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SYRIZA Leftists win general elections, to return in office with former coalition partner

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Greece's Radical Left SYRIZA party celebrated its second victory in general polls in eight months on Sunday night, and was set to return in office with its Right-wing former junior coalition partner, the Independent Greeks (ANEL), promising to "continue the battle for Greek people's rights in Greece and abroad."

SYRIZA has won about 35.5 percent of votes against 28.2 percent for the conservatives of the New Democracy (ND) party led by Evangelos Meimarakis, with 80 percent of the votes counted, according to the official results released by the Interior Ministry.

The two parties had respectively secured 36.3 percent versus 27.8 percent in January's national polls.

The official final results were expected to be released by Monday noon and Tsipras was expected to receive a three-day exploratory mandate from the President of the Hellenic Republic Prokopis Pavlopoulos to form a government, under the Greek Constitution.

The new government could be sworn in on Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning, according to local "Vima" (Tribune) daily.

Based on the preliminary official results pollsters estimated that SYRIZA will control 145 seats in the next 300-member strong assembly and ANEL 10 seats.

The 41-year old Leftist leader did not manage to win again the absolute majority he was looking for when he quit in late August triggering the snap polls.

However, he did not either lose entirely the bet he placed, political analysts noted in their first reactions to the results.

SYRIZA retained the first place and by renewing the coalition partnership with ANEL they jointly still hold a slim majority in the new parliament.

In the previous assembly that emerged from the historic January 25 elections the two parties jointly controlled 162 seats, but ever since lost ground due to their U-turn from their previous anti-bailout platforms.

The first Left-led government in Greece after the WWII had promised to tear up the bailouts and put an outright end to austerity.

After marathon negotiations with Greece's international creditors, the International Monetary Fund and EU, under the dark shadow of an imminent default and Grexit, the SYRIZA-ANEL administration sealed the country's third tough bailout in five years.

Following a party rift over the new bailout Tsipras called the new elections asking voters for a second chance to lead the country out of the crisis, pledging to make the utmost effort to soften the effect of the new round of austerity measures.

Addressing a crowd of cheering SYRIZA supporters at the party's central campaign kiosk in a square near the parliament building in Athens on Sunday night he promised to continue fighting to restore economic growth and put the "old regime of corruption that ruled Greece for years" behind.

"This victory belongs to the people. We gave a hard battle and I feel vindicated, because Greek people gave us a clear mandate to continue the battle in Greece and abroad for dignity," he said, noting that it was a crystal clear mandate for a four year term.

The Leftist leader announced from the same stage by warmly embracing ANEL chief Panos Kammenos the renewal of their post election cooperation.

"As of Monday we continue together the struggle we started a few months ago," Tsipras said.

For his part, Kammenos said that "ANEL were appointed again as the guarantors of normality, stability and progress the next day."

The Right-wing leader blasted pollsters which were predicting that his party would fail to reach the three percent of votes threshold needed to enter the parliament under the Greek electoral system.

A few hours before ballots open most polling firms were predicting a race too tight to call between SYRIZA and ND.

The two leaders celebrated their new alliance shortly after the head of the conservatives conceded defeat and congratulated SYRIZA.

"The electoral battle we gave is over... SYRIZA seems to be the winner. I congratulate Mr. Tsipras and I call him to form a new government," Meimarakis told media.

Tsipras also received congratulations from European leaders with the French President Francois Hollande and EU Parliament head Martin Schulz among the first to contact the Greek leader.

The abstention stood at a record high of 45 percent for national elections in Greece over the past two decades, according to the Interior Ministry data.

Political analysts and media commentators in the first reactions attributed the low turnout to ballot fatigue, noting that it was the sixth general elections since October 2009, as well as disillusionment.

Although Greeks have strongly rejected austerity in most electoral battles in recent years, even after SYRIZA's first victory they ended up with one more painful bailout.

In another alarming sign the ultra- Right Golden Dawn (Chryssi Avgi) party again held its ground and retained the third place by winning 7 percent of the votes, despite the judicial crackdown which started in 2013 over the murder of an anti-fascist activist.

It was followed by the socialists of PASOK who were running with the Democratic Left this time. According to the official results, with 80 percent of votes counted, they garnered 6.4 percent of the vote and were trailed by the Communist party KKE which gets 5.5 percent.

The centrist Potami (River) secured about 4 percent of votes, ANEL 3.7 percent of votes, and the centre-Left Union of Centrists, a party which had marginal influence over the past two decades 3.4 percent.

The anti-bailout and pro-drachma Popular Unity party that was formed in late August by former SYRIZA MPs failed to enter the new assembly garnering 2.8 percent, according to the preliminary official results.