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Intervention at the second SYRIZA conference

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Milan Kundera once wrote a definition for flirting: the promise of sex without guarantees! That's kind of the way I see the endeavours of the left: the promise of socialism, social transformation, with no guarantees.

In particular in these unstable times, there could hardly be any guarantees. My only firm conviction is that there does not seem to be much prospect of returning to pre-crisis neo-liberalism. When Theresa May is able to seriously propose to her party conference that what we need is more state intervention, more trade union rights, and less business greed, one knows that something serious is afoot. Neo-liberalism is not able to provide any hegemonic answer to the problems associated with its governance: social inequality which now extends to the middle classes, rising debt of all kinds and growth which is low in quantity, while providing poor quality employment for increasingly large numbers of the population. The rise of Le Pen or the Brexiters hardly needs rocket science to offer an explanation.

The eurozone is, if anything, even more unstable as it has failed to address not only social inequalities but regional ones, while its attempts to get a more adequate economic and financial architecture progresses at a snail's pace. Whether such failings can be addressed in time is anyone's guess. It is generally recognized that SYRIZA has helped to bring the issues to the fore. It has tried to connect with social democracy's first steps in the search for more radical solutions, without forgetting that its base is the European Left. Should it forget the latter, it is difficult to believe that it will make much progress with respect to the former.

But the lack of guarantees also lies closer to home, and the need to address the nature of our party and its role with respect to the government. The representation of women is still woefully inadequate – it is difficult to believe that we can have our ears open to the needs of social movements, if we cannot even hear the voice of the women within our party. Nor have we, and here we face a problem common to the Left nearly everywhere, met the challenge of creating a party structure that combines democracy and efficiency, while at the same time being attractive to younger people. We desperately need to move fast on this front, if the party is to play its role in government policy and screening unsavoury practices to which all governments are susceptible, especially in Greece where for so many years clientelistic politics and cronyism have been the norm.

Nor are there any guarantees with respect to the government's strategy of getting out of the crisis, leaving the programme with our creditors in 2018, laying the ground for progressive politics. On the one hand, the fact that capitalism has not converged to a new equilibrium since

the crisis, gives us an opening for such politics. On the other hand, we have the legacy of last summer's compromise with our creditors, a compromise which has lasting effects not only on the Greek people, but also on our alliances with large sections of society. We have to move quickly to implement those things we have agreed to – time is not on our side. At the same time, we must continue with those issues that are still under negotiation. Over the last year I am proud that, despite the agreement, we have managed to negotiate a redistributive income tax system, a state pension not subject to means testing, the protection of the houses of ordinary people from being sold to pay of their debt, and much else besides.

We have also made progress in our “parallel” programme, and, again, I am proud that we have reversed the policy of creating high security prisons, introduced civil partnerships for gay people, and even confronted the Orthodox Church on the subject of religious education in schools. It is very sad that Nikos Filis, the education minister, in this endeavour has not had greater support from Left and liberal intellectuals beyond SYRIZA. Indeed I would remind the Archbishop that St Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, asserted that the three main values of the Church were faith, hope and love, but above all love, because without the latter the first two are meaningless. But I do not see much love in school books on religion; for how can you inspire love in children if you do not teach them about other religions and cultures, if you do not put them in the shoes of the Other?

But the parallel programme is still in its initial phases. Over the next year we must promote initiatives in the areas of health, education and the social economy that will leave a legacy for the Left in other countries, and perhaps future generations as well, to build on. Here is my criterion for success, whether in a year's time, the Left in Thessaloniki, Barcelona or Berlin will defend our government along the following lines: sure these people compromised, they diverged seriously from what they had originally promised, but look how they were able to encompass their compromise into a progressive strategy, and look what they have done in health, in education, and in the social economy.

We need to come out of this conference more united than ever. Without guarantees, but with a faith in our values and analysis, with hope that we can make a difference in the current conjuncture, but above all with love - which we call solidarity. Solidarity not only among ourselves, but with the people who have suffered so much in this crisis, many of whom have lost faith and hope. The consequence of our defeat in this venture does not bare thinking about.