

# German Foreign Minister admits EU 'torture tools'

*Last week German foreign minister Heiko Maas used the term 'torture tools' to describe the hyper-austerity that the Troika (the European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF) has imposed on Greece for the past decade. **Greek Ambassador ad honorem Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos** considers the implications of this shocking admission, concluding that Greece is under no moral obligation to continue making repayments to its European creditors given that the conditions were imposed on it under torture.*

The official Twitter account of the German Foreign Office has tweeted the following excerpt from an interview given by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to *Der Spiegel*:

*'In this crisis, we need rapid help without "torture tools" such as a troika or tough austerity measures.'*

We cannot condemn this statement because the German minister is saying the truth, a truth that the majority of Greeks have experienced all too painfully. It is, however, the first time that a German minister has characterised the Troika and tough austerity measures as 'torture tools'.

These are tools that for ten years have tortured the people of Greece; tools that were accepted by Greek governments. It was the 'tough austerity measures' that resulted in the collapse of Greece's healthcare system by slashing its budget by over 40 percent. That increased unemployment to 28% and youth unemployment to 60%, and increased annual deaths from 70,000 to 124,000. That forced around 800,000 Greeks to leave their tortured country to find work abroad, mainly in other EU countries.

Mistakes were made in imposing these measures upon the people of Greece, mistakes acknowledged even by the Troika and the IMF. The former president of the Eurogroup Jeroen Dijsselbloem admitted as much in an interview he gave to the Greek newspapers *Ta Nea*, saying that initially they experimented and it took four years for them to stand on their feet and set up mechanisms to confront the crisis. He conceded that a different policy should have been implemented in Greece, as the bailout programmes were very strict and their implementation very difficult.

More frank was Pierre Moscovisi, who was the European Commissioner responsible for economic affairs at the time. In 2018, Moscovisi conceded in his blog that, 'mistakes were also made – in Athens, Brussels, Berlin and Washington – unnecessarily prolonging this crisis.' With considerable understatement, he admitted that 'the design of the three consecutive financial assistance programmes was imperfect.' He added:

*'The financial expertise of the IMF was initially necessary and has been useful; but certain positions were too brutal and personal, antagonised relations with the Greeks and even led the Eurogroup to adopt reforms that, in my opinion, were too harsh, particularly those on pensions due to kick in in 2019.'*

As Moscovisi says, 'Eight years of crisis is far too long.' It is not only too long but morally wrong, especially when one considers the lives lost as a result. And for what? The official reason that the memoranda programmes were imposed on Greece was to reduce its public debt, which stood at 120% of GDP in 2010. Today, largely as a result of the negative effects of those programmes, that debt now stands at 185% of GDP.

The recent rejection by the Troika of the Greek government's request to extend the legal protection for primary residence

is another example of the use of torture tools, leaving tens of thousands of Greeks in a constant state of anguish that they may lose their homes. Apparently the unprecedented situation of the coronavirus pandemic and its devastating effect on the economy counts for nothing with the Troika.

UN independent experts have produced two separate reports on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations on the full enjoyment of human rights: that of Cephas Lumina (2014), and of Pablo Bohoslavski (2016). These reports both acknowledge human rights violations in Greece as a result of the memoranda obligations.

It follows that the Greek government is under no moral obligation to continue the payments of the memoranda obligations that were imposed upon the country and its people. The Greek government must now inform Germany and the other creditors that it can no longer continue making these yearly payments, imposed on Greece under torture, so that these funds can be used to support the population of Greece during the coronavirus crisis.

We thank you Minister Maas for your honesty.