

FINANCIAL TIMES

June 17, 2012 11:07 pm

Syriza hails its advance despite defeat

73

By Joshua Chaffin in Athens

Although beaten into second place in Greece's most important election since the restoration of democracy in 1974, supporters of the leftwing Syriza coalition greeted their group's strong election showing as a glorious victory.

As they waited for Alexis Tsipras, their young charismatic leader, the crowd of Syriza supporters in central Athens broke into celebration, waving red-and-white banners, chanting and singing along to anthems of Mikis Theodorakis, the 1960s songwriter and musician who gave voice to the resistance against the country's military dictatorship.

A collection of leftists from as far afield as Australia and Venezuela – with Zapatista T-shirts, plentiful facial hair and a bent for black – mingled in the warm evening air, their mood helped along by a makeshift bar selling beer at recession-friendly prices.

In a nearby doorway, a man sat in plain view with a needle plunged into his bleeding arm – a reminder of the increasingly common scenes of misery in the Greek capital that have helped to fuel Syriza's rise.

The radical left coalition is now set to become Greece's main opposition party and a lasting presence on the Greek political landscape.

Party officials attributed its success to the popular embrace of Mr Tsipras's call to renegotiate the terms of the country's international bailout.

"The result proves this," said Vasilis Mouloupoulos, head of Syriza's communications team. "We forced all the other parties to talk about renegotiation. Before the [previous] May 6 election, they didn't even mention it."

Mr Mouloupoulos also pointed to the electoral arithmetic to make his case: three years ago, Syriza took 4 per cent of the vote; last month it reached nearly 17 per cent; and by Sunday night it had grown to more than 27 per cent.

"We have no reason to be sad," said Alexandros Zachiotis, 23, a member of the youth wing of Synaspismos, the leftist group the forms Syriza's core.

“Two months ago, none of the people that you see here even expected that we would be so close.”

Theodoros Paraskevopoulos, one of Syriza’s parliamentary co-ordinators, offered a similar victory-in-defeat message.

“We’ve won something,” said Mr Paraskevopoulos, noting that Syriza would now be an enduring force in Greek politics.

Mr Tsipras walked on to the stage at 11.30pm, in rolled-up shirt sleeves, to greet an adoring crowd.

Theano Fotiou, a new Syriza MP, said his appearance reminded her of the countless town square meetings where Mr Tsipras pressed his grassroots campaign.

“This is the same thing,” she said. “He’s always going back to the people.”

Only a few streets away, Syriza’s chief rival, New Democracy, staged its own gathering in Syntagma Square, the site of mass protests and civil disturbances that have flared during Europe’s interminable debt crisis.

The metal shutters were down and banks and other shops were closed. Yet apart from the party’s blue-and-yellow banners and the nomadic tribe of international television crews, what stood out was how peaceful Syntagma was.

Gangs of riot police were on hand, idling in small clusters. But most Greeks were glued to television screens – nervously awaiting the future.

You may be interested in

[New Democracy takes lead in Greek polls](#)

[Greek knife edge could mean long slow cut](#)

[Osborne risks the wrath of Merkel](#)

[Greek index soars on pro-austerity party](#)

[World awaits Greek election fallout](#)

Printed from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f7ac948c-b8b2-11e1-a2d6-00144feabdc0.html>

Print a single copy of this article for personal use. Contact us if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

© THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2012 FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.