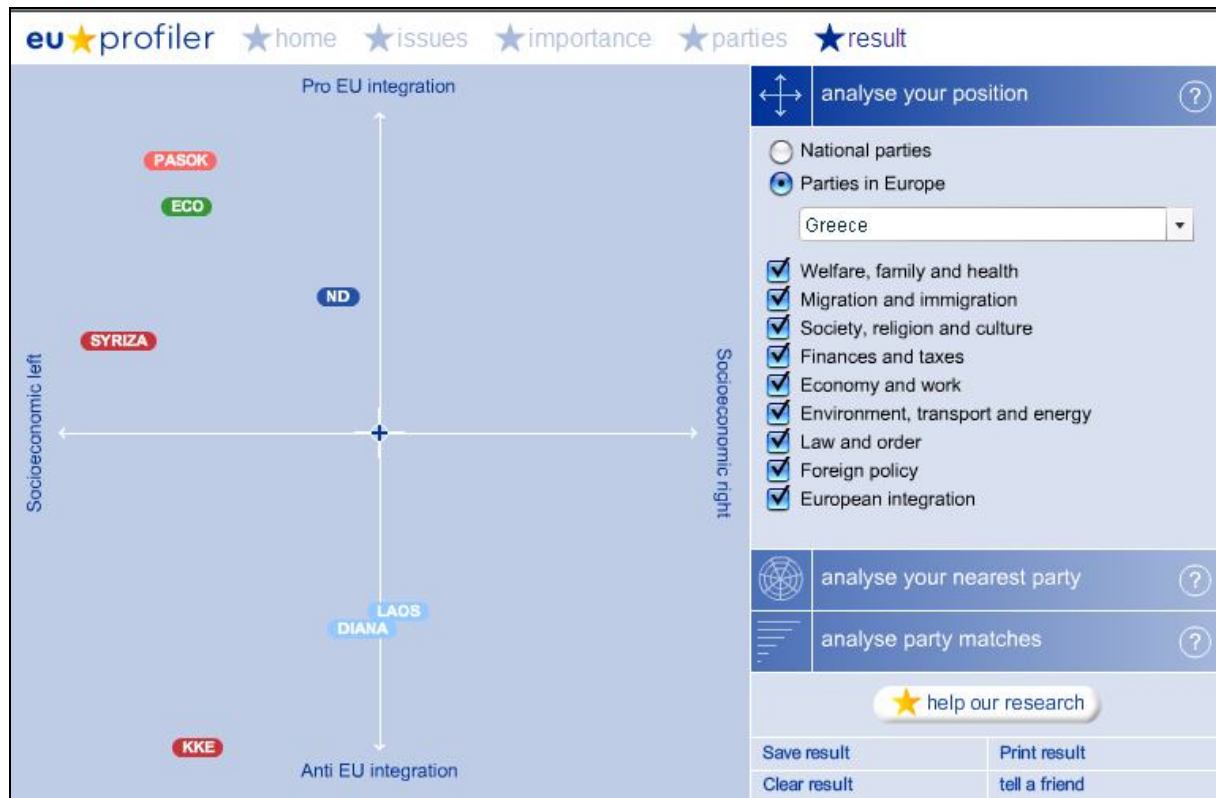


THE GREEK POLITICAL LANDSCAPE¹



The Greek party system, as depicted on the EU Profiler political landscape, is characterized by two main traits: One is the clustering of almost all main parties in the left part of the socio-economic axis. The second is the particular positioning of pro-European and Eurosceptic parties: In general the far right and far left extremes of the political landscape converge in a Eurosceptic position, whereas the parties covering the broad part from the center right to the center left are quite more in favor of EU and Greece's participation in it.

The clustering in the left is mainly explained by two things: One is the paternalistic and protectionist tradition of Greek conservatism, which is also picked up by parties in the more far right part of the spectrum. With a small exception in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the main conservative party Nea Dimokratia (ND) has always stressed issues of social cohesion, even though it has the more market-friendly outlook of the two big parties of Greece. Indeed, it is amazing how Greece lacks any substantial liberal party. (The new party Drassis was founded only days before the EU Profiler went online, and it comprises social liberals and economic libertarians. Whether they will have any impact on the ballot though is highly debatable.) After 1974 the mainstream social conservatism of Greek society was conspicuously meshed with a predominant socialistic discourse in economic matters, thus

¹ This graphic and its description are based on the so-called 'political landscape' of the voting advice application EU Profiler. For positioning the parties, the EU Profiler academic team extensively researched the manifestos and other sources of the covered parties and positioned them on the statements of the EU Profiler. For more details on the EU Profiler and its methodology, please visit www.euprofiler.eu or contact Dr. Fabian Breuer (Fabian.Breuer@eui.eu).

creating a powerful push for all parties to move to the left. Even then though, the parties fall on the socio-economic axis according to their relative ideology.

In European matters there is an essential agreement on the need of Greece to be part of all major initiatives in the EU among the two governing parties and a substantial part of the mainstream left. Yet here there are gradations as well: Whereas the conservatives and the socialists are pretty much devoted Europeans, the main party of the reformed left combines its official pro-Europeanness with an intense attack on the 'neoliberal' character of the EU project. On the anti-European side, both Communists and right wing populists and nationalists have Eurosceptic ideas; but the Communists are by far the most radical party in Greece when it comes to European integration. The parties of the far right accept the prospect of some kind of European integration (mainly as a counterweight to America), but are against the supranational elements of the EU and the loss of sovereignty.

Starting with the ruling conservatives of ND, one can see that they have managed to turn into a party of centrist outlook, emphasizing their social economic policies within a framework of the free market (thus bringing them quite close to traditional Christian Democracy), their moderately conservative social views and their traditional acceptance of the European project. Their most conservative positions can be found in the field of illegal immigration and their effort not to stray from the tenets of fiscal orthodoxy. For the European elections of 2009 ND is pursuing an aggressive electoral strategy, as the government is embattled from scandals and a very weak majority in parliament. For this, a major factor will be the prime minister and party leader Kostas Karamanlis, who in general terms is more popular than his party and is still seen as the most competent of Greek party leaders. It would be a tall order though for ND to place first in the elections.

The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) is the traditional center-left party of Greece which dominated government between 1981 and 2004. The party is still in search of its identity, but a very broad shift towards the economic left and social libertarianism can be detected. Their leader, George Papandreou, has tried to modernize the party along the lines of European Social Democracy. Usually in Greece being in opposition means moving to the populist left in economic matters, and this is what PASOK has done recently. At the same time, Papandreou's efforts have managed to brand the party with a more alternative, environmentalist outlook, but these elections will be mostly about the economy and this is what PASOK emphasizes. At the same time, the party's adherence to the idea of European integration is now complete and it even surpasses that of ND (the traditional European party). PASOK scores more on the European axis, but the parties' differences are more a matter of tactics than of broad ideas.

The Communists (KKE) are traditionally the third biggest party (lagging far behind the other two of course). Notorious for their closed character, they might as well be the last unreformed Communist party left in Europe. Their dogmatic point is: '5 parties, 2 policy alternatives'. This means that the current parliament may have 5 parties, but the true divide is between the defenders of the working class (the KKE) and the puppets of America, the EU, economic neoliberalism and big capital (everyone else). It is impossible for any other party to work with them, since their positions on the EU are irreconcilable. They retain a very devout organizational basis though and their Marxist rhetoric resonates far more than their actual voting percentages. They hold progressive positions in other social issues as well (apart from drugs), but in general they try to shift the debate to economic matters. They usually do well in European elections, but this time they face more challenges.

The Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) is a loose alliance of the reformed communists and various movements and groups of the leftist, anti-globalization and environmentalist part of the spectrum. After 2004 the party has shifted decisively to the left. Around a year ago the party enjoyed a season in the media sun due to the election of a new young leader. But soon SYRIZA lost big part of its support in the polls due to its ambiguous – sometimes outright encouraging – rhetoric towards demonstrations and incidents of violence and unrest. Now the alliance fights for its survival. The party will elect an MEP for sure, but inner-coalition balances are very delicate. Their economic rhetoric borders Marxism, they are the most explicit social liberals (thus making them a favorite target of the hostility of the far

right) and are generally pro-Europeans, even though this is more visible in their official documents than in their campaign rhetoric (as evidenced in the landscape).

The fifth party represented in both Greek and EU parliaments is the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS). Headed by a charismatic (or ridiculously populist, depending where you stand) ex-MP of ND, they have tried to carve out a specific identity. The core of their supporters and the most of their parliamentary group ascribes to deeply conservative and nationalistic views (pro-Church, anti-immigration, anti-Turkey accession), but their leader tries desperately to portray LAOS as a viable alternative in economic and practical matters. The party list this year will be headed by a woman with a business background, impressive CV and important connections to the media. This was a coup for LAOS, which targets a second seat as well. Their positions on Europe are eurosceptic, even though their leader made a big issue out of his tenure as MEP his party's affiliation with conservative formations in the MEP. In the EU Profiler their conservative social values are balanced by their socialist economic rhetoric, thus bringing them to overall center. In relative terms though they are still the most rightist party.

The most important party not represented in parliament is the Ecologist Greens. They burst into the mainstream after their message resonated with Greeks during the destructive forest fires of the summer 2007. Since then they are rising, and a recent poll showed them coming third! In many ways their positions are interesting: Apart from the two big parties, they seem to be the most adamant pro-Europeans (boosted also by the manifesto of the European Green Party). Their social values are progressive, but interestingly they have some practical positions in economic matters that surpass the protectionism of the other parts of the left. The coverage they are getting is mostly positive and they will definitely elect an MEP.

The EU Profiler is also coding Democratic Rebirth (DIANA), but this party has decided to contest the elections under the banner of the Panhellenic Macedonian Front (PAMME). The leader of both parties is an experienced politician from Thessaloniki, whose two favorite issues is the Church and the question of the name of FYROM. In questions of foreign policy and Europe his positions are very close to LAOS, even though he seems more unreformed and less prone to politicking than LAOS, emphasizing an unconditional support for Christian values and the uniqueness of Greek culture. PAMME's leader's background though is in the center left, and this is obvious in the party's socialist economic rhetoric and a substantial stress on the environment. Yet, the party's 'banner-issues' are not very important for the voters this time, and whether PAMME will have any impact over 1% of the vote is unclear.