

Right Honourable Members of the British Parliament, dear all!

I thank you for the invitation and for granting me opportunity to analyze the causes that have driven my country, a country which in the past inspired poets and philosophers, to inspire today only cartoonists and presenters of satirical shows.

Greece is a country in deep crisis, a crisis that is not only financial. I would dare to say that the financial issue is the least of its problems. For the past 35 years, Greece has been living through a continuous decline in ethics, institutions, public life, education and the level of its leaders.

There is no precedent in World History where a government adopted as its official state policy the blackmailing of its partners. This is precisely what SYRIZA did during its seven-month "negotiation" with the European Union - negotiation in quotation marks. And, let us not forget that the EU partners had already given to a basically bankrupt state, an enormous debt "haircut" and two bailout loan agreements with extremely favourable terms, mostly at the expense of the European taxpayers.

It is clear that the SYRIZA government went to Brussels with the following shocking message, a message which was its central platform during the pre-election campaign period: "You lend us money, we spend it. And, we intend to keep on spending in the exact same way that led us into bankruptcy; on huge pensions for fifty-year olds and on salaries for hundreds of thousands of redundant civil servants, many of whom with a ghost job description. And, not only shall we not fire any persons holding sinecure offices, but we shall hire even more civil servants and create more early pensioners. We are not undertaking any commitments for the new loans that we want you to give to us, and we demand that you write off the old ones." Unbelievable!

According to the SYRIZA propaganda in Greece, there was not even one in a million probability that the European Union would turn down the demands of SYRIZA, because the alternative of not lending to this Neo-Bolshevik Greek government would be the collapse of the European Union, a much greater catastrophe that the leaders of the European Union would certainly want to avoid !

I am ashamed for my country's government. I am ashamed for its politicians. I am ashamed of the image of Greece in the modern world.

I admire the composure and patience of the European governments that continued to negotiate for 7 months with these blackmailers! However, surprisingly, the SYRIZA won the national elections for a second time in a row. What has happened? Have the Greeks gone mad?

No. Even for the most irrational of behaviors there is always a rational explanation. But one has to look at the entire picture. Please, allow me a brief historical overview. It is essential in order to comprehend the Greek Drama.

The rule of law was never really applied in Greece, a country that did not go through the renaissance and the enlightenment. The Ottoman occupation was succeeded by an Ottoman model of governance, "Greek style". The Greek State has always been a mixture of guilds and interest groups, in conflict with each other. The core of this model has always been state sponsored patronage. In Greece we call it "clientelism". The Greek citizens have been giving their vote to those from whom they expected the greatest benefit.

The Greek politicians, on the other hand, ensured their re-election by giving away public money through the appointments to civil service positions, and through the granting of pensions and allowances. Policies to benefit the entire Greek population have never taken hold in Greece. The political parties seized power by any and all means, lawful or not, in order to look after their client section of the people and, of course, to put their hands on the public money which is taxpayers' money, as the late baroness Thatcher used to say.

Consequently, in the past, the Greeks were divided because of conflicts of interest and not because of substantial ideological differences. The ideological differences came after the civil war. Under the pretext of the communist danger, the rightist governments, who won the civil war, adopted practices of legalized fascism, which divided the Greeks between "loyalists" and "infected". Infected were not only the communists, but also the progressive thinking citizens. No person could occupy public office, get higher education, or even marry a civil servant, unless they could obtain a "certificate of political convictions", granted by the police, which certified that none

of the person's family members had ever been involved in any “anti-national activity”.

Given the fact that this term is totally vague, it was at the discretion of the police officer to determine how to classify a person and thus stigmatize him or her for the rest of his or her life. This regime lasted until 1981, leaving the civil war wounds open, and leading the post-war generations to believe that anything to the "right" is fascist and regressive, while anything to the "left" is synonymous with progress and humanism.

Then, came PASOK with Andreas Papandreou. By opening up the public sector to the leftists, who up to that time had been excluded, he could have led Greece to a national reconciliation. In addition, he happened to come into power at the time when the then E.E.C had opened the tap of financing. Thus, Andreas Papandreou also had the financial means to build the necessary infrastructure and modernize the country, especially its institutional framework.

He did exactly the opposite. He fostered a new division, but this time it was the rightists that were left out of the game, and all power went to Papandreou's partisans. In the first year of his tenure, he increased the number of civil servants from 121,000 to 208,000! By the time the crisis broke out, Greece had nearly 1,100,000 civil servants, burdening the State with a cost of 31 billion Euros per year!

Andreas Papandreou created one more industry of debt production and of "buying of consciences": pensions. He was granting early retirement at full pension to literally everyone: to 32-year old mothers of minors, to 40-year old military officers, to unmarried daughters of military officers, to judges, to leaders of trade unions, to repatriated Greeks from the ex-Soviet Union, to artists as a prize for their work, and to anybody who had supposedly participated in the resistance during the German occupation, including those born in 1933! 7 year old partisans!

The most outrageous benefits were granted to the members of certain unions through the so-called supplementary pension funds. In some cases, these union members, with insurance contributions to the supplementary pension funds of less than 200 Euros in total, have received, up to date, nearly 200,000 Euros per person in supplementary pensions! It was a good investment, don't you agree?

Between the year 2000 and today, Greek taxpayers have paid 200 billion Euros for pensions; which corresponds to almost two-thirds of the Greek debt.

In the periods when New Democracy, the alleged Greek conservative party, exercised power, it simply copied PASOK. The two parties, thus, created a monstrous mechanism of clientelism, even stronger than the position of the Prime Minister: The efforts of Constantinos Mitsotakis of New Democracy and of Costas Simitis of PASOK, both prime ministers, to implement some liberal reforms were undermined and eventually reversed by their own parties, themselves!

The clientelistic establishment that grossly inflated the ranks of the civil servants also destroyed the quality of the services provided. The party followers that were appointed were generally people without skills, with minimal education, low intelligence and without any desire to work. A note from a minister that Mr. Rakintzis, the Inspector of Public Administration, discovered in the file of a newly hired civil servant, is very telling. The politician wrote: "He is good for nothing. Just place him somewhere".

This partisanship has infiltrated everything, and has removed any notion of meritocracy and personal responsibility, eliminated any concept of benefit versus cost, and has also transformed the simplest civil functions into indecipherable riddles. Every time a citizen comes into contact with any part of the state mechanism, he or she knows in advance that they will live through a nightmare of absurdity, stupidity, legal chaos, bureaucratic sadism, wasted time, wasted energy and wasted money. And it is even worse for potential investors.

The parties nurtured state workers unions as a mechanism to control the civil servants. But in doing so, they actually fed a monster that has broken away and is devouring everything in its path. When the union of civil servants goes on strike, the country the country grinds to a hold. It is estimated that, over the last four decades, the time lost due to strikes by the civil servants is more than 1500 working days! That is approximately 6 years' worth of work!

The unions have imposed an unprecedented regime where there is a complete absence of any control and complete impunity for their

union members. Civil servants that have been sentenced for embezzlement of tens of millions of Euros, or even for murder, continue to be paid and keep their posts in the civil service, as if nothing had happened! The heads of the state workers unions are, by law, exempt from work. They cannot be fired, they receive a special union pension, they are illegally financed by the state with hundreds of millions of Euros, with no proof required for their expenses.

So, the Greeks have learnt to survive within a state that is hostile to them, that steals from them, does not fulfil its obligations, and does not honour its agreements. The state entraps its citizens taxes, retroactively, and constantly changes the rules of the game. The Greeks have learnt to operate within a non-existent institutional framework, where there are no checks and balances or separation of powers, where the justice system operates under the thumb of the executive branch, where it takes up to 30 years to reach a court judgement, where most operating regulations are not through laws voted in the parliament, but through decrees issued by each Minister depending on his personal political interests. It is telling that out of the 110.000 regulatory provisions of the last 15 years, a mere 2% have actually been voted in parliament.

Often it is impossible to sort out what to do because of the existence of contradictory laws for the same issue. Evidently, in no way does Greece resemble a western state operating under the rule of law. Thus, in the elections, citizens punish one party by voting for the other, if they don't abstain altogether, disgusted with the political system as a whole.

This decadence has gradually driven almost all capable people away from politics and, certainly anyone who would be able to reform this state-monster. There have been many examples of worthy, honest, and innovative politicians during these past years, but their own political parties pushed them to the margins, or away from politics altogether.

Most Greeks actually want this model changed. I remember when the troika appeared for the first time, I was in a taxi when I heard the news of the arrival of the troika on the radio. The driver, a simple guy, also heard it, and told me: "Can they stay here forever? Can they get into the ministries, and clean up the deadwood? It is the only way for us to become a real state!"

But this did not happen. Unfortunately, in my opinion, two criminal mistakes were made. The first was made by the Greek political system. First Mr. Samaras, then Mr. Tsipras, discovered the charm of the “revolution” against the bailout agreements. Instead of explaining to the citizens, in every detail, the real causes for the Greek bankruptcy, and instead of supporting the reforms that are necessary for the survival of the country, they fabricated the myth that the evil foreigners want to impoverish us, whilst at the same time they pretend to battle for the salvation of the Greeks. And, in order to preserve the privileges of their clients, they chose to overtax the private sector, forcing over 400.000 Greek companies to close or to relocate, and driving two million Greeks into unemployment, underemployment, or emigration.

The other big mistake was made by the Troika: Even though they were fully aware that the politicians they were dealing with were completely unreliable, they did not demand during the application of the first two bailout agreements that reforms must be made before the money is given. In fact, the Troika should have implemented what I had suggested, back in 2011, in my - very well known in Greece - letter to Chancellor Merkel: “Small installments against specific reforms, step by step. Not all the money at once!”

The governments of George Papandreou and Antonis Samaras voted for the laws of the bailout, took the money, and then voted other laws that annulled the first laws, or simply did not enforce them.

The data pertaining to the pension system are revealing. Even in the middle of the crisis, there are still 200 different pension funds and 40 legal loopholes for early retirement. Even today, one-third of the civil servants retire before the age of 55, with an average retirement age of 56.3 years. 91% of the retirements from the so-called “noble” funds are early. We pay 4.7 billion Euros per year to pensioners below 60 years of age. And, 417,000 people are receiving from 3 to 10 pensions each.

Despite being aware of these facts, the Troika accepted and continues to accept the criminal logic of allowing equivalent measures instead, which means new taxes in order to finance old privileges.

At the January national elections, the Greek people voted for the SYRIZA party because Mr. Tsipras promised tax relief and the end of austerity. At the same time, Mr. Tsipras promised new benefits and the hiring of hundreds of thousands of additional civil servants. Obviously, these were promises that could not be kept. But the Greek voters had to choose between slow death in the hands of the indecisive and ineffective New Democracy and PASOK or the unknown SYRIZA, that campaigned with false promises under the mask of humanitarianism. The people chose the unknown, longing for a change for the better.

While SYRIZA has won two consecutive elections this year, its populist leadership faces a daily painful humiliation, since they are forced to recant on all their pre-election promises. At the same time, New Democracy is forced, for the first time in its history, to face the question of its ideological identity, and there is even a possibility that it will elect a reformer as president of the party. This is of great interest to us because most of our voters are trapped in the polarization that the Greek political system has created, and many of them vote for New Democracy hoping that the Neo-Stalinists of SYRIZA will be defeated and that New Democracy may change its nature.

We, Dimiourgia Xana, are consistent in our pro-European orientation and radical reform agenda. We believe that the European Union is at a critical juncture in its history, since it is becoming necessary to transfer vital responsibilities from the sovereign member states to a central government. It is an extremely complex step, which we could discuss for days. But it is we, the citizens of Europe, and no one else, who have to attempt it, because, if we do not, no single European country alone will be able to play a leading role in the world of tomorrow.

However, the imperfect European structure is not in any way an excuse for the Greek problem. The debt of our country is 100% a Greek achievement, and we must be responsible for the repayment of every cent of it. And, we are the ones responsible for eliminating the mechanism that is creating the debt, because even if the entire debt were written off today, the corrupt system of governance would create the debt all over again.

The reform of our country is our obligation. It can only be done by politicians and technocrats who are not calculating the political cost and are willing to clash with vested interests.

Are there the necessary human resources to achieve this? Of course there are, but you are not seeing them in the news. Greece is full of intelligent, honest, energetic, innovative, productive, decent Greeks, who excel anywhere in the world, when they find an environment where the rule of law and meritocracy apply. Even in Greece, despite the enormous difficulties, there are people who work hard and produce wealth. There are also many competent and honest public servants at every level of the hierarchy that wish to work in an environment of transparent rules and the enforcement of the laws.

The healthy Greece exists everywhere, it exists among the Greeks of the diaspora, it exists in this room, and it exists in the last Greek village. Greece is favoured by nature. It has abundant natural resources, history, culture. In the same way that we excel in the shipping industry, we can excel in all types of business, in academia and in research. If an open-minded government were in power, which would encourage enterprise and innovation, Greece would be galloping.

We ask for your help to accomplish that. Not by giving us new loans, but by supporting reformist voices like ours, those voices that the Greek political system is silencing. It is a matter of time for the Neo-Bolsheviks of SYRIZA to collapse, especially if the European partners stick to their guns and force the Greek Government to reduce the size and waste of the State. This can only be done by shutting down useless public institutions and laying off their staff. Then, we will have a lot of work to do to rebuild Greece from the ground up. It is a big challenge, but we can do it! There are many Greeks like us that have sworn to our children to deliver to them a modern European country, productive, civilized, proud and worthy of its history. We are determined to succeed, no matter how much we will have to fight.