

Greek politics: Checking the facts

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What Greece has done to actually tackle the crisis

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Following the parliamentary elections of October 2009, the newly elected Greek government under Prime Minister George Papandreou put the budget deficit for 2009, in other words the new debt incurred in that year, at more than 12 % of the country's GDP. This 'political capitulation' is regarded – at least in foreign eyes – as the start of the Greek economic and financial crisis.

Whereas up to that point Greece had been regarded by the German public as an idyllic holiday destination, overnight it became a crisis-ridden country full of artful dodgers and creative accountants that attracted torrents of derision, polemics and rancour from German politicians and media. The following article highlights some of these alleged truths about 'the Greeks' that have been loudly proclaimed and are still persistently being peddled today. It then examines them objectively in order to establish how true they actually are.

As vice-chair of the Left and finance spokesman of its parliamentary group in the German parliament, I established close contacts with Greece following the emergence of SYRIZA – the Coalition of the Radical Left – and particularly with the Greek government under Alexis Tsipras. In this context, I have repeatedly informed our Greek comrades of the widespread views in Germany about 'the Greeks', and I have closely examined any critique of 'conditions in Greece' that did not seem

altogether implausible or that appeared to match my own experience. Needless to say, this scrutiny revealed that there is both light and shade in Greece. In so doing, however, I became keenly aware of the missionary zeal with which certain interested circles in German politics, in business and in the media, keep circulating tendentious portrayals, distorting facts and even slanderous statements.

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The intention of this paper is to counteract these fake news, without putting a gloss on anything, and to gather facts which must be presented all the more systematically in today's allegedly post-truth era. I am glad to say that this paper is not the first attempt to counteract depreciative clichés and preconceptions about Greece. At the end you will find a list of sources and portrayals of 'conditions in Greece' that are certainly worth reading.

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