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The party politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: The case of Greece

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Sofia Vasilopoulou

University of York, UK

Abstract

This article traces the trajectory of party Euroscepticism in Greece drawing upon theories of issue competition. It demonstrates that the economic dimension of the multiple crises facing the European Union (EU) contributed to a Eurosceptic shift in public opinion, the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties, new parties populating the Europhile end of the spectrum, and the formation of a coalition government united not by ideological affinity but by a common Eurosceptic and anti-austerity agenda. Mainstream parties maintained their pro-EU agendas and challenger parties offered both pro- and anti-EU policy options to the electorate. The prospect of power resulted in the progressive softening of Euroscepticism among challenger parties. EU issue salience was relatively high across the party system and remained so during the crisis. Although Greek parties justified their pro- and anti-EU attitudes using a number of frames, economic arguments were prevalent at the height of the crisis and challenger parties of the left intensified their claims of the EU interfering in national politics. The findings have implications for our understanding of the evolving nature of Euroscepticism and the ways in which it may feature in domestic party politics.

Keywords

crisis, Euroscepticism, framing, Greece, party competition, position, salience

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Introduction

Greece has been at the forefront of Europe's multiple crises. The country was one of the leading protagonists in the Eurozone crisis, often described in the media as the 'sick man of Europe'. Greece's financial crisis not only put the future of the euro currency in question but also the country's membership of the monetary union. The country was also one of the frontline states during the refugee crisis due to its proximity to sender regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa. It was criticised for failing to provide adequate reception facilities despite receiving funding from the European Union (EU) for this purpose (Guild et al., 2015). The UK 2016 referendum in favour of Brexit served to revive

Corresponding author:

Sofia Vasilopoulou, Department of Politics, University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD, UK.
Email: sofia.vasilopoulou@york.ac.uk

discussions about the possibility of a spill-over effect on Greece's Eurozone and/or EU membership.

Against this background, this article aims to study the ways in which the multiple crises facing the EU have impacted upon party-based Euroscepticism in Greece through an analysis of party competition over European integration, including EU issue position, EU issue salience, and EU issue framing. In doing so, this article differentiates between mainstream, that is, centre-left and centre-right parties that routinely alternate in government; and challenger parties that do not ordinarily participate in government (Van de Wardt et al., 2014). Classifying parties with reference to a framework that differentiates between populist and non-populist political actors on the basis of Mudde's (2004: 543) definition of populism as an ideology that views society separated into two antagonistic groups, that is, the pure people versus the corrupt elite, is less helpful in the case of Greece. This is because research has shown that Greece is a populist democracy, with populism observed across the party system rather than by specific actors (Pappas, 2013; Vasilopoulou et al., 2014).¹

Drawing upon theories of party competition and Euroscepticism (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Helbling et al., 2010; Sitter, 2001; Taggart, 1998; Van de Wardt et al., 2014; Vasilopoulou, 2018; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015), the article hypothesises that in times of crisis, (1) mainstream parties will maintain their positive EU position but are likely to increase EU issue salience; (2) challenger parties will emphasise their extreme positions on the EU, but the prospect of government participation is likely to result in them softening their Eurosceptic agenda; and (3) frames related to the specific nature of the crisis are likely to predominate across the party system. Challenger parties are also likely to further criticise the EU for interfering in member states' domestic affairs.

Findings suggest that Europe's multiple crises coincided with high levels of political polarisation over the question of Europe. Both pro- and anti-EU parties entered the system, offering the electorate a number of different options on the question of Europe. A coalition government was formed on the basis of its common Eurosceptic, anti-establishment, and anti-austerity agenda. Support for the mainstream pro-EU New Democracy declined, whereas the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) – a previously minor challenger party – effectively replaced the mainstream pro-EU Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) as the main left-wing contender for power.

The Greek case confirmed assumptions suggesting that mainstream parties would maintain their pro-EU agendas. However, contrary to expectations, not all challenger parties put forward Eurosceptic positions. Challenger parties offered both pro- and anti-EU policy options to the electorate. SYRIZA's progressive softening of its Euroscepticism once it became one of the main contenders for power also supports the theoretical assumptions. EU issue salience was relatively high across the party system and remained so during the crisis. Finally, although Greek parties justified their pro- and anti-EU attitudes using a number of frames, economic arguments were prevalent at the height of the crisis and challenger parties – particularly of the left – intensified their claims of the EU interfering in national politics.

The article commences with a short historical discussion of Greek Euroscepticism. It further unpacks the nature of multiple crises in the Greek context. It continues by outlining the theoretical framework with reference to EU issue competition, including issue position, issue salience, and issue framing. It subsequently tests the theoretical propositions through the use of expert survey data and the analysis of party manifestos.

The background of Greek Euroscepticism

Greece became the 10th member of the European Economic Community (EEC) in January 1981. The country's relationship with the EEC had begun in 1959, when the government submitted its application for accession, leading to the 1961 Athens Association Agreement, which came into force in 1962. The agreement included the establishment of a customs union and the harmonisation of certain economic policies, notably agriculture. The process was interrupted as a result of the April 1967 military coup and was re-activated after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. The Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative New Democracy, Costantinos Karamanlis, submitted a formal application for the country to join the EEC on 12 June 1975. New Democracy associated EEC membership with economic modernisation, external security in relation to Communism and Turkey, stability, and democratisation (Karamouzi, 2015).

With the exception of the Centre Union, which supported New Democracy's policy, Karamanlis' choice to lodge an application for EEC membership was, however, met with domestic opposition. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) called for the country's withdrawal from the Association Agreement. Yet, its fringe party status in the Greek parliament entailed that its influence was relatively minor. PASOK's opposition to EEC membership, on the contrary, was much more politically relevant. The party, which was established in 1974 and was on a path to power by the end of that decade, viewed the EEC as a construction serving imperialist and capitalist interests detrimental to national sovereignty. Its leader, Andreas Papandreou, advocated, instead, a 'national road to Socialism' and 'self-generating development' founded on import substitution with domestic production and the development of cooperation with Mediterranean and North African countries (Verney, 2011: 57). New Democracy's slogan 'Greece belongs to the West' was juxtaposed with Papandreou's catch phrase 'Greece belongs to the Greeks' (PASOK, 1977: 14–15). PASOK dichotomised politics and portrayed the EEC as part of an international plot of foreign intervention in Greek domestic affairs. PASOK's slogan 'The EEC and NATO form part of the same syndicate' (*ΕΟΚ και ΝΑΤΟ το ίδιο συνδικάτο*) is characteristic of this period, implying that foreign powers colluded to institutionalise Greece's dependency status (Clogg, 1987: 138; PASOK, 1977). PASOK's Euroscepticism was justified on nationalist grounds, arguing that it was the only party to safeguard Greek national sovereignty with a 'proud, independent and respectable' foreign policy.

Despite party disagreement on Greece's EEC accession, Karamanlis pushed through entry negotiations. The Greek Parliament ratified the Accession Treaty in 1979 but was boycotted by both PASOK and KKE. Karamanlis relinquished his position as the Prime Minister and was elected President of the Greek Republic in May 1980. PASOK's success in the 1981 national election meant that an overtly hard Eurosceptic party would form the new Greek government. However, the party could not fulfil its 1977 manifesto pledge for a referendum, as this was to be constitutionally initiated by the President of the Republic who was unwilling to do so (Verney, 2011: 61). PASOK continued its confrontational strategy until the mid-1980s, framing its 1984 European Parliament (EP) election campaign as 'the final confrontation' in which the party articulated 'the voice of National Independence, the voice of the People, the voice of the Nation' (PASOK, 1984: 10 capitals in the original). Greeks were asked to select between 'the past and the future, between progress and regression, between dependence and national independence, between the Middle Ages of the Right and the regeneration of the Left' (Kalyvas, 1997: 86–87).

As PASOK remained in government during the 1980s and Greece secured European loans in light of an unsustainable independent Greek economic policy, however, Papandreou's strategy of 'national exceptionalism' progressively subsided, and the party changed its rhetoric (Featherstone, 1994; Pagoulatos, 2004; Verney, 2011). Since PASOK's U-turn, Greek political parties and public opinion were largely pro-European with no party posing a significant threat to the country's European orientation (Verney, 2015). During the 1990s and 2000s, Euroscepticism was only articulated by minor challenger parties confined to opposition status, such as KKE, the Coalition of Left and Progress (SYN), the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), and the Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI). During that time, Greek public opinion was highly supportive of integration and the euro currency (Vasilopoulou, 2018). This suggests that Greeks would have likely supported their country's membership of the European Monetary Union (EMU), if a referendum had taken place at that time (Kokkinaki, 1998).

The context of multiple crises in Greece

The 2008 global financial crisis affected Greece's economy by decreasing its financial liquidity and slowing down the real economy (Pagoulatos and Triantopoulos, 2009). It took place against a background of domestic fiscal vulnerability and weak institutions characterised by clientelism. Greece's credit rating was downgraded and the country plunged into deep recession, accompanied by high levels of unemployment and a large deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). To avoid the prospect of insolvency, the country became the recipient of a series of bailout packages, which were linked to programmes of strict budget compliance, structural reform, and severe austerity cuts. The 'troika', that is, the group of Greece's lenders formed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was established to monitor the implementation of the bailout programmes, which involved strong external interference in Greek economic policy.

These developments affected Greek citizens' view of European integration. The percentage of Greeks having a negative image about the EU sharply increased from 2009 onwards, becoming much higher than the EU average (Figure 1). At the height of the crisis in 2013, approximately, half of Greek respondents had a negative image of the EU as opposed to approximately 28% of EU citizens. The EU's heavy involvement in debtor countries' economic policy meant that EU-initiated reforms became linked with economic malaise and loss of sovereignty (Clements et al., 2014; Katsanidou and Otjes, 2016). In addition, the sovereign debt crisis coincided with Greece being one of the front-line states during the refugee crisis with thousands of arrivals being reported in the Greek islands of Chios, Kos, Lesvos and Samos. This resulted in the recurrent perception among the Greek population that the EU was not doing enough to help the country manage the crisis. In Autumn 2015, Greeks exhibited the highest levels of distrust in the EU at 81%, that is, 26 percentage points higher than the EU average (Eurobarometer, 2015).

The context of multiple crises combined with the country's inability to promptly resolve them contributed to the rise of Euroscepticism, high levels of electoral volatility, the electoral success of anti-establishment parties, and the fragmentation of the party system (Dinas and Rori, 2013; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2013). Greece held two consecutive electoral contests in May and June 2012 in the shadow of an imminent Grexit. Parties were divided between those that supported the terms of the bailout agreements that Greece had signed with the troika, that is, the mainstream PASOK and New

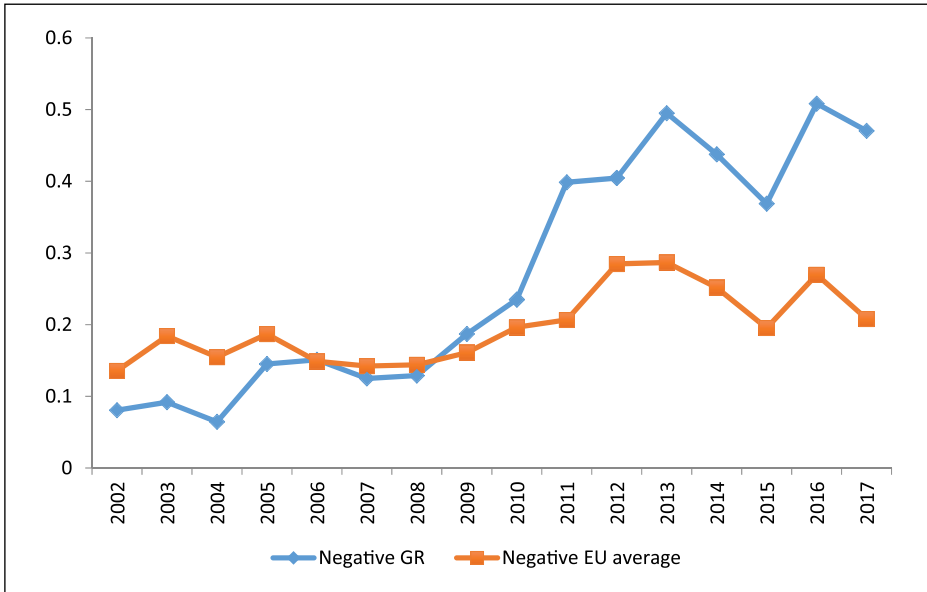


Figure 1. Greek and EU-wide negative image of the European Union, 2002–2017.

Source: Eurobarometer, European Commission. ('In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative, or very negative image?').

Democracy, and those that opposed them, that is, the far left KKE and SYRIZA, the moderate Democratic Left (DIMAR), and the far right Golden Dawn and ANEL. The May election did not result in a single party gaining a majority in parliament for the first time in over two decades. This trend persisted in the subsequent June 2012 election, but New Democracy was able to create a coalition government with the support of PASOK and DIMAR.

In December 2014, an indirect parliamentary election was held for the position of the President of the Greek Republic. According to the Constitution, the President is elected by a two-thirds parliamentary supermajority in the first two rounds of voting, and 180 out of 300 Members of Parliament (MPs) in the third round.² Failure to elect a President paved the way to an early general election in January 2015, with SYRIZA topping the polls but remaining short of two parliamentary seats from forming a single-party government. In an unprecedented move, SYRIZA formed a government coalition with ANEL. Although these parties sat at opposite ends of the left–right ideological spectrum, they both campaigned on a Eurosceptic agenda (to be discussed below) and criticised domestic ‘corrupt’ elites, pledging to end austerity and defy Greece’s foreign lenders (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016). These elections marked the failure of pro-EU parties, which were not only associated with chronic clientelism and corruption but were also linked to five years’ implementation of austerity cuts (Rori, 2016). New Democracy’s support declined whereas PASOK was relegated to a peripheral status in the system.

In late June 2015, the SYRIZA–ANEL government initiated a referendum on whether the country would accept the proposals of Greece’s lenders. The government together with the far right Golden Dawn openly sided with the ‘No’ camp, whereas the pro-EU New Democracy, PASOK, and the newly formed centrist The River supported the ‘Yes’

camp. The far left KKE boycotted the referendum, arguing that it represented a false dilemma, and that both the Greek government and the EU intended to put forward anti-popular austerity measures (Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2016). Despite the fact that Greek citizens rejected the bailout conditions on 5 July 2015 with a majority of 61%, a few weeks later, the government signed a provisional bailout deal, which revealed SYRIZA's decision to keep Greece in the Eurozone. Some SYRIZA MPs, however, revolted against their party, which meant that it had lost its parliamentary majority. In August 2015, SYRIZA's leader resigned and another snap election was held in September of the same year, which resulted in the formation of a second SYRIZA–ANEL coalition.

European crises, Euroscepticism, and party competition

The above discussion pointed towards a number of ways in which Greek party politics changed as a result of the European crises. The public became more Eurosceptic, a coalition government was formed on the basis of its common Eurosceptic and anti-system agenda, and the mainstream pro-EU parties were faced with substantive electoral losses. How may we theorise the impact of European crises on Greek party-based Euroscepticism? Theories of party competition expect parties to compete on three key dimensions: issue conflict, issue salience, and issue framing. Positional theories view competition as based on conflict over policy choices (e.g. Downs, 1957). Parties take different policy positions in order to signal their programmatic differences to the electorate. Salience theories perceive competition less as a conflict over different policy positions and examine instead issue emphasis (e.g. Budge, 2015). Issue framing refers to the ways in which parties tend to problematise a policy issue and justify their positions (Entman, 1993).

The question of Europe has been described as a 'wedge issue', crosscutting the traditional left–right dimension of conflict (Van de Wardt et al., 2014). Related to EU issue conflict and salience, the literature differentiates between, on one hand, the responses of mainstream parties, that is, those that routinely alternate in government and non-mainstream/challenger political actors, that is, those that do not ordinarily participate in government (e.g. De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Van de Wardt et al., 2014). Mainstream parties tend to primarily compete on the left–right dimension, and as such they have few incentives to compete on the newer EU dimension in order to eschew potential reputational costs (Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015; see also Hooghe et al., 2002). This entails that despite the fact that they tend to be pro-EU, they are motivated to avoid debating questions that relate to European integration. This leaves a void for challenger parties to become EU issue entrepreneurs. They challenge the status quo by emphasising extreme positions on Europe (e.g. De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Wagner, 2012; see also Adams et al., 2006). Challenger parties seek to differentiate themselves by strategically increasing the salience of the question of Europe, thus intensifying conflict over the EU issue. In the face of rising popular Euroscepticism, this strategy is expected to lead to an electoral advantage over their mainstream pro-EU competitors (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Vasilopoulou, 2018; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015).

These expectations are also in line with research on Euroscepticism, which conceptualises opposition to the EU as a 'touchstone of domestic dissent' and suggests that it is primarily observed among protest-based and single-issue parties, which are peripheral to the system (Taggart, 1998). When faced with the prospect of government participation, parties are expected to modify or avoid Euroscepticism (Sitter, 2001). This implies that

the ways in which parties compete on the question of Europe is not fixed. They change subject to electoral, party political, and government constraints (Vasilopoulou, 2018).

In times of crisis, challenger parties may see additional electoral opportunities arising from political and economic instability. This may motivate them to continue to stress their Eurosceptic positions. At the same time, the prospect of government may incentivise them to soften their Euroscepticism. Mainstream parties are likely to 'stick to their guns' and continue with their existing strategies in order to maintain their competitive position. That being said, it is plausible that the increased importance of European integration in the public debate combined with stronger pressures from challenger parties may compel them to alter their tactics and increase the salience of the EU issue in their agenda. However, it is unlikely that mainstream parties will engage in wholehearted positional change on the EU issue, as this will undermine their prior policy record and reputation.

Related to issue framing, parties may employ different frames to problematise and justify their EU agenda. For example, some parties may be similarly Eurosceptic or Europhile, but they may justify their attitudes on the basis of completely different argumentation. Helbling et al. (2010) suggest a typology, which differentiates between cultural and economic frames. Cultural frames of European integration are identity-related. Negative cultural frames mobilise in favour of cultural homogeneity and the preservation of national boundaries. Positive cultural arguments suggest that the EU promotes multiculturalism and cultural openness. Economic frames are subdivided between those that refer to economic prosperity, and labour and social security. Positive frames refer to the EU contributing to domestic economic prosperity and/or labour and social security rights whereas negative frames focus on declining living standards, unemployment, and welfare state retrenchment. Additional frames include questions of security and ecology as well as arguments related to political efficiency and efficacy, referring to the political system. Centre-left mainstream parties are predicted to justify their pro-EU stance primarily on the basis of a multicultural-universalist rationale as well as economic prosperity arguments. Christian democratic and conservative mainstream parties are hypothesised to similarly frame their EU support; however, prioritising economic prosperity over multicultural-universalist arguments. Whereas far left parties are likely to mobilise negative economic frames, far right parties will mostly evoke negative cultural frames.

These expectations should continue to hold in times of crises. However, it is plausible that specific frames may intensify depending on the nature of each crisis. Crises are exogenous events that may change the public debate by shifting the focus of attention to different crisis-related pressing issues (Halikiopoulou et al., 2017; Singer, 2013). For example, under conditions of economic crisis, economic frames are likely to intensify across the party system. To the extent that the crisis is perceived as being caused by or resulting in external intervention, negative frames criticising the EU for unwarranted foreign interference are to be expected. Given their lack of both access to power and prior record of collaboration with the EU, these frames are more likely to be observed among challenger parties.

Data

To test these expectations, this article combines two data sources. To assess position and salience, it employs longitudinal data from the Chapel Hill Expert survey (Bakker et al., 2015). Country experts are invited to position political parties on a number of EU dimensions, and to evaluate EU salience in their programmatic agenda and the level of internal

party dissent on the issue. Information is provided from four survey years (2002, 2006, 2010, 2014), which not only give us a snapshot of the party system in each of these years but also allow us to capture potential change over time. To examine EU issue framing, that is, how political parties justify their EU positions and evaluate whether this may have changed as a result of the crises, the analysis relies on an attentive reading of Greek parties' manifestos for the 2004, 2009, and 2014 EP elections. These documents have been selected as they outline the parties' positions on the EU. Where necessary, they have been supplemented by other materials in order to paint a more complete picture of EU issue framing in Greece. Note that data availability allows us to directly test the effect of the Eurozone crisis on Greek Euroscepticism rather than the effect of other crises, such as the migration crisis or Brexit, which erupted after 2014.

Greek Euroscepticism in times of crisis

Party positions on the EU

Commencing with party positions, Figure 2 displays parties' overall orientation towards European integration and the powers of the EP. The party system was polarised on the question of Europe in 2002, with New Democracy, PASOK, and SYN standing firmly on the Europhile end of the spectrum, while KKE fully rejecting the EU project conforming to its challenger status in the system. SYN, which was established in the late 1980s and ran as an electoral alliance with SYRIZA from 2004 onwards, had a left-wing vision of a social Europe in line with its Eurocommunist tradition. It viewed the EU as a vehicle leading the way towards socialism, democracy, and freedom (Verney, 2011; see also Keith, 2017). In 2006, New Democracy, PASOK, and KKE maintained their positions. We may also observe two new Eurosceptic parties, including the far right challenger LAOS and the leftist challenger DIKKI. Despite scoring similarly on the EU axis, these parties put forward dissimilar objections to the EU. On one hand, LAOS, a splinter party from New Democracy established in 2000, presented a sovereignty-based Eurosceptic critique primarily justified on ethno-cultural grounds, calling for a Europe of nations rather than a United States of Europe (Vasilopoulou, 2018). On the other hand, DIKKI, which was formed in 1995 by former PASOK members, was primarily against Maastricht and the EMU. Similar to PASOK in the 1980s, it argued against foreign interference (Verney and Michalaki, 2014). The SYN/SYRIZA electoral alliance moved towards a much more pronounced Eurosceptic position compared to 2002. This partly reflected the general anti-globalisation sentiment of the time but also internal coalition dynamics as SYN had entered an alliance with various Eurosceptic left-wing groups (Verney, 2011).

The picture was similar in 2010 but changed dramatically in 2014 when more parties became electorally significant. New parties populated the Europhile end of the spectrum, including The River, a moderate centrist political party established in 2014, and DIMAR, a splinter party from SYN formed in 2010. Euroscepticism also became more prevalent. In addition to KKE, SYRIZA, and LAOS, the far right ANEL and Golden Dawn also articulated Eurosceptic positions. ANEL was another breakaway party from New Democracy, founded in 2012 after its leader, Panos Kammenos, was expelled from New Democracy for not toeing the party line on the second bailout package. Although the Golden Dawn had been established in 1983 (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015), it experienced its electoral breakthrough during the crisis. Both parties were firmly anti-bailout, stressing

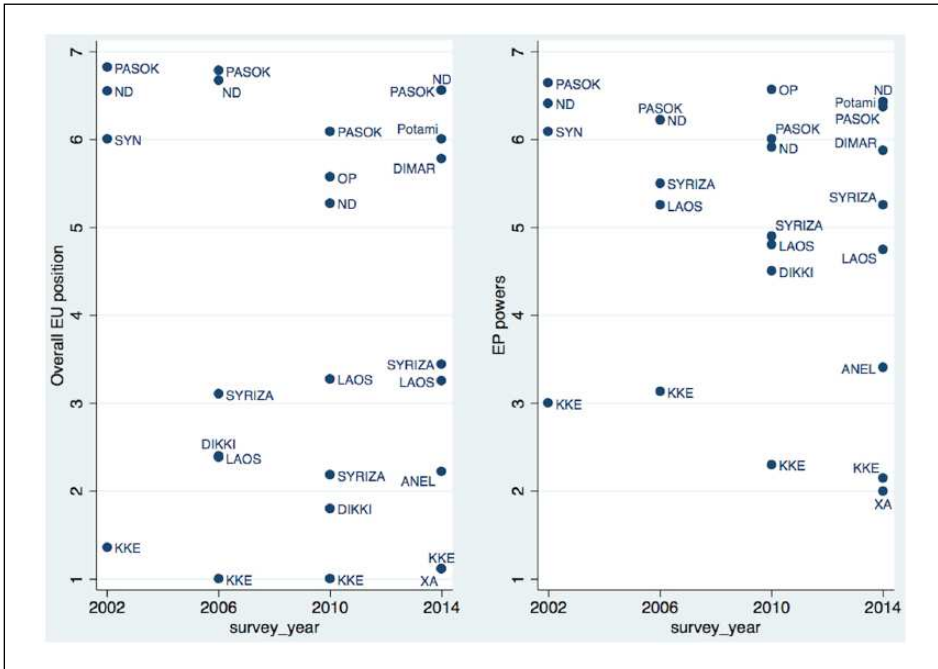


Figure 2. Party positions on the EU and on the powers of the EP.

Source: Bakker et al. (2015).

PanHellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK); New Democracy (ND); Coalition of Left and Progress (SYN); Greek Communist Party (KKE); Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA); Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI); Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS); Ecologist Greens (OP); The River (Potami); Democratic Left (DIMAR); Independent Greeks (ANEL).

EU position: overall orientation of party leadership in each survey year (1 = strongly opposed; 7 = strongly in favour). EP powers: position of the party leadership on the powers of the European Parliament (1 = strong opposition; 7 = strong support).

questions of external intervention, austerity, and national sovereignty. However, ANEL’s Euroscepticism may be considered as ‘soft’, given that the party is willing to work within the system, whereas the Golden Dawn’s extreme right ideology is fundamentally incompatible with EU membership.

These findings support the expectation that European crises are not likely to result in mainstream parties altering their EU positions. PASOK and New Democracy maintained their pro-EU positions, despite pressures for change deriving both from rising public Euroscepticism and the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties. Whereas most challenger parties put forward Eurosceptic positions, we may nonetheless observe three exceptions, that is, the Ecologist Greens, DIMAR, and The River, which were situated on the Europhile end of the spectrum. This may be explained through the theory of the inverted u-pattern of party alignments on European integration, which suggests that parties positioned close to the centre of the left–right dimension tend to be favourable to integration (Hooghe et al., 2002). In addition, given that DIMAR supported the New Democracy–PASOK coalition government (2012–2013), its challenger status is debatable. The changing over time position of SYN/SYRIZA also confirms the expectation that the prospect of government may incentivise challenger parties to soften their Euroscepticism. SYRIZA

scored close to the middle of the EU dimension in 2006, put forward a fairly hard Eurosceptic position in 2010 at the beginning of the Eurozone crisis, and again a middle position in 2014 as the party became a stronger contender for power. This suggests that parties' EU positions are not fixed and may change depending on changing electoral and party system dynamics.

In terms of strengthening the EP's powers, the picture is slightly different. Only KKE and the Golden Dawn strongly oppose giving more powers to the EP. The remaining Eurosceptic parties express different levels of support for this European institution. With regard to leftist Eurosceptic parties, such as SYRIZA and DIKKI, their support may be explained by the fact that they both advocate a 'social Europe' (Keith, 2017). They tend to view the EP as a platform for popular sovereignty that can strengthen accountability within the EU. A strong EP could also offset the power of other institutions, such as the European Commission and the European Central Bank, which are not only criticised for being unelected but also for promoting neoliberal policies. Eurosceptic far right parties, such as LAOS and ANEL, acknowledge the fact that a number of important decisions take place in the EP and view it as a forum where each member state's MEP (Member of the European Parliament) can defend and promote issues pertaining to the national interest.

EU issue salience

Figure 3 allows us to assess the levels of importance of the EU issue in Greek parties' agendas as well as the extent to which there is party agreement on this question. Information on the figure partly confirms theoretical expectations. EU salience is persistently higher among the pro-EU mainstream parties compared to Eurosceptic issue entrepreneurs, such as SYRIZA, KKE, LAOS, and Golden Dawn. This may be explained by both ideational and strategic reasons. First, PASOK and New Democracy continued to associate the question of Europe with Greece's Westernisation and economic modernisation. These two parties governed a small and peripheral EU member state where EU participation – at least until the crisis – had been overwhelmingly associated with policies resulting in economic prosperity and higher living standards. Competition had to a large extent operated on the basis of a debate regarding which government had a better record of managing EU funds, and thus the question of Europe was salient in their respective agendas. Interestingly, as the crisis intensified, the two parties slightly decreased the importance they attached to the EU, which points towards a hesitant attempt to detach themselves from their previous agendas. Second, both parties suffered from very low levels of disagreement on the question of Europe, which suggests that they had no need to avoid the EU dimension in order to neutralise intra-party dissent. Both parties experienced moderate levels of dissent on the question of Europe in 2010, which may be attributed to conflicting views regarding the EU's involvement in the Greek crisis. By 2014, levels of dissent in both parties had dropped. Third, both parties – and especially New Democracy – drew support primarily from citizens with pro-EU orientations, which allowed them to solidify their strong European credentials and emphasise their pro-EU positions.

The EU issue is salient across the party system and has remained so over time. While Eurosceptic challenger parties did not prioritise the EU as much as pro-EU mainstream parties in comparative terms, the EU was still high on their agenda. Specifically with the eruption of the crisis in 2009, all Greek Eurosceptic parties increased their emphasis on

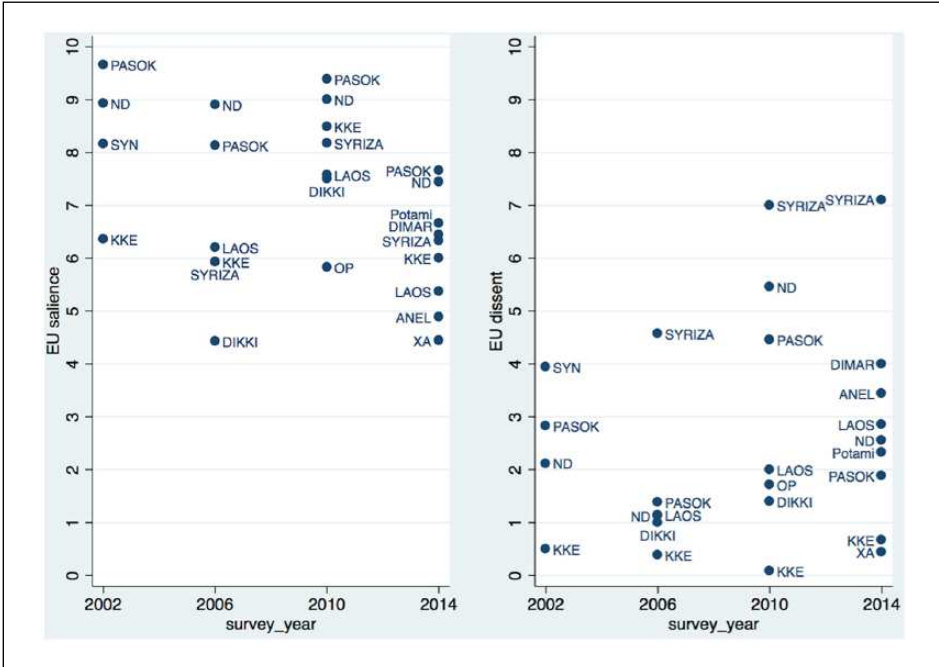


Figure 3. EU issue salience and EU issue dissent.

Source: Bakker et al. (2015).

EU salience: relative salience of European integration in the party’s public stance (0=European Integration is of no importance, never mentioned; 10=European Integration is the most important issue). EU dissent: degree of party dissent on European integration (0=Party was completely united; 10=Party was extremely divided).

the EU. EU issue salience across the party system slightly decreased in 2014, which suggests that parties prioritised domestic issues that needed immediate resolution, such as the economy, the state’s finances, and questions of governance. The most interesting finding that relates to challenger parties’ dissent over European integration concerns SYRIZA. This was by far the most divided party on the question of Europe, which goes some way to explaining the public’s confusion over whether the party did or did not advocate in favour of Greece’s withdrawal from the Eurozone.

EU issue framing

Starting from the mainstream pro-EU New Democracy and PASOK, we may observe the employment of a variety of positive frames. Both parties justified their pro-EU attitudes in terms of meeting the country’s economic interests through EU participation. New Democracy prioritised questions of prosperity and quality of life over labour rights. The party’s main objective was to ensure that Greek citizens have the same standard of living compared to their European counterparts (New Democracy, 2004: 24). This was defined with reference to salaries, quality of life, and public services. On the contrary, PASOK (2004, 2009) focused much more on questions of social rights and social cohesion. It viewed Greece’s EU membership as way of addressing inequalities and ensuring equal

opportunities. Both parties perceived the EU as providing external security and regional stability. They supported Turkey's accession as a means of resolving the Cyprus dispute but also issues related to Greece's borders. PASOK's pro-EU framing was composed by additional arguments of political efficacy and efficiency, particularly regarding the party's contribution to the democratisation of the EU as part of the European Socialists' agenda, as well as environmental protection. The multiculturalism argument was not prominent in either party's pro-EU argumentation.

The crisis was portrayed differently, however. New Democracy (2009: 4) focused on limiting the effects of the economic crisis through continued EU participation and portrayed the EU as supporting the Greek economy (New Democracy, 2012). PASOK (2009) touched upon the argument that the EU's neoliberal policies contributed to the crisis and that the EU should recognise Greek efforts at addressing the crisis (PASOK, 2009, 2014). PASOK (2014) put forward a vision of a free, secure, and just Europe that ensures the social cohesion, equal development, and solidarity among its members. The party warned against populism and austerity, calling for a system that would allow Greece to regain its credibility. Both parties employed the crisis to criticise each other. New Democracy (2009) insisted that it was the only Greek party with a 'true' European orientation. PASOK (2009) directly blamed New Democracy for the mismanagement of EU funds, which – the party argued – contributed to the country's lack of credibility abroad and its economic crisis.

In terms of Eurosceptic frames, we may also observe the predominance of the economic category across challenger parties. Additional frames included security and foreign interference mostly mobilised by far left Eurosceptic actors, and cultural/nationalistic frames primarily employed by far right Eurosceptic parties. Specifically, starting from the far left, KKE (2004, 2009) endorsed 'resistance', 'disobedience', and 'insubordination', arguing that EU policies were 'anti-popular' and urging Greek voters to embark upon a struggle against the EU *cul-de-sac* (*Ευρωμονόδρομος*) (KKE, 2004, 2009, 2014). KKE used economic frames both related to economic prosperity and labour/social security to argue that EU membership is a capitalist alliance that serves the interests of the rich and powerful, including bankers, industrialists, and ship-owners, at the expense of the working class that has lost its social and labour rights. In addition, the party justified its Euroscepticism with reference to negative security arguments, specifically framed in terms of foreign interference. It portrayed the EU as an imperialistic power, which along with the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervenes in countries' domestic affairs, promotes war, and seeks to establish protectorate states. Contrary to expectations, KKE put forward nationalist frames, but instead of focusing on culture, it prioritised popular sovereignty and self-sufficiency (e.g. see Halikiopoulou et al., 2012). The crisis did not fundamentally change the party's anti-EU framing. Economic frames did, however, predominate, as the crisis further consolidated existing argumentation that the EU is a neoliberal project that does not serve the peoples of Europe. KKE (2014) continued to call for Greece's withdrawal from the EU and the unilateral suspension of the country's debt payments.

Similar to KKE, the far left SYRIZA (SYN, 2004; SYRIZA, 2009, 2014) framed its Euroscepticism primarily with reference to economic and security frames. The EU was viewed as a 'Great alliance' between right-wing and left-wing neoliberal forces, whose anti-democratic policies negatively impact upon social cohesion, economic prosperity, women's rights, and minority protection. SYRIZA opposed all European Treaties since Maastricht. The party (2009) stood firmly against the militarisation of Europe and the

EU's foreign interference, which it viewed as undermining peace, stability, and cooperation in Europe. However, unlike KKE, SYRIZA also employed negative frames of political efficacy and efficiency in its anti-EU reasoning, especially the criticism that the EU is unaccountable and undemocratic not taking Europeans' views into consideration. Most importantly, it did not – openly in its European manifestos – advocate Greece's unilateral withdrawal from the EU and the Eurozone. The party did not advocate a 'national road to socialism'. Instead, at the height of the crisis, it put forward a 'radical criticism' of the EU and offered its alternative vision of a socialist Europe defined as 'a Europe of employment, rights, solidarity, democracy, peace, progressive development, gender equality, without racism or homophobia; a Europe that guarantees equality among its peoples' (SYRIZA, 2014: 2). In 2014, the EU's foreign interference was also framed in economic terms, for example, with reference to Germany's intervention in EU member states' domestic affairs.

The far right LAOS, ANEL, and the Golden Dawn combined economic and cultural/nationalism frames.³ They often merged cultural and security anti-EU frames. LAOS (2004) was critical of the euro, which was seen as resulting in national economic decline. The party argued that the EU discarded Europeans' Christian values and culture. It criticised the EU for failing to protect Greek and Greek Cypriot security vis-à-vis Turkey (LAOS, 2004) as well as Greek parties for not fighting for the Greek national interest in the EU, specifically referring to Cyprus and Turkey (LAOS, 2009). LAOS portrayed itself as the only party advocating the interests of Greece and 'Hellenism' in the EU. ANEL (2014) argued that EU membership had resulted in the country losing sovereignty in all policy domains. It also called for a coalition between the countries of Southern Europe in order to 'fight' against Northern European states. Finally, the party reiterated that Greek borders are also EU borders. This security frame was linked both to Greece's relations with neighbouring countries as well as migration. Finally, the Golden Dawn viewed the EU as a 'total failure' with devastating consequences on Greek industrial and agricultural production. The party called for self-sufficiency, national production, and a return to the national currency. The EU was framed as inspired by Marxist ideals, which 'destroy national identity' and 'obliterate national consciousness' (Linardis, 2015).

Discussion

The multiple crises facing the EU – the economic crisis in particular – contributed to a Eurosceptic shift in Greek public opinion, new parties populating the Europhile end of the spectrum, the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties, and a coalition government united not by ideological affinity but by a common Eurosceptic and anti-austerity agenda. These changes increased the relevance of Eurosceptic voices in the system. That being said, we must be careful not to equate support for these parties as exclusively linked to their Euroscepticism. Their success was also partly related to the fact that – unlike the two pro-EU mainstream parties – they were not associated with or deemed responsible for the crisis. Therefore, their protest and anti-system character also heavily contributed to their success. The rise of Eurosceptic parties did not coincide with a 'Eurosceptic contagion' across the party system. Instead, we may observe a stronger polarisation on the EU dimension with parties presenting a variety of different options to the electorate on the question of Europe.

Two findings are particularly interesting. First, New Democracy, which is the main right-wing actor in the system, continued to adhere to its pro-EU agenda. Second,

SYRIZA, which effectively replaced PASOK as the main left-wing contender for power, progressively softened its Euroscepticism. In essence, both parties decided that it is best to address the crisis within rather than outside the EU. For New Democracy, this may be understood through a focus on the centrality of Westernisation and Europeanisation in its ideology. The party was also aware of the country's limited state capacity outside the EU. The progressive softening of SYRIZA's Euroscepticism may be explained through the realities of governance. When the party entered government, it became clear that Greece was not in a strong negotiating position vis-à-vis the troika and could not therefore obtain the concessions it had hoped for. This U-turn, however, did not prevent the party from winning the September 2015 national election. This suggests that although SYRIZA's Eurosceptic agenda contributed to its rise, it was not necessarily responsible for its continued electoral success. SYRIZA represented a new political force in the system, not previously tainted by corruption, nepotism, and rent-seeking behaviour, which ultimately consolidated its presence in the party system.

The article has offered an analysis of the changes that occurred in Greek politics following the eruption of the global financial crisis. Since then, the EU has had to also address a migration and a constitutional crisis. It is hard to assess the relative weight of the above crises on the party politics of Euroscepticism in Greece, as the latter two are continuing to unfold as of the time of writing. The key observation thus far is that the economic crisis has had a greater effect on Greek politics, as it was tightly intertwined with significant domestic economic problems and the chronic persistence of clientelism.

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Notes

1. This is because research has shown that Greece is a populist democracy based on pluralistic values, which are nonetheless inimical to political liberalism (Pappas, 2013). Despite the fact that Greece's transition in the late 1970s commenced with New Democracy initiating liberal reforms, this trend was quickly reversed with PASOK assuming office from the 1980s onwards. PASOK was a highly personalised and populist party, which offered a master narrative separating the Greek 'people' from an exploiting domestic and foreign 'establishment'. PASOK's political success not only consolidated this political cleavage in the Greek society but also resulted in New Democracy co-opting this populist strategy in order to compete with PASOK in the context of the Greek two-party system. Various efforts to modernise and reform the political system in the 1990s and 2000s failed. New Democracy and PASOK employed their access to state resources in order to distribute rents for party political purposes. Populism remained a key feature of the entire party system during the crisis – albeit in different forms depending on mainstream versus challenger party dynamics (Vasilopoulou et al., 2014). The establishment of the coalition government between SYRIZA and the Independent Greeks (ANEL) in 2015 further solidified the populist character of Greek politics, as these two parties were divided by their ideology but were nonetheless united by their populist anti-establishment credentials, which allowed them to coalesce (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016).
2. http://www.presidency.gr/?page_id=4144 (accessed 1 September 2017).
3. Note that while ANEL issued a manifesto for the 2014 EP election but not for previous years, LAOS issued a manifesto for the 2004 and 2009 EP elections. There is no available Golden Dawn manifesto for the 2014 election.

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Author biography

Sofia Vasilopoulou is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of York, UK. Her work examines political dissatisfaction with democracy and democratic institutions across Europe. Specific themes include Euroscepticism, extremism, and loss of faith in traditional politics. She is the author of *Far Right Parties and Euroscepticism: Patterns of Opposition* (ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield, 2018) and the co-author of *The Golden Dawn's 'Nationalist Solution': Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Greece* (Palgrave, 2015). She has published in journals such as *European Journal of Political Research*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, and *European Union Politics*.