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Procedures for Selecting Mayoral and Prefectorial Candidates

George A. Papandreou: Ladies and gentlemen, Greek society has demanded that the quality of our political life should be upgraded. The climate of political decay that has been cultivated, especially by the current government, as witnessed by events such as phone-tapping, non-transparency, partisan politics, and the nepotistic appointment of individuals to government and other positions, all highlight the need for radical changes in the way we do politics - changes that will enhance security and confidence.

In the short term, of course, these problems could be solved by simply bringing in new faces, but we believe that more substantive change is in order. That is why we have adopted new procedures, radical changes to decision-making processes, which will create a new relationship of trust between the citizen and the state. I am very proud of what our movement has been able to accomplish to this end.

This effort by PASOK to deepen democracy and increase transparency has been going on for several months. We have focussed our efforts on an issue that is vital to the quality of our democracy: the selection of our local candidates for the upcoming Mayoral and Prefectorial elections.

Among the many innovations we have introduced into our Charter, we have undertaken a radical democratisation of decision-making procedures. For the first time - both for PASOK and for Greek society as a whole - candidates will not be selected by a committee appointed by the party leader, but by a completely independent committee elected by our movement's National Council. A committee with a legal mandate to reach decisions after an exhaustive process of deliberation through decentralised bodies.

Another of our decisive changes has been the decentralisation of this procedure. For PASOK, the overwhelming majority of municipalities – almost 800 - are no longer under central control; the selection of candidates is not decided by the party headquarters in Athens. The final decision regarding the selection of candidates now rests with the regions themselves, through their elected regional bodies.

This decentralisation of party mechanisms and political power, this transfer of political responsibility to the regions, is just the beginning. It is the first step, if you wish, in an effort to decentralise the Greek state apparatus, and start introducing our party members and all our citizens to a new process that calls for them to take on new responsibilities and new duties. This is part of our broader programme to strengthen local government and decentralisation.

Yesterday, we set in motion a third innovation. We announced that primary elections would be held in every municipality in the country. We have decided to institute the most advanced form of primary elections. We will hold open primaries in which every citizen registered to vote in that particular region has

the right to take part, regardless of whether or not they are a member or friend of PASOK.

As this process will take place all over Greece, we will have the opportunity to evaluate the results and the process itself, and of course to make continual improvements. Ultimately, this will be an important political tool to promote deliberation and direct democracy in the future, not just for our movement but also for our nation.

Today, I would like to announce one more innovation. A new system of selecting candidates called deliberative polling, a scientific method that is being applied in Greece for the very first time.

It contains elements of preliminary elections, but I would say it is of special interest because it also revives the traditions of ancient Greece in combination with new scientific methodology. A reworking of the concept of choosing by lots practiced in ancient Greek democracy.

Deliberative polling combines the substantive dissemination of information with deliberation among citizens. It addresses many of the weaknesses inherent in political evaluation, but also in the process of direct preliminary elections.

As I said, this is the first time this method will be used in Greece. It has already been used in about forty other instances, but we are breaking new ground here at the international level too: this is the first time this method will be used to support the selection of candidates in local elections. I am very pleased, because what we are about to do for the first time in the world is nothing short of reviving and bringing up to date a practice used extensively during the golden age of democracy in ancient Athens, where citizens were randomly selected to reach important decisions that concerned all of society.

You will be briefed on the process in detail by Alecos Papadopoulos and Professor Yannis Panaretos, former Secretary General of the Ministry of Education.

This decision underlines PASOK's intention to implement procedures that will bring citizens and society closer to the centre of political life and give them a voice; that will enable deliberation, transparency, and dialogue; that will scientifically link this process of deliberation with polling, public awareness, and the internet so as to enrich our democracy.

Democratisation, decentralisation and really opening up to society – these are the three pillars of the political platform we are pursuing.

The choice of municipality will be announced today. I believe this is an important new undertaking, which will give us a tool for democratic deliberation that will not only help us today, in opposition, but will also help us tomorrow, when we are back in government, to put forward important policies that will have to be tested, heard, and thoroughly debated with our citizens.