

# Socialist Wins in Greek Cliff-Hanger

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**ATHENS —** In a harrowingly close vote that showed more indecision than clear favor, Greek voters re-elected the Socialist prime minister, Costas Simitis, a reserved technocrat who brought the faltering Greek economy into line with the European Union.

Mr. Simitis's mandate was jolted by Costas Karamanlis, leader of the New Democracy Party, a fresh, but untested politician who tapped into voters' thirst for change.

With 99 percent of the vote counted Monday, Mr. Simitis's PASOK party had 43.78 percent of the vote and 158 seats in the 300-member Parliament.

New Democracy got 42.78 percent and 125 deputies. PASOK dominated the outgoing Parliament, with 160 seats compared to 103 for New Democracy.

After a long, emotional roller-coaster of a night, a smiling Mr. Simitis, 64, arrived at the central election headquarters early Monday as fireworks in the green-and-white PASOK colors went off in the sky. He claimed a victory that he described as "greater than the numbers." He committed himself to work for stability and greater prosperity for all Greeks and called for an end to political differences.

The first partial exit polls projected that the conservative New Democracy Party was ahead by 1 percentage point, which drove supporters and even some

party leaders to predict a premature victory.

The waves of excitement and crashing disappointment so whipped up supporters of both candidates in Salonika, where Mr. Karamanlis's district is situated, that the riot police were called in to separate the two crowds.

The results were clearly not the ringing endorsement Mr. Simitis sought when he called early elections. But the dead heat also reflected an unprecedented absence of deep ideological differences.

Mr. Karamanlis, 43, espoused the same pragmatic path taken by his rival — fiscal restraint to meet European

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prerequisites for inclusion in the European currency, the euro, and rapprochement with Greece's historic enemy, Turkey.

In a concession speech Monday, Mr. Karamanlis referred to the new leverage his party won in the close race. "It's obvious the government cannot proceed without our consent," he said. "Our battle for a better Greece continues."

Voting is compulsory in Greece, and turnout among the 9 million registered voters was close to 75 percent. Under Greece's system, the party that gets the largest percentage of the vote is assured of a parliamentary majority.

Voters weighed Mr. Simitis's proven experience against their yearning for new blood after nearly 20 years of PASOK rule, interrupted only by a fragile New Democracy government from 1990 to 1993.

Many voters who supported Mr. Simitis simultaneously expressed disenchantment with PASOK, whose longevity in power bred corruption and inertia.

"I was tempted until the last minute to vote for a new face, but in the end I chose the interests of the country," Konduvas Constantinos, 39, said after voting in an elementary school in central Athens. "Greek membership in the euro is very important, and when the future is uncertain, it's hard to choose someone who is also uncertain. I

prefer a more experienced leader, even if I am a bit tired of PASOK."

The vote count was hair-raising, but the nine-week campaign was bland by Greek standards, which in itself marked a significant change from the past. "This is the first time since World War II that the U.S. was not an issue in the campaign," said the American ambassador, Nicholas Burns. "It's also the first campaign since 1965 that hasn't been marked by a huge ideological chasm."

Mostly, the battle was over social issues. Mr. Karamanlis sought to exploit ordinary people's discontent over unemployment, which is now at 11 percent, bloated and inefficient social services, and antiquated state monopolies.