

Introductory speech of the President of the Parliamentary Group
of SYRIZA-USF, Alexis Tsipras

Comrades,

Men and women, fighters for Democracy and Social Justice,

I'm glad we meet up at this Convention of joy and creation.

Welcome to this historic get-together for the Left and for this country.

To a Convention that will give birth to the new unified and strong SYRIZA that wants and is able to take on the responsibility for the great subversion but also for the reconstruction of our country.

To a Convention that aspires to be a landmark, a starting point in our effort to rebuild on solid ground the prospects and the future of our people and our country.

Comrades,

Since last May's elections that dramatically changed the political scene, there has been a ghost hovering over Greece:

The ghost of SYRIZA and the Left that manage to unite our people in a broad front of victory and subversion.

All the aged forces of the country, all the aged forces of the old world that is fading away, have united into a holy alliance to chase this ghost away.

The parties of yesterday, responsible for the predicament of the country, that slammed the economy into the rocks, the **extreme right wingers** of Mr. **Samaras** and Mr. **Voridis**, the **opportunists** of Mr. **Venizelos**, the **neo-Nazis** of Golden Dawn, the **barons of the media** and vested interests, the **tax evaders** of the various lists with the untaxed bank accounts, the **looters** of public property, the international loan sharks.

They have all united to confront us.

Because they see their days in power running out.

Because they fear SYRIZA, but most of all they fear the power of the people and democracy itself.

That is why they are set to subvert it.

They fear that our people will put an **end** to their omnipotence.

And they fear us, even though we have neither their money nor their power; neither the media to shape perceptions nor their connections with international centers of power.

But they fear us because we have the most powerful weapon that they can't beat.

We've got clean hands, open mind and a great heart.

We've got love for Greece and our people.

We've got justice on our side and we've got no dependence from anybody.

We claim nothing for ourselves.

That's why we can claim everything for everybody.

Everything for everybody and nothing for ourselves.

Well, this is something they can't bear; this is something they can't take in; this is something they can't beat whatever means and weapons they might have.

Against all the engineering and the mechanisms of their rotten power, against **the tales of the privileged of the old world**, we put the power of our ideas, the culture of our people, our democratic mobilization, our plan for the country's revival.

And most of all, the invincible power of our people; the unstoppable surge that will sweep them away.

That's why we have gathered here in Athens today, in this historic convention of democratic refounding.

Leftists of all generations, democrats and patriots from different political backgrounds, of different traditions, of different beliefs, to declare what the whole Greek people, the world of labor, is expecting from us:

Our faith and our readiness to take on the responsibility to bring down the memoranda tyranny and the traditional parties' corruption.

And to govern the country at the hardest moment in its modern history, with the aim to restore democracy, national independence, and the dignity of the Greek people.

At this call – the democratic call of the fighting Left – we are present today, men and women, all of us.

And we all have our equal positions.

We can't afford to spare anyone.

The fighters of the National Resistance.

The comrades of the United Democratic Left and the Lambrakis Democratic Youth.

The fighters of the anti-dictatorial struggle.

The political wealth of the 1974 Changeover.

As well as the wealth of the movements, old and new.

The industrial trade union movement, the first tentative urban movements, the feminist organizations, the environmentalist groups, the human rights movements.

Finally, the political and theoretical wealth of the 2000s decade, of the anti-globalization movements, of the European and Greek Social Forum, the anti-racist movements and organizations, as well as the European Left Party that has emerged as a reliable alternative force in Europe.

We are all present here, men and women.

And it is not chance that has brought us together.

We are the children and grandchildren of those who – in the first steps of the labor movement - put on the light of the Commune and class emancipation.

We are children and grandchildren of those who during the Metaxas dictatorship gave the battle of democracy although they were outlawed, imprisoned, or exiled.

We are children and grandchildren of those who during the German occupation with their patriotism and their blood created the miracle of the National Resistance.

Of the great democratic majority of the Greek people, who lived for years in the fear and terror of the Post-Civil War emergency regime.

Who gave the great battles for democracy, the 114, the Lambrakis Democratic Youth.

The hard and bloody fight against the dictatorship of the colonels – for bread, education, and freedom.

That's who we are.

We've come a long way and we're going a long way.

And at every moment, at every turn of the way we know whose side we are and where we are headed for.

And this is nonnegotiable.

But what makes us totally different is not only our roots and our humanitarian, emancipatory ideology.

It is our values, our unselfishness.

The same values for which it is worth living, even sacrificing oneself.

As thousands of fighters for social liberation sacrificed themselves in our country and in the whole world.

This is our difference.

For us politics is not a profession and power is not a piece of loot.

For us politics is a means for the people to be able to see and live better days.

And we are fully aware that no power belongs to us.

All power comes from the people and belongs to the people.

We have a home country, we have roots, we have a stand determined by the interests of the people and Greece.

We stand on the side of those who want to know the world, not in order to conquer it, but in order to change it.

Comrades,

The Founding Convention of the new unified and democratic SYRIZA takes place in the most crucial time but at just the right moment.

As people say: A little earlier would be too soon, a little later would be too late.

Our Convention is right on time - when our country reaches out to us.

When the need is ripe for **a great political subversion, a great political change.**

When the need is ripe for a Government of the Left and SYRIZA that will put an end to the Memoranda and the threat to Democracy.

This is the time to make one more resolute step forward.

And commit ourselves collectively to Greek men and women for our goals and our intentions.

To proceed with the resolutions of our Convention to a **Great Political Commitment** to the Greek people and Greek society.

We are all aware of the magnitude of the historic responsibility that falls to us.

Responsibility, first of all, to rescue the country from social destruction, to restore social confidence, to rebuild social institutions, to stop the looting of the commons.

Greek society is today before the challenge of a critical, absolute choice.

At a historic crossroads.

Greek society will either choose the road of cancelling the Memoranda or choose the road of continuing them.

Will either choose the road of democratic revival or the road of shrinking democracy.

Either the road of social justice and social emancipation or the road of vested interests and banks' dominance.

Will either choose the road of pride or the road of voluntary slavery.

Our responsibility is to thoroughly organize the first road and convince the great majority of the Greek people that in our plan for the country there is a place for every underprivileged and disadvantaged citizen, every man or woman who has been harmed by and has bled from the barbarity of the memoranda.

The cancellation of the memoranda and the renegotiation of the loan agreement is the basis on which we build the road map for the exit from the crisis.

We have recently brought our programmatic guidelines before the Greek people.

These are our prospect, our commitment.

For a Greece of democracy and social justice.

➤ **We commit ourselves for radical changes in the political system.**

- Referenda when necessary, because the people must participate in crucial decisions.
- Simple proportional representation, because each vote has the same value.
- Term limits for members of Parliament, because an MP is not a profession.
- Abolition of the Law on Ministers' Responsibility, because with SYRIZA in the government no crime will be prescribed.

➤ **We commit ourselves for democratization of the media.**

- Authorization procedures on a clean-slate basis, because the job of a "channel-boss" must stop being the only "closed" profession in the country.
- Support for journalists' cooperatives and authorization of social organizations and social actors, because reporting the news cannot be a matter of profit-making.
- Securing the legal operation of the National Board of Radio-television, because **discrediting it will nurture impunity.**

- And, of course, public ERT (Greek National Broadcaster).

Because with SYRIZA in the government, public television will not be a pariah but a major factor in the radio-television scene.

The government is breaking the law.

And we wonder: is there a public prosecutor to hold certain ministers responsible for the black screens of ERT?

➤ **We commit ourselves for radical change in public administration and the welfare state.**

- Abolition of the Kallikratis Law and transfer of funds and responsibilities to local government
- Regional governments will be major institutions for economic development and municipal governments will take equal part in shaping the welfare state
- Public property will not be sold off but given to social security funds so as to restore their property which was ravaged by PSI

➤ **We commit ourselves to combat unemployment and protect the unemployed.**

- With intervention in the Bankruptcy Law
- Lifting the liberalization of dismissals in the private sector
- Without dismissals in the public sector
- Establishing an employment clause so that whoever is subsidized with public money, Greek or European, will have to create new jobs
- Stimulating demand on the part of the popular classes

Because every euro earned by poor people is spent, stimulating the economy; it is not hoarded; it is not put in bank accounts in Switzerland; no poor people can be found in the Lagarde list

- And of course strengthening social economy and social solidarity structures

➤ **We commit ourselves for immediate measures to alleviate poverty.**

- With a new “seisachtheia” (debt relief) for overburdened households
- Reduction of the tax burden on the have-nots
- “Housing for all” and “food for all” programs
- Guaranteed access to basic goods, energy, water, telecommunications, medicine, transportation

➤ **We commit ourselves for the productive reconstruction of Greece.**

- Because growth is not possible with all-inclusive tourism that doesn't help local economies; nor with 23% VAT on food and drink
- Growth cannot mean destroying Halkidiki in order to favor those who are constantly favored

Because with SYRIZA in the government, Halkidiki will be saved. It won't be destroyed. The environment will be protected.

- Growth is not possible without public banks, which will be helping large development projects, small and very small businesses
- Growth is not possible with deserted farmlands and farmers that find it impossible to produce, and with the Agricultural Bank in the hands of private interests
- Because you cannot have growth by begging to sell off public companies, ending up of course in a fiasco

Mr. Samaras passionately tried to sell ΔΕΠΑ (Public Gas Corporation).

That wouldn't have helped growth.

Growth would be helped if Greek companies and households stopped being overcharged 30% on gas prices.

But the Prime Minister hasn't bothered at all about that.

We, on the other hand, don't bother at all about Mr. Samaras' fiasco.

What we do bother about is households and businesses panting because intermediaries coming and going at Maximou [the official seat of the Prime Minister] are having a party.

We want this party to stop.

And this is our commitment.

This mandate we will ask the people to give us, this mandate we will observe, this mandate will be nonnegotiable.

And believe me. This mandate will be respected, whether they want it or not.

Both by Mrs. Merkel and by Mr. Schaeuble.

Comrades,

After more than ten years of common course in the unprecedented adventure of our unitary coalition, SYRIZA, we are now at a historic moment of a breakthrough and continuity.

As the poet Giannis Ritsos said: 'It was worth living so that we would meet.'

It was worth meeting so that we would give hope and prospect to our people's struggle.

This magnificent get-together of different political currents, organizations, parties, and trends of the Left, was not an outcome of some opportunistic bureaucratic processes.

It was demanded and created by Greek society.

It was the hundreds of thousands of working people that took SYRIZA by the hand and drove it to **become the leading force that will take on the task of getting Greek society out of the economic and humanitarian crisis.**

It was them who imposed on SYRIZA the task of seeing things in a different way.

Until then the parties and the organizations of the Left had been renouncing the neoliberal policies, had been organizing the society's resistance, exercising control and criticism.

We could say though, paraphrasing Marx's famous words:

The point is not to renounce the anti-popular policies but to change them.

To implement a new democratic model of political, social and economic democracy together with Greek society.

The very formation and course of SYRIZA constitute a brilliant venture of the great currents of the historical Left coming together on equal terms.

It took time, experimentation, social actions and fronts. It was tested in the course of time.

It has managed to overcome all obstacles, all suspicions, and all misunderstandings.

And today the structural unity of the currents of the Left is concluded with the construction of a new political actor.

Of a new "collective intellectual" that is ready to leave behind selfishness, historical justice, ideological purity, and absolute truth.

And become a modern mass pluralistic and democratic party whose only historical justice will be the trust and the active support of the working classes.

Comrades,

SYRIZA's mature transformation into a mass democratic party is not only an internal affair of ours, but **a major necessity for the popular classes.**

Against a political-financial bloc that is determined not to give up anything of what they have gained in all these years of their dominance, we have the duty to construct a powerful, determined, unified mass political force.

The SYRIZA of its members is the essential instrument for a better organization of the genuine political representation of the forces of labor.

I have said many times that unified SYRIZA will not be a party like all the rest.

Because for us the party is not an end in itself.

The party is not its bureaucratic structures.

The party is not a springboard for the social advancement of some crafty individuals.

The party is not a “flag of convenience” for personal strategies or group strategies.

The party is the “home” of every worker, of every jobless person, of every poor man or woman.

The party will not let anyone face the crisis alone.

The party we are constructing is the collective expression of the lower classes, the disadvantaged, the working people of toil.

A supple tool based on the integration of radical social theory and the social forces of labor.

And through processes directly democratic and equal for all, it sums up this course of unity into a political program for the change of society.

Different views don't frighten us. They are our wealth.

The party we want is deeply democratic; a democratic collective individual that ‘lets all flowers bloom’, but at the same time is based on unity, unselfishness, respect, and conscious discipline.

The party we want is also an active self-criticism of party models we all carry in our minds historically, each of us according to his or her background.

We reject the idea of a party of bureaucratic centralism, **a cartel party.**

We reject the idea of a state party.

Yes, we are ripe for a sky-high leap, for a party of the society, a party of its members, a party of the disadvantaged, of those who really need the party to support their interests.

I would like though, at this point, to emphasize an issue which I believe is the heart of not only the discussion so far and in the future, but of the party itself as we understand it and as the times need it.

The issue of the member of SYRIZA.

We have all concluded, almost unanimously, and it has been a demand of the vast majority, to build the SYRIZA of its members.

SYRIZA of its members means democratic SYRIZA, multi-tendency SYRIZA, which gives room to all views and allows all views – whether individual or collective – to bloom.

It means we continue and develop the tradition of the radical left to discuss and synthesize.

It means right of control, right of opinion, right of disagreement, for all and for each member separately.

But speaking of a party of its members, comrades, we highlight - and we must highlight – not only the rights but also the obligations of those who carry the title of the SYRIZA member.

If we are talking about party members who are dedicated to the task of great subversion and change - to the colossal work awaiting SYRIZA, that is.

Then, comrades, we cannot be talking about members of diminished responsibility.

Members who treat the party as a place of political ferment.

No SYRIZA of the members will exist if we don't decide that the members of SYRIZA will be members with all the rights and obligations such a thing means, and not split personalities.

This is deeply democratic, and befits the ethos and the course of the Left, and its characteristic tradition of offering.

The members of SYRIZA should have all the power and responsibility.

This is how we should perceive SYRIZA of the members.

But also the self-evident statutory obligations of SYRIZA members.

Comrades,

SYRIZA of the members, but also SYRIZA of the society, is today more necessary than ever.

Because the dynamics of the political scene today are defined by three poles: **the New Democracy (ND) that is leaning more and more towards the extreme right, the pole of the fascist threat, and the pole of SYRIZA** and the wider political and social Left.

The attempt to put together a pole supplementary to ND - in the name of progressive origins, at that - seems to have failed for good.

The view that the Memorandum can be 'implemented' with social sensitivities and 'red lines' – i.e. the 'left governmentalism' that has been represented mainly by DIMAR and secondarily by PASOK – **has proven to be unsound and unrealistic.**

The essence of the Memoranda and of the memoranda policies completely escaped them though: **the Memoranda are not a technical procedure.**

The Memoranda are **the absolute roadmap of the neoliberal shock-therapy, which not only questions but actively demolishes all rights.**

It cannot be implemented without – even open now – forms of political and constitutional derailment.

For a year now **Democracy in Greece has been shrinking, the Constitution has become a worthless piece of junk, and even the elementary typical separation of powers is being cancelled.**

Samaras' leadership and the team around him know very well that the stability of the government depends on the complete submission to the commands of the lenders and the Memoranda. Therefore, it must be accompanied by authoritarianism, anti-constitutional practices, and stifling restriction of democracy.

Their ideological rationale is coming back on the tracks of the civil-war Right, highlighting an unprecedented and historically unnatural revanchism against the Left and society.

The fixation of the bigots of today's ND has obliterated all traces of the tradition shaped by the Right during the Changeover period – a tradition of 'radical liberalism' and bourgeois parliamentarism – transforming their party into **a hybrid of far-right neoliberalism which will be supported by vested interests and big capital.**

Against this emerging 'black front', which was so vividly and symbolically manifested on our 'black' TV screens, we must form a hegemonic program for the defense of political democracy and of economic, social, and individual rights.

We must become the political representative of a broad popular social alliance that will include all the poor and the newly poor.

In this social front we don't forget – and we don't ignore – the other political forces of the Left.

Mainly the forces of KKE.

It is inconceivable that when the working class is being ferociously and coordinately attacked by the capital, the forces of the Left are not united.

As it also inconceivable that in the name of petty party calculations the struggle of the people should be frustrated.

Particularly when this confirms – from a different perspective – the dominant argumentation about one-way streets of the memoranda barbarity.

The memorandum is not a one-way street.

The memorandum is a concentrated attack of the capital on the rights and achievements of the popular and labor movement.

Achievements which were the result of struggle and were preserved for years, in the context of the capitalist system and the bourgeois democracy.

Nevertheless, they were progressive achievements.

Their cancellation is a serious blow to the forces of labor; and a regression.

If we don't all resist this regression, then we will all suffer its dramatic impact.

Because never in history has the defeat of the popular and labor movement led to progressive developments and transformations.

Therefore, the persistence of KKE leadership in diminishing the necessity to overthrow the barbarity of the memoranda, the questioning of the necessity for a broad anti-memorandum front, and the equation between SYRIZA and the pro-memorandum parties is an unscientific approach that ignores history.

No political leadership, though, can ignore the unitary message of its base for long.

The message of the working class, of the unemployed, of the impoverished masses.

For us, KKE has and will always have its place in this democratic, class front.

In the necessary front of all the forces of the Left.

Let alone in the broad political and social alliance for the defense of democracy and people's rights against the onslaught of political obscurantism.

The day after a great election victory of our people, whether or not we will be able to form a government, we will address all the forces of the Left, to together lead the country and the people to the post-memorandum light.

To the light of democracy, popular sovereignty, national independence and dignity.

From the floor of our historic convention, we want to address a general call to all the democrats who after the changeover supported the demand for Change and pinned their hopes on the PASOK of the time.

Today, those people are watching in astonishment Mr. Venizelos' party being transformed into a component of the Right and the far Right.

SYRIZA calls all those people – honest people who are suffering from this violent class restructuring – to rally around the Left in the struggle for the restoration of Democracy and of political dignity.

It is time to meet again.

We are united by our common values and our sincere commitment that we will never betray these values.

Because Greek leftists and their parties may have made a lot of mistakes.

But they have never betrayed the faith in and their dedication to Democracy, Popular Sovereignty, National Independence, and Social Justice.

Finally, from this floor we call all the citizens who never belonged in the Left but, inspired by the ideas of political liberalism, see the problem of Democracy this country is experiencing due to the overt flirt of ND with the far Right and the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn.

The Left, and especially our own political tradition of the radical Left, is the only political force that has always respected and defended to death each individual's freedom of expression and the circumstances of their individual existence.

Those who understand the size of the threat to Democracy today in Greece can lay their trust in SYRIZA.

Not because they will necessarily agree with our positions on the economy or the political situation.

But because SYRIZA is the only political force today with the prospect of governing that can **guarantee the individual rights** against the steamroller of an authoritarianism that restricts even the achievements of the Enlightenment, the achievements of bourgeois democracy.

Comrades,

History has once again set us against those who are driving Greece to misery, authoritarianism, and to the waiving of its national sovereignty and identity.

They are **the Greece of the memoranda, the decadence, the backwardness, the submission to Merkel's every beck and call and to ultra-nationalism.**

They present submission as the only way today, poverty as the only choice, the abolition of rights and freedoms as national imperative.

And we are the Greece of tomorrow that cancels the memoranda, that puts an end to policies of subjugation, humiliation, and destruction.

We are the Greece of democracy, of those who refuse to accept the inevitability of submission and are seeking a way to national reconstruction and recovery.

We are the Greece of the intellect, of creation, of art, of thought, of dialectics, of questioning, that even in the darkest time know how to keep the light of civilization burning.

We are the Greece that opts for freedom, democracy, dignity, and social justice.

And knows how to fight for all the things that today are the alpha and the omega of our national and personal identity.

We are the ones who can and will change Greece.

This is the political, social, and class conflict today, whose outcome will determine the lives of people for years to come.

There are great and crucial dilemmas:

Memoranda or democracy.

Memoranda or social justice.

Memoranda or national independence.

And eventually all these dilemmas are summed up politically into one, which multiplies our responsibilities:

Memoranda or SYRIZA!

Comrades,

We have a plan.

We have a program.

We know what the Greece we want and we deserve should be like.

The only question is: Can we make it? Can we win this battle?

The answer is only one word: YES!

Yes, we can because first of all we deeply, firmly, unwaveringly believe that our people can.

They were able to in much harsher conditions.

They were able to in times of slavery.

They were able to under the conqueror's boot when the word "freedom" meant death.

They can change their fate today as well.

So can we, taking power from the people.

Because the will of the people is our power.

Because our politics are guided by Ethics.

Because we put the needs of the people before the demands of the lenders.

Because we put democracy before troikas.

Resistance before fear.

And we dare to declare that we acknowledge only one debt:

Our debt to the Greek people to fight for their survival, dignity, and rights.

Full stop.

Whoever thinks we might retreat from this red line knows nothing at all.

Whoever thinks we might retreat from the cancellation, the overthrow, the abolition of the memoranda knows nothing about our politics and our will.

They don't know who they're dealing with.

We can, comrades, because we won't be alone in this harsh fight.

It won't be the fight of an enlightened vanguard that has ready solutions and answers to everything.

It will be the fight of the millions of Greeks, who with SYRIZA's victory will gain a valuable foothold for their counterattack.

It will be a fight of **all the peoples of the European South**, who with SYRIZA's victory will see the overthrow of a policy promoted and regarded as a one-way street.

It will be the fight of all the peoples in Europe, who see their turn coming, after the Greek experiment.

We won't be alone, then, in this fight.

We will have the support and assistance of the great majority of the peoples in Europe, as well as of the public opinion in the whole world.

Because at last they will see a government questioning the policies of the European nomenclature that is leading Europe to disaster.

Because at last they will see a people and a government determined to open new ways, on behalf of all the peoples in Europe.

With tough negotiations for the debt.

With the aim of erasing large part of the debt, adding a growth clause, and freezing loan interest repayment.

With a strong Alliance of the South.

With the aim of an international convention for the debt, similar to the London Agreement on the German debt in 1953.

These positions, which to some might sound utopian, will become material power and will gain much more international support when SYRIZA emerges from the elections as a majority party and the Left forms a new government.

And do you know who with their attitude show they believe in SYRIZA? Those who fear SYRIZA.

Mrs. Merkel and the perpetrators of today's policies believe we are their main opponent.

They treat us as their main opponent.

They do their best to vilify us, to slander us as opportunists, to defame us.

Because they believe we can make it.

Because they are afraid that we can threaten their omnipotence.

That we can open new ways for Greece and Europe.

We won't disprove their fears.

We agree on that. We believe that, too.

Today we are making the big step for the SYRIZA of its members.

Tomorrow we will make the giant leap of subversion and creation.

We will bring down the corrupt political establishment of vested interests; we will bring down the memoranda of barbarity and rebuild the Greece we deserve.

We will bring back the thousands of the young scientists and researchers who are leaving Greece to work for a piece of bread.

We will restore the dignity and the pride of our people.

Comrades,

Men and women of SYRIZA,

I'm calling you all to make the step together.

Not to hesitate to make brave and historic decisions.

It's worth daring together.

We owe it to our historical responsibility to dare to make the step together.

We might wait.

But Greece cannot wait.

Now is the time to get the future out of the mud.

To make SYRIZA strong and our people even stronger and self-reliant.

Thank you!