



The newly elected Attica governor in Greece

BY RENA DOUROU

This time things must be different

●●● GREECE | ATHENS

Next year will be a crucial one, not only for my country, Greece, but also for the European Union. The last EU election had the lowest-ever turnout on record: 42.54%. Only four out of 10 European citizens voted for the new European Parliament. It was the lowest turnout since 1979 when elections were first held. This is not an irrelevant number. This is a first class political issue.

This low turnout means European citizens do not consider this election as a major one, worthy of their participation. In other words, this fact illustrates well the deep crisis of the European Union – not simply a debt crisis, but a deeper one. A “legitimation” crisis, a “lack of democracy” crisis.

It is most interesting to note, that during this economically difficult juncture when the voice of citizens should be heard loudly, the European institutions have failed to create confidence for the people to express their will.

They have failed to create the necessary conditions for the genuine citizens’ expression, the kind of expression that would provide the European institutions legitimate mechanisms of a new European project. The price of this failure is the historic low turnout of the May election.

What the EU actually needs for the next and the coming years is to find a way to address the main two-fold problem: to fulfill the “legitimation” gap and to connect with the expectations and needs of all citizens. This is in order to promote policies that will trigger growth and employment, which is the only viable and lasting solution for the recovery of the EU economy.

Precisely, the EU goal for the coming years should be to deal with the growth problem, the growing inequalities, the poverty and misery. All these factors and the wrong way the EU, until now, has faced them, have undermined the EU’s econo-



A man casts his vote during the European Parliamentary elections and the second round of the local administration elections in Athens, Greece, 25 May 2014.

EPA/ORESTIS PANAGIOTOU

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my, people’s prosperity and damaged the democratic political system.

Let’s focus on the case of Greece. The “medicine” imposed by the “Troika” and accepted by the Greek governments was completely wrong. Many analysts agree that the internal devaluation just didn’t work for the recovery of the Greek economy and that the Greek debt is not

viable. At the same time, democracy has been diminished in the country by the way Greek governments managed to impose the implementation of the austerity “memoranda”, cutting public expenditure in crucial sectors such as the healthcare, education or the regions and the municipalities. The wrong medicine, its catastrophic results and the way governments have imposed it have undermined democracy in the country.

More specifically, we (recently elected for governing the Region of Attica in Greece) face huge problems due to the recession policy. Considering also the complicated task, it is a huge responsibility and a crucial challenge to keep the commitments to the citizens of Attica while dealing with the everyday problems of the people, without having enough means to do so. And above all, there must be a change in the way politics work in Greece, by creating a new governance model: one without clientelism and nepotism, without widespread corruption, putting emphasis on the fight against growing disparities among rich and poor, on prosperity with growth and employment, on solidarity, on public goods.

This is a multi-challenge that goes well beyond the Attica Region because it has to do with the credibility of politics.

“This time it’s different”. The slogan of the European Parliament campaign sounds relevant.

Since this time things must be different. In Attica, in Greece and in the European Union.

The European project has to work for a new governance paradigm of the people, by the people, for the people. This is not an easy task to achieve.

Nor is it a single task for one region, one party, one government or one country. This is a task that must be brought out by a collective political will, with people shaping its objectives.

This is why it is not an easy task.

This is the task for 2015. And the direction for the years to come. We have to move towards this direction in order to overcome the current dangerous stagnation. This is the direction of hope, of social justice and solidarity. No one should fear this direction.

In the end, this is why we need to depart from the current, dead-end way of thinking.

Otherwise “Europe” will be a lost cause. And the fear of Alexis de Tocqueville will become true: “I cannot help fearing that men may reach a point they look on every new theory as a danger, every innovation as a toilsome trouble, every social advance as a first step toward revolution, and that they may absolutely refuse to move at all for fear of being carried off their feet”... (Democracy in America, Volume II, Book Three, Chapter XXI).

PICTURES OF THE YEAR



Protesters sit on the roof of a burnt-out bus during an anti-government protest in downtown Kiev, Ukraine, 25 January 2014.

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