

## NEW LEADER, DEAD END

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Greek politics is an eternal source of macabre entertainment. Following the collapse of the military junta in 1974, and the Cyprus tragedy, Greece supposedly entered a “democratic” phase. The exercise proved anywhere from incomplete to disastrous.

A long period of political dominance by the loony left Pasok party, headed by the late radical former Trotskyist Andreas Papandreu, derailed the Greek economy, undermined state institutions, spread corruption, and created a remarkably survivable core of rabble rousers, political hypocrites, and professional demagogues that continues to affect the Greek political condition.

On the conservative side, a string of incompetent leaders of the New Democracy (ND) party, the main right-wing political force, coupled with ND’s visceral fear of challenging the Greek Left toe-to-toe, has emasculated any competent opposition to the improbable current government coalition marrying the far-left SYRIZA party with the miniscule but vociferous far-right ANEL grouping.

Meantime, the economic crisis that began almost ten years ago continues to [destroy](#) the country and defeat any reasonable hope for recovery. In the background, the European Union, itself in disarray and crisis, refuses to release its debt stranglehold on Greece, now an effective protectorate of the lenders, with the puppet governments in Athens doing the creditors' bidding.

Enter the self-declared "reformer and modernizer" current ND leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Son of a late former prime minister and elder statesman, brother of a former foreign minister, Athens mayor, and prime ministerial aspirant, and uncle to a young nephew elected regional governor who, undoubtedly, will emerge soon in the guise of yet another "savior" of Hellas, Mitsotakis has been busy marketing himself and his party as *the only* hope for Greece.

American-educated, and with business experience, Mitsotakis is a textbook starched neoliberal at a time neoliberalism is under strong attack from all sides. At the head of a party that has been prominently inflexible and, at times, lethargic, Mitsotakis promises to change things by applying "rational modernization." He bitterly rejects the amateur experiments of the present Maduro-like SYRIZA-ANEL government and spends considerable time in and out of parliament going over "plans" to reform all aspects of the Greek system.

Ever since he took over ND's leadership in 2016, Mitsotakis has been busy trying to build an image of the "trustworthy" political leader ready to succeed where others failed. He hurried to declare his "brotherly similarity" to France's Macron, whom he apparently recognizes as the role model for both aspiring and convinced neoliberals, and misses no opportunity to explain at length, during television interviews, his "reconstruction" plans.

Mitsotakis's tactics appear to work – ND is ahead of SYRIZA by at least 8 points in all recent polls. If elections were to occur tomorrow, he would be probably elected prime minister at the head of a majority government.

*This is where the “positive” estimates stop, and reality takes over.*

Every Greek administration, beginning in 2010, failed disastrously to defend the country against the German onslaught orchestrated by Angela Merkel to make Greece an example to others. Bone-crushing austerity has impoverished most Greek people and has destroyed the country's wealth by brutal and unrelenting “internal devaluation.” The German juggernaut, blithely supported by Berlin's northern allies, smashed the Greek economy and has brought back levels of “wellbeing” circa 1950.

Mitsotakis, well known for his German sympathies, appears ill equipped to convince his “friends” in the Fatherland of the necessity to abandon suicidal austerity and adopt investment and growth as the locomotives of Greek recovery. His own neoliberal habits also intervene when the “bailout” masters demand privatization of everything at fire sale prices, a move broadly rejected by Greek voters. The IMF warns its continuing participation in Greece's “rescue” program depends on generous *real relief* (and not ‘restructuring’ or extending maturities) of a debt pile which keeps growing stratospherically despite German claims to the contrary. Mitsotakis though appears reluctant to join the IMF “revolt” for reasons he keeps quiet.

While the wrecked economy is the key field where Mitsotakis will be tested, there are other concerns related to Greece's domestic and external security. Under SYRIZA, lawlessness and anomy have exploded. Greece has never been a particularly orderly and quiet country, but the domestic security situation under SYRIZA grows from bad to worse by leaps and bounds.

To add fuel to the fires of common penal crime, domestic hooliganism, and street terrorism, painfully present in Athens almost *daily*, SYRIZA continues to display

unacceptable carelessness and amateurism regarding *the core internal security threat of illegal immigration*. And Greece's European "partners" have just [accepted publicly](#) (text in Greek) that from now on Greece and Italy will have to fend for themselves in trying to relocate and/or repatriate the steadily increasing numbers of undocumented aliens slipping into their territories.

Judging from the long-established model of Greek politics, Mitsotakis will need to prove himself a truly towering figure if he is to bring about even minimal changes and put the brakes on Greece's downward spiral. So far, the ND leader has displayed no convincing evidence of being such a man.

A familiar tactic Mitsotakis will most likely continue to pursue is to try and paint himself a "centrist." The concept of "center" has a long and dismal history in Greek political affairs and, thus, Mitsotakis should turn himself into an unusually gifted political inventor if he is going to claim workable "centrist" solutions. So far, his parliamentary as well as in-party maneuvering shows no signs of that.

The most prominent indication Mitsotakis may be setting himself and his party up "for more of the same" is the distinct, and indeed central, emphasis he ascribes to "better management."

Repeatedly, the ND leader returns to the same themes of ND's supposed "dependability" as a forward-looking "European" political party ready "to manage:" "we know better," "we can negotiate as trusted partners and not adversaries," "we have no partisan mind blocks," etc.

Yet, management is *the* secondary issue for a Greece facing historically unprecedented and generalized paralysis and economic calamity. Management as a core political aim is way below the necessary reformist spirit that *could* inaugurate forward movement and pull the country out of the morass.

Ultimately, Mitsotakis must answer the true core question of Greek survival: can this country, under a ND government, pull herself up by the bootstraps and engage in an unprecedented reform campaign to *smash the ancien regime, defeat the monster of the corrupt public sector, and impose what it takes to run securely a country like Greece bedeviled by internal near anarchy and surrounded by immeasurable external challenges?*

If the recent and more distant past of Greek politics is to serve as the yardstick of Mitsotakis's hopes for success, based on what we have heard from him so far, these hopes recede into the realm of comfort-inducing mythology.