economy, prospects for cooperation in areas such as culture, education, technology and research, as well as Greece's willingness to offer support, assistance and know-how to these countries on their accession course to the EU and NATO.¹⁶

Albania

In Tirana, the Albanian and Greek Foreign Ministers focused their discussion on regional cooperation, Albania's road towards the EU, Greek economic crisis, energy security and radical extremism. They also discussed the maritime border dispute between the two countries, but stated that the negotiations could take some time, as both sides still had different visions on how to resolve it. Greece's Foreign Minister praised the presence of Albanian immigrants and students in Greece, seeing them as a bridge that links Greece and Albania. Adoption of the law which grants Greek citizenship to ethnically non-Greek children who have been born in Greece was stressed as a positive development in relations between the two countries, as the new provisions will benefit a large number of children of Albanian immigrants.¹⁷ In March 2016, during his meeting in Athens with the Greek counterpart, Albanian Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati expressed his gratefulness for Athens' support in the path of European integration, stressing the fact that it was during the 2014 Greek EU presidency that Albania was granted the EU candidate status (Kurani 2016).

More recently, the Greek Foreign Minister carried out another official visit to Tirana in June 2016, in order to promote a package of proposals aiming to resolve the outstanding issues between the two countries, including delimitation of the Greek-Albanian continental shelf and maritime zones, law of the state of war, Albania's treatment of the ethnic Greek minority, and the military graveyards of Greeks that lost their lives during the Second World War. The Foreign Minister Kotzias' meeting with his Albanian counterpart has resulted in a mutual agreement on a 'road map' for addressing the problems that have been affecting Greek-Albanian relations.¹⁸ However, this important initiative has been marred by protests organized by supporters of the Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU), a coalition partner of the Socialist government led by Prime Minister Edi Rama. The protestors gathered in front of the Albanian Foreign Ministry where the meeting between the two Foreign Ministers was taking place, demanding solution for the 'Cham issue', i. e. compensation for members of the Cham Albanian community who were expelled from Greece during the Second World War after being accused of collaborating with Nazi Germany. Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati had both referred to the existence of a 'Cham issue' in their statements ahead of the Greek Foreign Minister's visit, which additionally contributed to the anti-Greek climate in Albania (Kurani 2016a). This was evident at the EURO 2016 Albania-Switzerland football match, when Albanian football fans hanged a banner that accused the Greeks of being guilty of

16 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement of Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias and: Foreign Minister of Serbia, Ivica Dačić (Belgrade, 25 June 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1ob4Pan>; Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Igor Crnadak (Sarajevo, 16 July 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1LlrmGj>; Foreign Minister of Montenegro, Igor Lukšić (Montenegro, 26 June 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1QwY9tM> [Accessed 10 July 2016]

17 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement of Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias and Foreign Minister of Albania, Ditmir Bushati (Tirana, 15 July 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1Qcr3VQ> [Accessed 10 July 2016]

18 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Joint statements of Foreign Minister Kotzias and the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Albania, Ditmir Bushati, following their meeting in Tirana (6 June 2016), available at: <http://bit.ly/28TDbHJ> [Accessed 11 November 2016]

genocide (*Protothema* 2016). With Greece's official stance being that the 'Cham issue' is "non-existent"¹⁹, these developments have triggered a lot of negative reaction in Athens²⁰, and have overshadowed the overall positive meeting of Kotsias and Bushati in Tirana. Tensions over the 'Cham issue' continued in September 2016, when Greek officials accused the European Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn of siding with Albania on this matter. According to the Greece's Foreign Ministry, Commissioner Hahn's reply to a Greek MEP, in which he mentioned the Cham issue as an "existing one", is not only impartial, but also "untruthful" and therefore "unacceptable".²¹

A new hostility in the relations between Greece and Albania occurred in October 2016, after local authorities at the Albanian town of Himara decided to demolish the homes of 19 ethnic Greek families at this predominantly ethnic Greek seaside resort. The Greek Foreign Ministry warned that the protection of property rights, and in particular of minority rights, was one of the five conditions set by the European Union for Albania's EU accession negotiations to begin. Therefore, as the official statement of the Greek Foreign Ministry declared, "if Albania sincerely wishes to join the European Union", it should demonstrate in practice that it respects the principles of the rule of law and protects the rights of all its residents regardless of their nationality and origin.²²

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

Greece has no plans to lift its informal veto on FYROM's accession talks with the EU until the name dispute is resolved. Nevertheless, it has been trying to be constructive amid its preoccupation with the economic problems and deep political and institutional crisis in FYROM, which has been producing instability and tensions in this country since February 2015.²³ The Greek Foreign Minister visited Skopje in June 2015, which was the first such trip in a decade, and expressed willingness for good cooperation between the two countries, in order to isolate extreme nationalism and irredentism, and to seek an honest compromise on the name dispute under the auspices of the UN. More importantly, he presented an initiative for the agreement on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between Athens and Skopje. The 11 CBMs are aiming at creation of cooperation networks between the two countries in as many areas as possible, such as trade, energy, transport, education, culture, justice and internal affairs. The idea behind CBMs has been

19 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Ministry announcement regarding unacceptable statements from the Albanian political leadership (5 June 2016), available at: <http://bit.ly/28TczJI> [Accessed 11 November 2016]

20 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Efstratios Efthymiou's response to a journalist's question regarding the hanging of a banner with provocative content at the Albania-Switzerland soccer match (11 June 2016), available at: <http://bit.ly/28Pw6u9>; Foreign Ministry announcement on the actions taken following the hanging of a provocative banner at the Albania-Switzerland match, (13 June 2016), available at: <http://bit.ly/28Px2Ae> [Accessed 11 November 2016]

21 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Announcement by the Foreign Ministry on Commissioner Hahn's response to the MEP question, regarding Albania (29 September 2016), available at: <http://bit.ly/2eO1eKU> [Accessed 11 November 2016]

22 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Ministry announcement on the threat of demolition of homes belonging to members of the Greek National Minority (30 October 2016), available at: <http://bit.ly/2e28D8k> [Accessed 11 November 2016]

23 Political crisis in FYROM escalated in February 2015, when the opposition led by Zoran Zaev, leader of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), started releasing covertly recorded tapes, which allegedly showed that the VMRO DPMNE-led government was responsible for the illegal surveillance of some 20,000 people, including ministers. This was followed by large protests which occurred in May 2015, demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. After an EU-brokered agreement ('Pržino Agreement'), worked on in June and July 2015, the Prime Minister Gruevski resigned in January 2016 and pledged to hold early elections. The political crisis, followed by new wave of protests known as 'Colorful Revolution', further deteriorated in 2016, after the controversial decision by President Gjorgje Ivanov to stop the investigation against former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and number of other politicians who were allegedly involved in the wiretapping scandal.

to find areas where there are much easier ways to find solutions, and in this way build trust and confidence between the two sides.²⁴ Since this initiative was introduced, a number of meetings have been held with the participation of experts from the respective relevant authorities from Greece and FYROM. Most recently, delegations from the two countries met in Athens in June 2016 (Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The FYROM Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki visited Athens in December 2015 and the two sides agreed that, although the name issue remains open, it will not be a point of tension and an obstacle to the good cooperation between the two countries in the future.²⁵

The refugee crisis has put these positive initiatives and conciliatory declarations to the serious test. FYROM's decision to close off its border with Greece in March 2016 has effectively shuttered the 'Western Balkan route' (made up of FYROM, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia) which served as a transit path for refugees headed for Western Europe, but it also opened a fresh diplomatic rift between Skopje and Athens. When the violent clashes between refugees and FYROM security forces occurred at the Greek-FYROM border in April 2016, Athens sent two diplomatic protest notes to Skopje, accusing FYROM's security forces of using excessive force against the refugees. On the other side, the authorities in Skopje have made counter-accusations, claiming that Greek police did nothing to prevent several thousand refugees from trying to force their way into FYROM's territory. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras stated that FYROM had "shamed" Europe by these actions, while Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos characterized such behaviour as "incomprehensible", which only shows that FYROM had "no place" in the EU or NATO (*Ekathimerini* 2016).

Soon after, on 21–22 April 2016, Greece hosted a quadrilateral meeting in Thessaloniki with three of its Balkan neighbours — Albania, Bulgaria and FYROM, aiming to exchange views and find solutions for the common problems they face in dealing with the refugee crisis. Even though many diplomats wondered why Greece did not take such diplomatic initiative earlier bearing in mind the fact that it has been seen by its Balkan neighbours as a weak link in managing the refugee issue (*MacroPolis* 2016), it was an opportunity for the Foreign Ministers of Greece and FYROM to ease the tensions and reset relations to a certain extent. In an official statement, Foreign Ministers of Greece and FYROM stressed that, while in 2015 the two countries dealt with the refugee crisis without any cooperation whatsoever, there has been an improvement in bilateral cooperation during 2016. In Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias' words, the quadrilateral meeting of the foreign and interior ministers of the four Balkan countries eliminated "suspicion of one another" and contributed to having relations of "sincerity and trust".²⁶

Kosovo

SYRIZA-appointed Nikos Kotzias was the first Greek Foreign Minister to officially visit Kosovo, which represented a landmark event, given the fact that Greece is one of the five EU member states which does not recognize Kosovo's independence. During the visit in July 2015, he expressed Greece's support for the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, which, in Kotzias' words, contributes to peace and stability for the entire region. Also, Greece supported creation of links between the EU and Kosovo, offering Greece's

24 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement of Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias and Foreign Minister of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Poposki, in Skopje (24 June 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1QwZiBo>; Foreign Minister Kotzias' interview with Telma TV (Skopje, 24 June 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1SM5z2u> [Accessed 10 July 2016]

25 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement of Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias and Foreign Minister of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Poposki in Athens (17 December 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1Ps4PLX> [Accessed 10 July 2016]

26 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press conference at the conclusion of the Quadrilateral Meeting of Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and FYROM, in Thessaloniki, on cross-border cooperation (22 April 2016), available at: <http://bit.ly/29HmR1U> [Accessed 11 November 2016]

expertise and capacities for cooperation with the EU and NATO. Importantly, Greece offered its support to Kosovo's efforts to join international organizations, such as UNESCO and Interpol, based on international law and to the benefit of stability in the region.²⁷ However, when Kosovo's UNESCO membership bid failed in November 2015, Greece was one of twenty-nine countries that abstained from voting.

The expressed support to Kosovo in its efforts to join the international organisations, together with Greece's offer to proceed with the establishment of a Kosovo liaison office either in Athens or Thessaloniki, has spurred a lot of negative reaction in Serbia, where such a move was characterized as a sign that Greece would change its position regarding Kosovo. The Serbian Foreign Minister, Ivica Dačić, asked for an explanation from Greece on this matter, stating that he is aware of the pressures that Greece suffers to recognize an independent Kosovo, but that he believes this will not happen, as it would not be in accordance either with international law or with the friendly relations between Serbia and Greece (Mastilović Jasnić 2015). The regional media had speculated how Belgrade's frequent remarks that Greece's vulnerable financial situation causes Athens to make compromises on its important foreign policy positions, had angered the Greek government. Allegedly, the Greek Prime Minister Tsipras even postponed his intention to officially visit Serbia in autumn 2015 due to Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić's critics directed towards Tsipras' "unrealistic" economic model (B92 2015, Mitrović 2015, Stojanović 2015).

Some analysts in Greece (i. e. Armakolas for RTS 2015) believed that the SYRIZA-led government is indeed making a step forward regarding Kosovo's recognition. First, this is indicated in the fact that the SYRIZA-led government insists on the continuation of the policy of previous governments on this issue, while the party's stance before the elections was firmly against any closer engagement with Kosovo. Also, it was the first time that Greek Foreign Minister visited Kosovo and openly supported Kosovo's aspirations to join the international organizations. However, the Greek Foreign Ministry dismissed such speculations. Its official stance has been that a productive working relationship with Kosovo does not alter Greece's cautious stance on its recognition. The statement that has caused controversy refers to a decision of the Greek government from 2012, under the former Foreign Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos. Therefore, the current Greek leadership only continues the country's policy on Kosovo that has already been determined in the past (Sideris 2015b).

Conclusion

Since it formed a Greek government for the first time in January 2015, the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition has been preoccupied with the country's economic survival, which has pushed the government's foreign policy agenda in the background. Renegotiation of the Greek debt with the creditors and subsequent accepting of the bailout conditions some months later has triggered a set of political crises in the country, including a referendum in July and snap parliamentary elections in September 2015. So far, the SYRIZA-ANEL's second mandate (the cabinet was reshuffled on 5 November 2016) has been dominated by the government's attempt to honour the third bailout deal through the implementation of difficult social-economic reforms, followed by a new wave of social unrest these measures have provoked.

SYRIZA has watered down many of its hard stances from the period it acted as the opposition, which primarily concerns its relation with Russia, as well as its Eurosceptic and anti-NATO attitudes. This could be characterized as a positive development, given the fact that many observers have raised concerns that SYRIZA's seemingly uncompromising foreign policy stances on some of the major issues could undermine Greece's important initiatives and deteriorate its international position. Also, SYRIZA's coalition with the right-wing ANEL has not affected the general course of the Greek foreign policy. Despite ANEL's strong,

27 On this see: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement of Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias and Foreign Minister of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci (Pristina, 14 July 2015), available at: <http://bit.ly/1XuZJBN> [Accessed 10 July 2016]

nationalistic stance on national affairs and 'red lines' the party defined on certain foreign policy questions, this has not tipped the balance towards a more nationalistic foreign policy approach. When it comes to the name issue with FYROM, some could argue that absence of any tangible results in bringing the two sides closer together is indeed the result of SYRIZA's coalition deal with ANEL. Such a view seems legitimate given the fact that ANEL sees the official Greek position of accepting a composite name that includes the word 'Macedonia' as unacceptable. However, bearing in mind Greek government's preoccupation with economic problems, prolonged political turmoil in FYROM, and an ongoing refugee crisis, it is doubtful whether the more active approach towards the name issue would have come to SYRIZA's agenda, regardless of ANEL's participation in the government.

According to the SYRIZA-ANEL government, stability in the Balkans has remained the key for Greek foreign policy. Greece has continued expressing commitment to the region's EU and NATO integration process, offering its political support and know-how. Greek diplomatic activity in the Western Balkans has been somewhat more visible during SYRIZA-ANEL's first mandate, when the Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias made a tour in all Western Balkan capitals (including Pristina, for the first time) and introduced some important initiatives for the improvement of bilateral relations, such as the confidence-building measures (CBMs) with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). During its second term, most notable Balkan policy activity of the Greek government has been the 'road map' agreed in Tirana, based on Greek Foreign Ministry's package of proposals which aimed to resolve a number of bilateral issues between Greece and Albania.

The SYRIZA-led government has defined its foreign policy towards the Balkans with the phrase 'Greece returns to the Balkans', attempting to re-establish its leading role in the region which, in the government's view, the country enjoyed prior to the economic crisis. The Greek government's vision has been to support cooperation in the region and assist its EU integration process. Yet, it is arguable whether the current Greek government has managed to bring Greece closer to accomplishing this goal. While Greece has enjoyed a reputation as one of the firmest supporters of the Western Balkans' EU integration process, there has been little space for the SYRIZA-led government to put forward new initiatives concerning this matter. This came as a consequence of the political and economic crisis within the EU, EU's preoccupation with security issues, the refugee crisis, and ever-increasing enlargement fatigue which have put the enlargement question towards the end of the EU's priorities. However, it is also true that Greece's economic and political affairs have negatively affected the country's image, reputation and credibility both inside the EU and in its Balkan neighbourhood, even more so in the past two years since SYRIZA came to power. At a bilateral level, although the introduction of CBMs indisputably represents an important initiative, so far it has had more a symbolic than substantive value in improving the Greek-FYROM relations. Also, controversies and tensions which surrounded the Foreign Minister Kotzias' meeting with his Albanian counterpart, and new frictions over the 'Cham issue' which continued afterwards, have raised the question of whether the agreed 'road map' can indeed provide a genuine path towards the resolution of the bilateral disputes or if it will only lead to another dead-end.

Overall, the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition has not demonstrated major policy modifications in comparison to the previous Greek governments. Instead, as far as the Western Balkans is concerned, it has mostly continued the foreign policy it inherited from its predecessors.

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