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# Fragmentation and Exclusion: Understanding and Overcoming the Multiple Impacts of the European Crisis (Fragmex)

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## D.2.4 Policy Paper on Greek public discourses and attitudes on the role of Germany and the EU in the Greek Crisis

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Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού, Παιδείας & Θρησκευμάτων  
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ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑΣ  
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η περιφέρεια στο **επίκεντρο** της ανάπτυξης

Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης - Ευρωπαϊκό Ταμείο Περιφερειακής Ανάπτυξης (ΕΤΠΑ), στο πλαίσιο του Ε.Π. Ανταγωνιστικότητα και Επιχειρηματικότητα (ΕΠΑΝ II) και των Π.Ε.Π. Αττικής, Π.Ε.Π. Μακεδονίας - Θράκης

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on FRAGMEX's second Work Package other research reports and new data from Eurobarometer surveys and opinion polls from the polling company Public Issue, this paper documents the emergence of a normative/ discursive rift in the Greek public sphere, whereby the EU and Germany in particular, are distinguished as largely responsible for the crisis suffered by the Greeks. The EU is held responsible because of its inability to resist Germany's domination and display a more solidary face to Greece; Germany for being a privileged economic superpower, which dictates a harsh economic policy that serves its own national interests. In this context, aggressive public discourse against both the EU and particularly Germany has been articulated by both politicians and the general public. More generally, the paper documents an outbreak of Euroscepticism in Greece, as well as a gap between elites' and the general public's attitudes towards the EU, with the latter feeling much more alienated and untrusting of the EU, than the former. Nonetheless, the analysis also shows that while disappointed, Greeks do not reject the EU and still want their country to be part of the European integration project. Indeed, it could be said that a positive message that emerges from the analysis, is that the criticism leveled against the EU, is not that EU has gone too far, but on the contrary, that integration has not gone far enough, in order to guarantee a more efficient and just crisis management mechanism.

## **Preface**

This policy paper is the final deliverable of work-package 2. Its aim is the examination of the conceptualization and understanding of the crisis in Greece, and in particular, of the view of the role of the European Union (EU) and especially Germany in it, through an analysis of Greek attitudes and public discourses on these issues. It is preceded by, and partly relies on the findings of three other deliverables, which were designed to report research findings on attitudes on the crisis and different types of Greek public discourses: (a) “Public discourse analysis of the Greek crisis: the case of Greek politicians’ perceptions of the Germans”, which also included an additional part on political commentary by the readers of online news sites: “Readers’ online comments about Chancellor Merkel’s visits to Athens”, authored by Maria Zafiropoulou, Aspasia Theodosiou and Anastasia Papakonstantinou; (b) “Discourse analysis of interviews from selected groups (Policy and Opinion Makers)”, by Anastasia Papakonstantinou and (c) “Assessing the image of Germany in the Greek media: Visual analysis of Greek media reports on the role of Germany in the Greek crisis”, by George Tzogopoulos.

## II. Introduction

The Greek crisis has been the most difficult episode of the wider Eurozone crisis to resolve to-date. As other countries that had to resort to the funding mechanisms of the European Union (EU), have either exited their bailout programmes or are on course to do so,<sup>1</sup> Greece's crisis seems to be without end (Katsikas 2012). One of the key characteristics of the Greek crisis, which could also go some way towards explaining why it has been so hard to resolve, has been the very intense and polarized public discourse that has dominated the country's public sphere during the years of the crisis. While, neither intensity, nor polarization are new features of the Greek public discourse (Pappas 2014), in recent years these features reached unprecedented heights; no doubt the severe social crisis which accompanied the deep recession, which has been without precedent for a developed country in the postwar period, played its role.

From May 2010, when the first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) detailing the policy programme accompanying the first bailout loan, was signed, up to the summer of 2015, when the new coalition government of SYRIZA/ Independent Greeks, negotiated and signed a third MoU, the public discourse in Greece was dominated by a deep "Memorandum/anti-Memorandum" rift, which pitted those against the policy recipe of the MoU, against those who endorsed it, or at least accepted it as necessary. On the one hand, this rift reflected the material fragmentation impacting Greek society due to the social and economic crisis, as the lower income strata were disproportionately hit by the crisis,<sup>2</sup> and the state proved unable to soften the blow through social policy.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it was also due to political strategies, as mainstream parties in opposition, but primarily parties hitherto found at the fringes of the mainstream political system, sought to uphold and reinforce this rift, in order to undermine the legitimacy of the parties who signed and implemented the MoUs.<sup>4</sup>

This polarization along the "Memorandum/ anti-Memorandum" division, is expected to have significant consequences for the image of the EU in general and Germany in particular, because the "Memorandum" has been perceived by part of the population and the political system as the main culprit for the deep economic crisis the country has been suffering for more than 6 years. In this sense, since the "Memorandum" was effectively imposed by the country's creditors, it has often been perceived as an instrument of foreign oppression. In this context, finding negative associations related to Greece's European partners in the Eurozone in the Greek public discourse, should come as no

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<sup>1</sup> Ireland exited its bailout programme in December 2013, while Portugal exited its own programme in June 2014, both according to plan. Cyprus' programme is on track and progress is considered good (see "Eighth Review under the Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria, IMF, 8 September 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See deliverable 1.1 of the Fragemex project, "Social Profile Report On Poverty, Social Exclusion And Inequality Before And After The Crisis In Greece", Dimitris Katsikas, Alexandros Karakitsios, Kyriakos Filinis and Athanassios Petralias, Athens, February 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See deliverable 1.2 of the Fragemex Project, "The Double Mismatch: Anti-Poverty Policies and Discourses on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Greece under the Economic Crisis", Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos, December 2014.

<sup>4</sup> The analysis here is focused on the discursive "Memorandum-anti-Memorandum" rift; for an analysis that demonstrates how all political parties, both mainstream and fringe have used populist tactics during the crisis see Vasilopoulou et al. (2014).

surprise. Germany is expected to have a particularly important role in such discourses, given her emergence as the new economic hegemon of Europe and her dominant role in the handling of the Greek and wider Eurozone crises.

From the above, it is obvious that the crisis is expected to have had a significant impact on the image of the EU and Germany in Greece. This in turn is bound to be significant for a number of wider debates related to the European integration project, such as debates on the EU as an elite-driven project and Euroscepticism. It is clear that these issues, beyond their theoretical interest, raise significant policy issues and have potentially serious repercussions for the course of the European integration project.

In this context, the aim of this policy paper is to: (a) bring together the findings of the research reports mentioned above, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of the attitudes of elites and public discourses on the crisis in the Greek public sphere, (b) present findings derived from opinion surveys, which will complement the picture obtained from (a) with data on the attitudes of the general public, (c) discuss the contribution of the findings from (a) and (b) to the perceived discursive fragmentation in the EU between creditor and debtor countries and in particular between Germany and Greece, (d) to link these findings to relevant theoretical debates on issues such as the EU as an elite-driven project and Euroscepticism and (e) consider ways to reverse this process of fragmentation.

Accordingly, the rest of the paper is structured as follows: in the next section empirical findings on Greek attitudes and public discourses on the EU and Germany during the crisis are presented, followed by a discussion on their importance in the formation of a discursive rift between Germany and Greece. The next section relates this analysis to wider theoretical debates on the course of European integration. The final section considers how a reversal of this process of fragmentation could be achieved, focusing on the Greek side of the rift.

### **III. Greek attitudes and public discourses on the EU and Germany during the crisis: Empirical findings and assessment**

In this section of the paper, a selection of the main findings from available empirical research will be presented in an effort to provide a more comprehensive image of the Greek attitudes and public discourses on the EU and Germany in the context of the Greek crisis. The analysis will examine first empirical data on attitudes and then on public discourses. In both cases the empirical findings will be categorized into two groups, according to the type of actor they relate to: (a) general public/ voters, (b) elites. Moreover, in the category of public discourses, a third actor, the media, will be added. These are the principal types of actors participating in the dynamic process of shaping both public discourse, and the wider political background in modern liberal democracies and their concurrent examination will allow for a more holistic and complete understanding of the way Greeks perceive the role of Germany and the EU more generally during the crisis. For the attitudes of the general public/ voters we will rely on an analysis of recent Eurobarometer surveys for their views on the EU and for their attitudes towards Germany, we will rely on and a series of public opinion surveys in Greece on this topic, by one of the

most well-known polling companies in Greece, *Public Issue*. To analyse the attitude of elites, we will rely on the findings of a series of interviews conducted in the context of FRAGMEX, with 67 representatives of four elite groups, namely: (a) politicians (members of the government, members of the parliament (MPs) and executives of political parties), (b) government technocrats and policy advisors, (c) trade unionists and representatives of professional associations and (d) journalists and editors (Papakonstantinou 2015). The analysis of public discourses will rely on the following sources: a) for the general public/ voters we will use the findings of a discourse analysis of the online comments of visitors to three well known and influential Greek news portals/ websites – Vima, Prwto Thema and TVXS, performed by Zafiropouloulou, Theodosiou and Papakonstantinou (2015) in the context of FRAGMEX, b) the discourse analysis of elites will be limited to political elites and will rely on a critical political discourse analysis by political parties, MPs, and party leaders throughout the crisis, conducted also by Zafiropouloulou, Theodosiou and Papakonstantinou (2015). Finally, the role of the media will be examined by relying on the findings of a content analysis of the reporting and visual representation in the cover-pages of mainstream Greek newspapers conducted by Tzogopoulos (2015) for the FRAGMEX programme.

### **III.a Greek attitudes on the EU and Germany during the crisis**

#### *III.a.1. General public/ voters*

Greece has traditionally been considered one of the most “pro-European” countries and Greek public opinion has always been very positive towards the EU, recording levels of support considerably higher than the EU average (Clements et al. 2014). However, during the years of the crisis research indicates that the attitudes of the Greek general public towards EU have turned negative (Serrichio et al. 2013; Clements et al. 2014). In this section we review and analyze the most recent available data from Standard Eurobarometers in order to determine Greek attitudes towards the EU during the crisis.

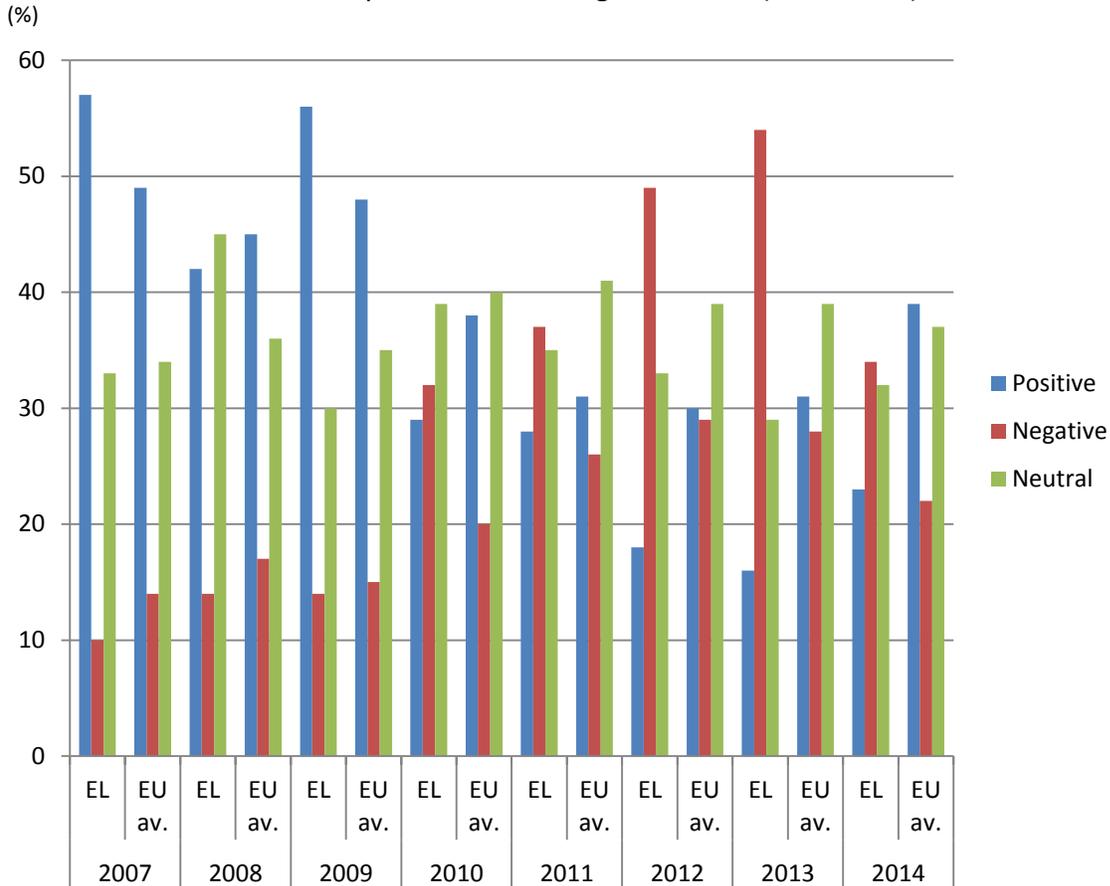
Considering first the general attitudes of Greek public opinion towards the EU, we see a clear trend of reversal of previously positive attitudes concerning the image of EU as a whole (Graph 1). Following a drop in positive attitudes and a significant increase in neutral attitudes in 2008, a trend reproduced in many EU member states as the global financial crisis erupted and economic prospects worsened,<sup>5</sup> up to and including 2009, Greek attitudes remained overall positive; moreover, negative attitudes were at low levels and for all years before 2010, below those of the EU on average. However, from 2010 (when the first MoU was signed) there is a drastic change in the image of the EU in Greece, with negative attitudes surpassing positive attitudes (and from 2011 surpassing also neutral attitudes) and displaying a constant upward trend, which peaked in 2013 at 54%. This means that for the first time in 2013, the majority of Greeks held a negative image of the EU. This is in contrast to the EU average, where positive attitudes continued to surpass negative attitudes throughout the crisis.<sup>6</sup> Also, an interesting finding is that in both

<sup>5</sup> For details see *EUROBAROMETER 70 Public opinion in the European Union*, June 2010, available at: [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/eb70\\_full\\_en.pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/eb70_full_en.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Obviously there is considerable variation between countries, but such an analysis goes beyond the purposes of this paper.

Greece and the EU as a whole, we see a significant drop in negative attitudes and a rise of positive attitudes towards the EU in 2014. Given that in 2014 economic prospects for both Greece and the Eurozone seemed to improve, this change in attitudes is an indication that the overall image of the EU is significantly affected by the general economic prospects, which is also in line with the change recorded in 2008, mentioned above.

Graph 1. General Image of the EU (2007-2014)

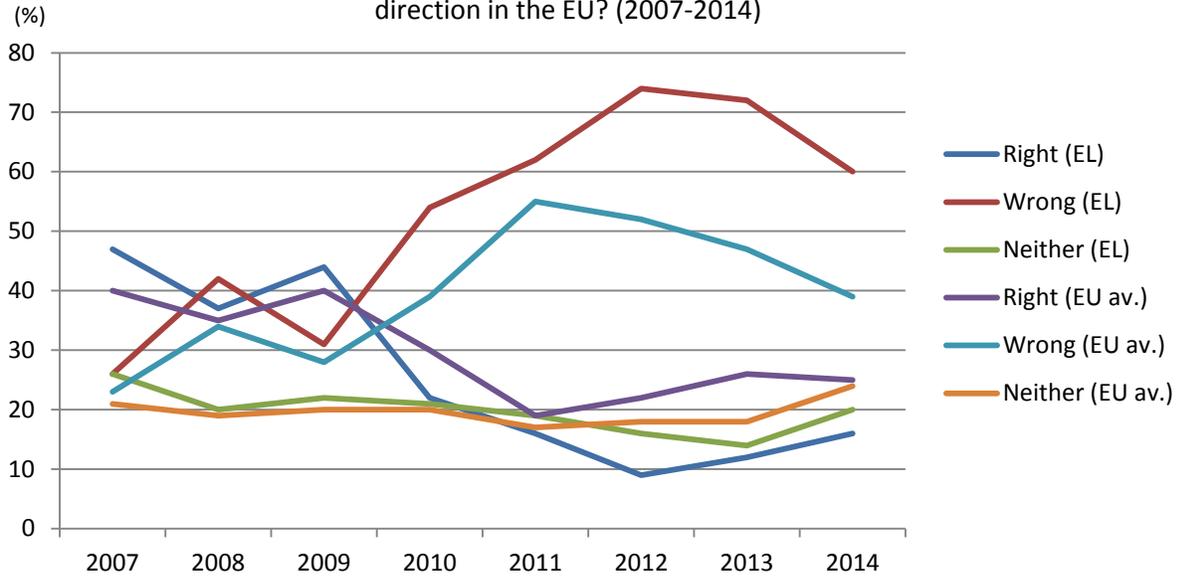


Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 2007-2014.

We get an even clearer view of this correlation of the change in the attitudes of the Greek general public towards the EU and the state of economic conditions, when we examine the public’s perception of the general direction of the EU (Graph 2). Here, we see again that starting in 2010 there is a dramatic increase in responses that characterize the EU’s direction as wrong and a concurrent dramatic drop of answers that view EU’s direction in a positive light. This trend is replicated at the EU average level, albeit with substantially lower intensity than is the case for Greece. This finding is hardly surprising as in 2010 the EU’s approach in handling the Greek, but also wider Eurozone crisis was shaped; bailout loans, austerity programmes, the IMF and the Troika were introduced in 2010 as key elements of an ad hoc, “muddle-through” approach to resolving the crisis, which has proven unable to provide a fast and painless recovery of either the Greek or Eurozone economies. In this context, the perceptions of the

general direction of the EU are certain to portray the rejection of its approach to resolving the crisis by a considerable part of the Greek, but also the wider EU public.

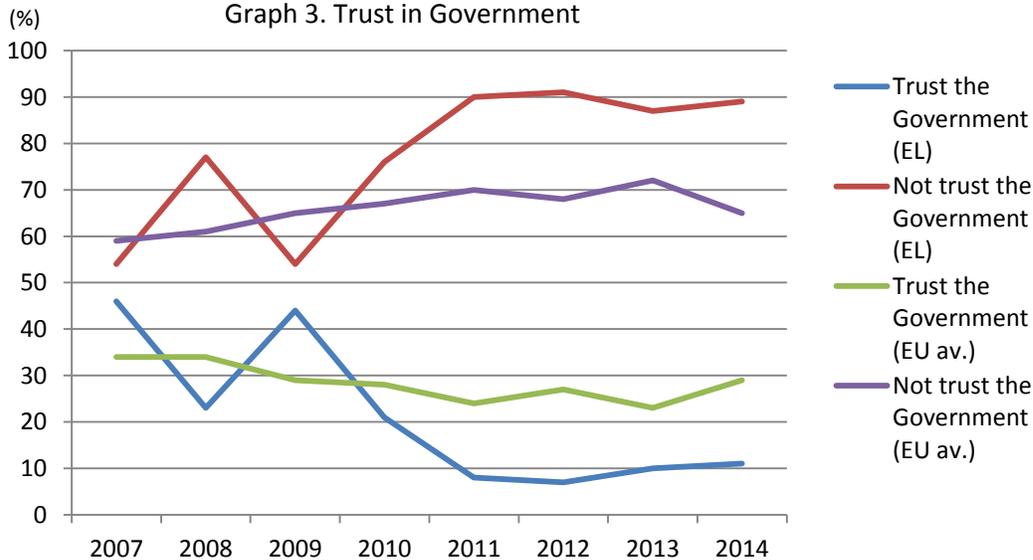
Graph 2. Would you say that things are going in the right or in the wrong direction in the EU? (2007-2014)



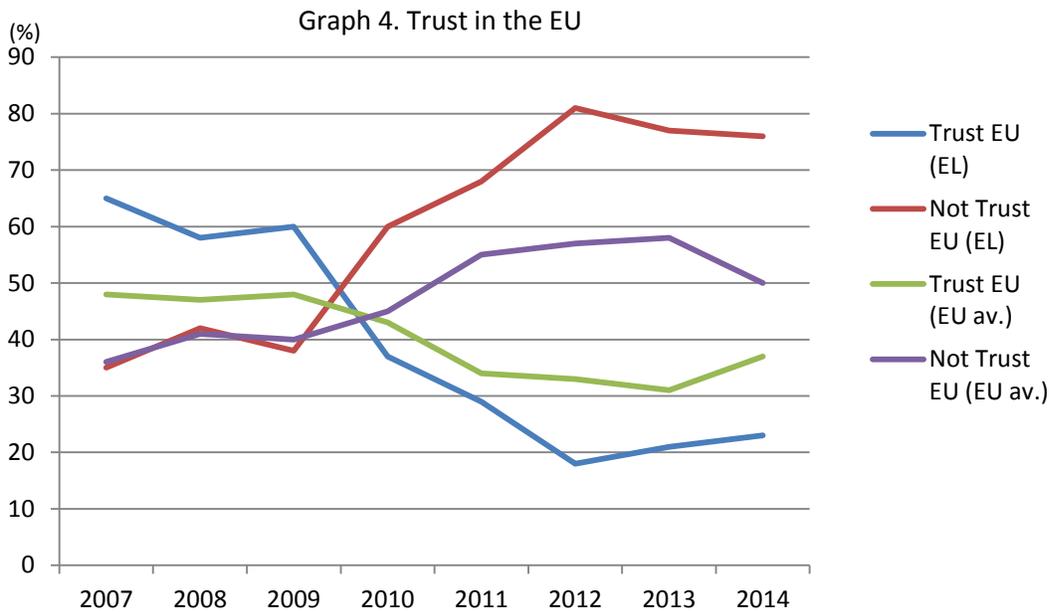
Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 2007-2014.

The rejection of the handling of the crisis can also be seen by the degree of trust Greeks and Europeans feel towards their national government and the EU. Trust in both their national government (Graph 3) and the EU (Graph 4) have deteriorated during the crisis, with only 11% of Greeks trusting their government in 2014 and 23% trusting the EU, down from 46% and 58% respectively in 2007.

Graph 3. Trust in Government



Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 2007-2014.



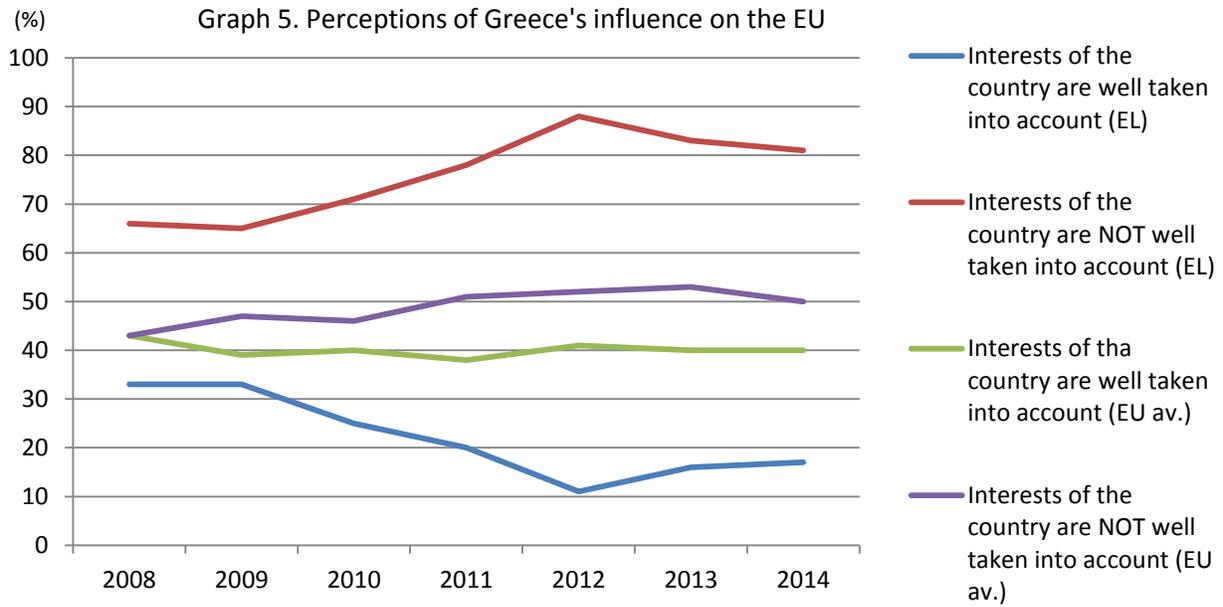
Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 2007-2014.

It is also noteworthy that trust (distrust) towards the EU remains at higher (lower) levels compared to the national government even after the crisis. Finally, a similar trend is observed for the EU as a whole, albeit as before it is less intense. These findings lend support to the view that Greek and EU citizens hold responsible for the crisis not only and perhaps not primarily the EU, but their own national governments, despite the critique towards the way the EU has handled the crisis.

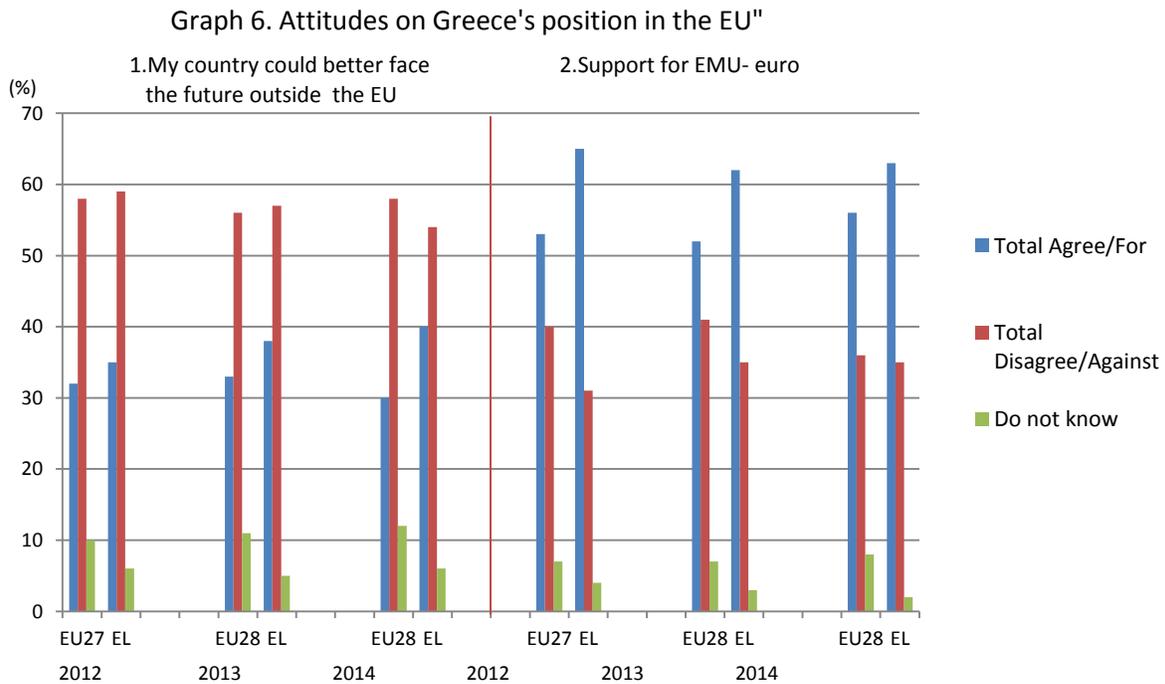
This is somewhat surprising when we consider what Greeks think about their country's influence in the EU and the degree to which Greek national interests are taken into account (Graph 5). Here we see that starting in 2010 Greeks' increasingly thought that their country had very little influence on the way the EU operated, a trend which peaked in 2012 with 88% of Greeks believing that Greek interests are not taken into account in the EU. Obviously, this view betrays a sense of disappointment; however Greeks do not seem to put the blame for this situation entirely on the EU, as they still trust it more than their national government. This combination of findings could be explained in two ways: either Greeks realize the nature of international and European "hard-politics" and do not assign a "negative" sign to the EU when other states' interests seem to dominate, even if these are not necessarily compatible with Greece's interests, or they assign a large part of the blame for this "impotency" to project Greek interests to the EU, to the Greek governments themselves.

Such a reading of the findings would suggest that despite the deterioration of EU's image and Greek's trust in it, Greek citizens do not reject the EU as a whole. This view is corroborated by the answers of Greek citizens to two other questions about the position of the country in relation to the EU (Graph 6). Through some of the most difficult years of the crisis (2012-14), for which there is available data, a solid majority of Greeks (ranging between 54 -59%) believe that their country would not fare better outside

the EU, while an even higher majority (ranging between 62-65%) support the monetary union and the common currency.



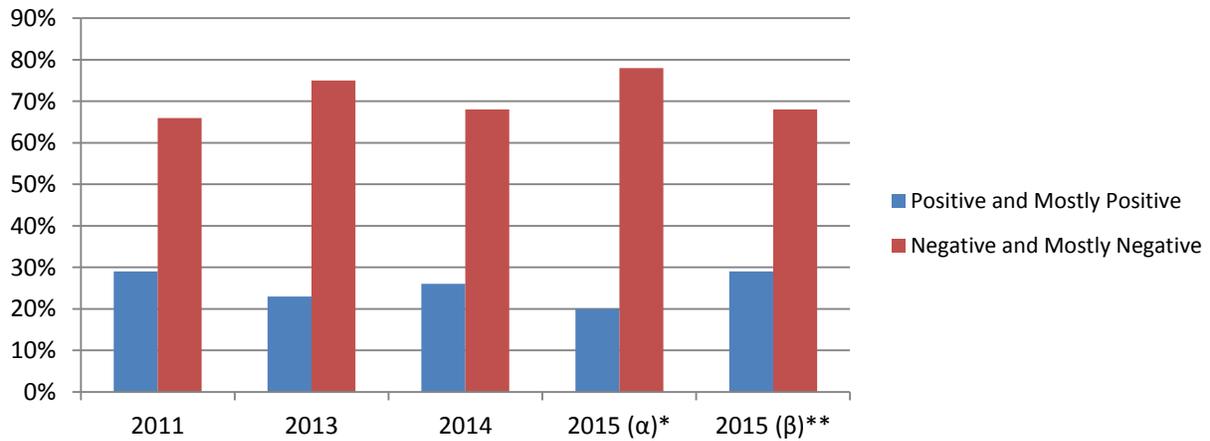
Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 2008-2014.



Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 2012-2014.

The data from the Eurobarometer Surveys give us a fairly thorough account on Greek citizens' attitudes on the EU, but they cannot provide us with information about the attitudes of Greeks on the role of Germany during the crisis. For this reason, the research team turned to Public Issue, one of the most well-known polling companies in Greece, which has conducted a number of relevant opinion surveys during the crisis.

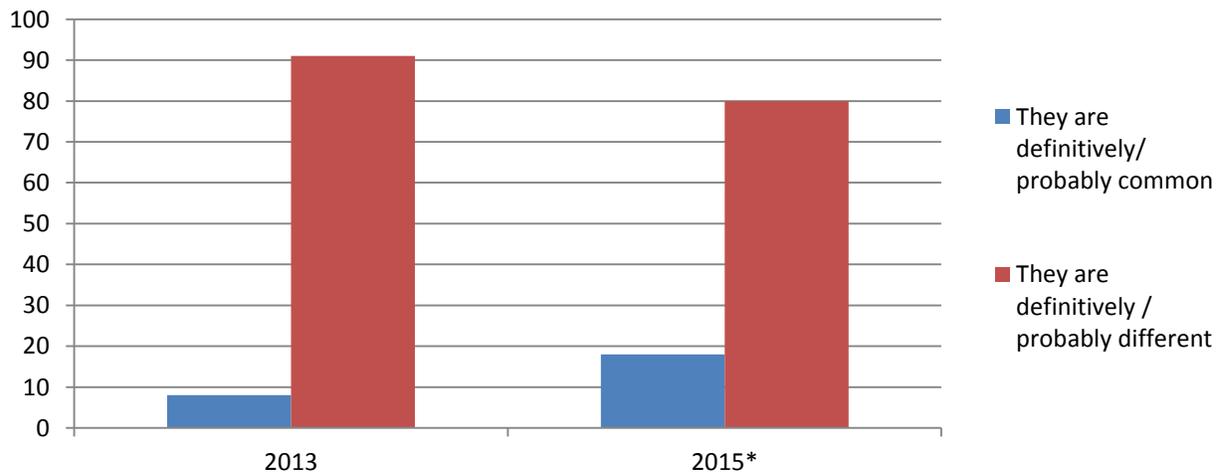
Graph 7. Opinion of Germany



\*(a): February 2015, \*\* (b) October 2015

Source: Public Issue

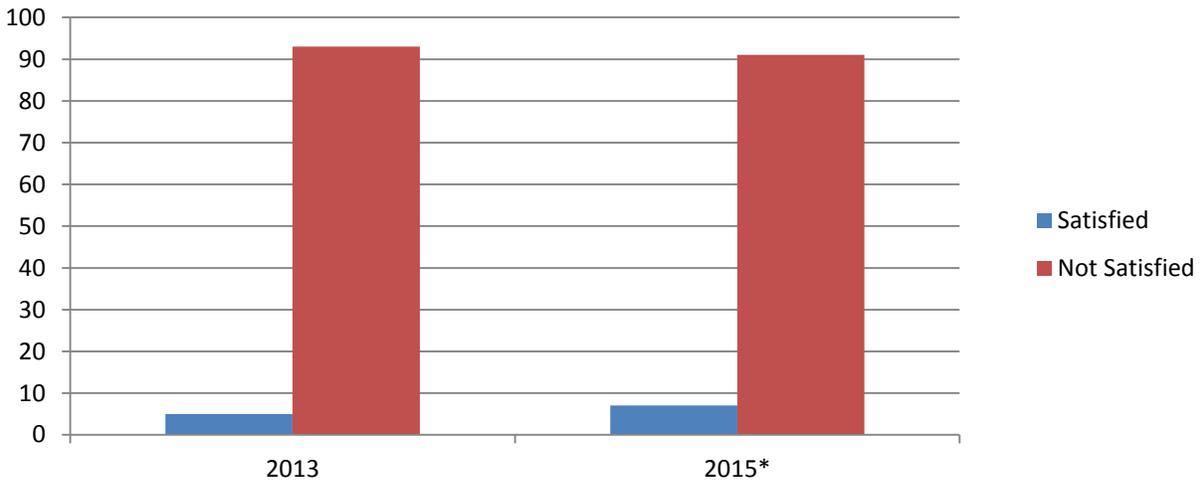
Graph 8. Opinion on the interests of Germany and Greece



\* The survey was conducted in February

Source: Public Issue

Graph 9. Satisfaction with Germany's handling of the Eurozone crisis



\* The survey was conducted in February

Source: Public Issue

Graphs 7-9 demonstrate the deterioration of Germany's image among the Greek public during the years of the crisis. The negative views of the general public on Germany (Graph 7) are dominant, ranging from 66% in 2011 to 78% in February of 2015. It is interesting to note that in 2014, as was the case with the image of the EU in the Eurobarometer surveys, an improvement of Germany's general image seems to be recorded, while in early 2015, in the aftermath of the Greek elections and the start of the negotiation of the country's creditors with the new government, which rejected the previous agreement, the deterioration of Germany's image is the worst recorded throughout the crisis. It is also quite interesting to note the change in the way Greeks perceive Greek and German interests in 2015; in February 2015 there is a noteworthy increase in the percentage of respondents who believe that Greek and Germans interests are common, compared to 2013. On the other hand, the handling of the crisis is rejected overwhelmingly and uniformly across time by the Greek public, as over 90% of respondents, recorded their dissatisfaction with it in both 2013 and 2015.

What these findings demonstrate is that overall the image of Germany among the Greek general public has been very negative throughout the crisis; there are some variations which seem to be affected by the economic circumstances of the country and by political developments. Nonetheless, the overall picture never changes substantially -Greeks reject the way Germany has handled the crisis and perceive its interests to be different from those of Greece- a perception particularly troublesome, given that the two countries are part of an economic and monetary union, albeit consistent with the Eurobarometer surveys' findings discussed above.

### *III.a.2 Elites*

The analysis of elites' attitudes is particularly important because it reveals perceptions about the crisis of groups of people, which influence and shape public policy and/ or public opinion. The findings of the report by Papakonstantinou (2015) are very interesting in this respect.

More specifically, it is interesting to note that the representatives of the elite groups share widely the view that a large part of the blame for the outbreak of the crisis is due to domestic factors. The factor most referred to by all elite groups, including politicians themselves, is the role of the domestic political system. Moreover, some elite groups, particularly journalists and editors, and trade unionists and representatives of professional associations, also "blame Greek citizens for accepting and furthering patronage and clientelism, which prevented the implementation of necessary reforms for the Greek economy and welfare state" (Papakonstantinou 2015, pp.19-20), while a substantial part of respondents, predominantly technocrats, identify the problematic growth model of Greece as a major cause of the crisis. On the other hand, elites' representatives do not seem to blame the EU, or the global financial crisis for the outbreak of the crisis in Greece. The only exception is politicians, a majority of whom, mention EU policies as a significant cause of the crisis.

The picture is different however, when it comes to the causes of the current situation in Greece. Here, the blame for the inefficient handling of the crisis, once it broke out, is more evenly shared. Among politicians, 68% of respondents believe that it was both domestic political decisions and external forces that have resulted in the current situation –the latter including a variety of factors such as the global financial crisis, the speculation of the global markets, the management of the crisis by the EU and the national interests of specific EU members, especially the interests of Germany. A similar view is held by 71% of the technocrats and 88% of trade unionists and representatives of professional associations. The views of journalists and editors on the other hand were more divided; 47% journalists argue that the current situation is due to domestic political decisions, while 53% responded that the current situation in Greece has been the result of both internal political decisions and external factors. The majority of the latter stated that the factors which have influenced the current situation in Greece, are the management of the crisis by the EU and the interests of specific members of the EU and especially those of Germany.

These findings are in line with the evaluation of respondents of the role of the EU in the handling the crisis. Respondents are uniformly critical of EU's handling of the crisis. Among politicians, 84% of respondents hold a negative view of the way EU managed the crisis, an assessment shared also by 86% of the technocrats, 94% of the trade unionists and representatives of professional associations and 71% of the journalists and editors. On the issue of what motivated the EU's management of the crisis, views are more divided, especially among politicians. Members of coalition government parties (ND and PASOK), for the most part believe that EU acted in the way it did, in order to safeguard the interests of the Eurozone as a whole and that "European partners and lenders sincerely want to help Greece" (Papakonstantinou 2015, p. 25). On both these questions (dominant motivations in EU's handling of the Eurozone crisis and of its handling of the Greek crisis), SYRIZA's MPs take a very different stance, as four out of five argue that the EU's approach was dictated by its willingness "to safeguard the national

interests of EU member states and to rescue the banks” (Papakonstantinou 2015, p. 25), while none of them agree with the statement that European partners and lenders sincerely want to help Greece.

Among the other groups, technocrats hold a more “benign” view of the motivations predominating in the way the EU handled the Greek and Eurozone crises, with a significant majority holding the view that Greece’s creditors sincerely wanted to help Greece, and that “the motivation for managing of the crisis has been the national interests of the member states and the rescue of the Eurozone” (Papakonstantinou 2015, p. 26). Journalists and editors hold an equally positive view with 76% and 65% of them arguing in favour of the sincere efforts of European creditors to help Greece and rescue the Eurozone respectively. The picture is more mixed when it comes to trade unionists and professional associations’ representatives, with a minority of them (47%) believing that the country’s creditors really wanted to help and a large majority (82%) believing that the primary motivation of EU’s handling of the wider crisis was the rescue of the Eurozone.

Finally, a very interesting finding is that despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the respondents assess negatively EU’s handling of the crisis and that a substantial part of them views with suspicion its motives both in the context of the Greek and the wider Eurozone crises, literally all of the technocrats, a significant majority of politicians (74%) and journalists and editors (76%) and a smaller, but still clear majority (59%) of trade unionists and representatives of professional associations, retain a positive view of the EU. From the remaining respondents, only seven (for all elite groups, that is, approximately 10%) had a negative view of the EU after the crisis, while nine held a neutral stance.

Regarding the role of Germany, first of all, there seems to be a consensus among respondents from all four groups, that Germany “has had a major role in the formulation of the policy to tackle the crisis” (Papakonstantinou 2015, p.27). But how is that role evaluated? For 74% of politicians Germany’s contribution was negative or absolutely negative, a view shared by 64% of the technocrats, 88% of the trade unionists and representatives of professional associations and 65% of the journalists and editors.

### **III.b Greek public discourses on the EU and Germany during the crisis**

#### *III.b.1 General public/ voters*

The online comments analysis examined 2.500 comments on 65 articles published in the period around two significant political moments regarding the relationship between Germany and Greece in the context of the crisis: the two visits of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Athens, in October 2012 and April 2014 (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015).

The analysis of the comments reveals that a substantial part of the readers hold Germany responsible for the situation in Greece, but also for the wider Eurozone crisis as a whole: “The euro crisis has transformed political and economic relationships within the European Union. Germans, for many Greeks are ‘at the heart of the problem’ or ‘on the backstage of the scene’. Germany has become much more competitive over the past decade and the unique dominant country of the EU as well” (Zafiropoulou et al., pp.65-66) and “Germany, for a majority of them [readers commenting negatively on Chancellor

Merkel] is responsible for European dissolution” (Zafiropoulou et al., p. 73). In this context, it is not surprising to find that the majority of readers, who comment on Chancellor Merkel, portray her as “persona non grata” and use pejorative adjectives to describe her, while there is a resurface of stereotypes related to the Germany’s past, with Germans often portrayed as Neo-Nazi and descendants of Hitler. Correspondingly, “...there is a palpable resentment among Greeks who feel they are being asked to pay for Germans’ hegemonic attitude” (Zafiropoulou et al., p. 91). In this context, Greek politicians who have signed and implemented the MoUs are portrayed in a similar light: “They claim that Merkel and Samaras look out for their common interests, which ‘betray’ the Greeks” (Zafiropoulou et al., p. 73).

From the above, it is clear that the readers’ comments reflect a deterioration of Germany’s image during the crisis, at least for part of the population. On the other hand, the other EU countries are often considered to be a hostage of German hegemony as well, while there is also a sense of disappointment with the EU: “...only a few comments argue that the European Idea still exists. And more generally, little reference to pejorative, sarcastic, negative or positive comments related to Europe is noted. This implicit silence on the European Community hides some value assumptions. Readers are not self-projected anymore as European citizens” (Zafiropoulou et al., p. 66).

Having painted a rather bleak picture for Germany and the EU, it is worth noting that for a substantial part of the readers the main culprit for the crisis is Greece itself and not foreign interests, with a particularly large share of the blame being attributed to the domestic political system. Nor, are comments that see the EU or Germany in a positive light, entirely missing.

The end result is rather complex picture, which reflects intensity and polarization, but where the two ends of the spectrum are not always the same and the “in/out groups” seem to be shifting. Blame is attributed to both the domestic political system and the EU/Germany complex. However, when referring to Germany in particular, negative views clearly outnumber positive ones, while the view on EU is often one of disappointment and “absence”.

### *III.b.2 Political discourses*

The critical political discourse analysis is based on official statements and papers of Greek political parties; on speeches of MPs during specific Plenary Sessions; on statements of political leaders before Merkel’s visiting Athens in 2012 and 2014; as well as on the minutes of the Parliamentary Inter-Party Committee on the German Reparations Claim (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015). Regarding the official statements and papers of political parties, the focus of the analysis lies on the electoral campaigns of political parties in 2012 and the announcements of political parties regarding the economic crisis. The debates in the Greek parliament refer to the speeches and minutes of the discussions before the parliamentary vote for the First Memorandum (06/05/2010), for the Second Memorandum (12/02/2012), for the First Mid-term Fiscal Strategy Framework (29/06/2011) and the Second Mid-term Fiscal Strategy Framework (07/11/2012). The study has also looked at the statements of political leaders regarding the first visit in Athens of the Chancellor of Germany, Angel Merkel, on 9 October 2012 and her second visit on 11 April 2014.

A first interesting finding of the report is that as time passes, the number of references increases. Indeed, in 2010 the references to the Germans were only 15% of total references, in 2011, 18% and in 2012 it increased to 45%. In 2014, politicians' speeches concentrate on Merkel's visit in Athens and their debates focus on the war reparations. At the same time that the number of references to Germans increases, the content of these references is also changing. For part of the parties and MPs at the beginning of the crisis the "Germans appear as Greece's allies and regulators willing to resolve the problematic situation of the country. The German system is presented as the prototype and German politicians as Greece's protectors" (Zafiropoulou et al. p.43). This approach is soon eclipsed and after a few months of implementing the MoU, the entire opposition refers to Germans as a "privileged" nation set against the "dispossessed Greeks"; "MPs discourse involves tacitly or implicitly claims for German dark historical periods and their forgetfulness, for their higher lifestyle compared to the Greek one, for their disrespectful attitude during crisis compared to other European countries" (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, pp.45-46).

The critique towards EU in this context is strong and focuses on its failure to safeguard the Greek interests and indeed dignity; EU intervention, through the MoUs is perceived as compromising Greece's national sovereignty. The principal criticism of EU is in effect that it has been high-jacked by Germany and its allies. "Germans appear as a force of division not only for Europe but for Greece[...]The "Merkiavelli model" (Beck, 2013) is characterized by an asymmetry between power and legitimacy, which reaches its outer limits and impacts not only German- Greek relations and Greek-EU ones but also internal (national) ones" (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p. 48). Indeed, the government is often considered complicit in Germany's hegemonic stance. According to some Greek MPs, the "'Germanisation' of Greece -or the so-called 'Merkelisation' of Greece- passes from a legal framework -by the ratification of different conventions and treaties- as well as from an economic systemic panorama of consultations, recommendations, decisions and impositions. According to the MPs, the "Germanisation" of the European Union's policies passes firstly from the "Germanisation of European monetary policy" (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p.49). In this context, Greek MPs, mainly from the opposition parties, use harsh language including cultural stereotypes, portraying often Germans as Nazi's descendants for example, while there is a wealth of neologisms employed, very often to characterize in a derogatory fashion the perceived servile attitude of Greek governments towards Germany.

Looking at party strategies, "the coalition of the centre-left and the centre-right wing parties (PASOK and ND), then in power, employed a threat-based conceptualization of the situation, invoking the sense of urgency referring to scenarios of national chaos and catastrophe in case of not conformity to Troika" (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p.75). In this context, Germany's attitude is referred to as a symptom of a wider crisis; in order to exit the crisis Germany is a necessary ally. Messages are not clear and often mixed, identifying Greeks or a part of them ("US the conscious Greeks") with Europeans and the EU, which includes Germany, while on the other hand employing the national sovereignty/ national pride argument to attract voters. On the other hand, the opposition parties' strategy is totally different; thus for example SYRIZA also adopted a blame strategy targeting the government for employing scaremongering tactics and as the crisis intensified attacked increasingly Germany, employing morality related arguments, such as for example the issue of German reparations for World War II. In this

context, the EU is associated with the concept of “US”, (“we the Europeans” with the exception of Germany) and therefore the message also has a positive connotation, where Europeans and Greeks are called upon to change their situation, to create a new Europe. In this strategy, SYRIZA also uses an urgency-based rhetoric, employed to instigate resistance by the people, against the policies of austerity. On the other hand, right-wing LAOS uses aggressive blaming strategies against Germany, “combined with conspiracy theories” referring to “bourgeois governments, to imperialist and capitalist restructuring, and on the other hand, to the Greeks' exploitation and to national patriotic sentiments. LAOS employed undiplomatic exchanges of threats and ultimatums in the name of the democratic history of Greece and of patriotic spirit” (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p. 80).

Consequently, it is not surprising that the leaders of the political parties of the tripartite government welcomed Merkel’s visit to Athens and pointed out its importance, while the leader of the main opposition party, SYRIZA, declared that “Merkel came to Athens to support her ‘groupies’ but Europe of the peoples will beat Europe of memoranda and brutality” (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p. 82).

### *III.b.3 Media*

The role of the media is very important in the construction and functioning of the public sphere in modern liberal democracies. Claims to objectivity and professional integrity notwithstanding, it is clear that the media exert significant influence on public discourse and through it on peoples’ attitudes. This happens through two main mechanisms: “agenda-setting” and “framing” (see McCombs and Shaw 1972 and Entman 1993 respectively). Agenda-setting “refers to the capability of the media to set the order of importance of particular issues, and thus, raise the significance of those issues in people’s mind steering public opinion”, (Tzogopoulos 2015, p.7), while framing is “to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52; italics in the original).

Both of these mechanisms are evident in the analysis of Tzogopoulos, which reveals a negative approach to reporting the crisis, concerning the role of Germany in particular, by the Greek media. A large part of the media system in Greece has adopted a very critical stance against Berlin, often accompanied by stereotypical and derisive images with references to Nazi symbols. This imagery has been framed in an analysis of a “hegemonic” Germany, which imposed its views on both Greece and the Eurozone; for the first two years of the crisis the message put across by most media was that “Germany was highly responsible for the Greek drama and EU’s emphasis on austerity” (Tzogopoulos 2015, p. 15).

Tzogopoulos finds evidence of a partial change in the mode of reporting, following the elections of 2012 and the visit of Prime Minister Samaras and Chancellor Merkel to Berlin and Athens in the summer and autumn of 2012 respectively. Indeed, especially during the German Chancellor’s visit to Athens, the media coverage was divided, with some newspapers presenting the occasion as an opportunity to mend the Greek - German relations, while others portrayed the visit “as an indication –if not confirmation –of Merkel’s will to control Greece and promote German national interests” (Tzogopoulos 2015, p. 18). This division seems to reflect a similar division across political parties, with the coalition government parties

presenting the visit as a positive development, while opposition parties denounced the visit as an expression of Germany's power over the country; SYRIZA in particular called for public demonstrations during the visit and Independent Greeks planned to organize a protest in front of the German Embassy. In this explosive climate "a tone of populism and tabloidization was largely evident" (Tzogopoulos 2015, p. 18).

The same kind of a relatively differentiated coverage continued until the elections of January 2015; a substantial part of the media continued its anti-German rhetoric in high tones, which increasingly targeted German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, who insisted on a tough austerity stance for Greece, while a few newspapers presented Greek - German relations in a more positive light, given the gradual stabilization of the economy and the relative "absence" of the Greek issue from the EU negotiation table.

In summary, there is no doubt that Greek mainstream media,<sup>7</sup> contributed to a climate of hostility and enmity, primarily against Germany, and of dismissal of the EU. While the severe economic and social crisis of Greece and the apparent failure of the adopted policy, would certainly warrant critical commentary and analysis from the Greek media, the coverage from a large part of the Greek media system, helped to create an extremely negative climate through the promotion of populist argumentation and stereotypical imagery of Germany and its political leadership. In this sense, it reinforced and promoted a populist approach to the crisis, advocated to varying degrees by all opposition political parties, and often by governing parties as well, whose primary strategy was to find a scapegoat to attach the blame for the crisis (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, see above; also Pappas 2014).

### **III.c. Greece, the EU and Germany: Patterns of attitudes and discourse during the crisis**

The previous presentation of the findings from empirical studies and data allows us to get a more comprehensive view of the way Greeks have thought and talked about the role of the EU and Germany during the crisis. While the analysis of attitudes and public discourses is not entirely compatible, as the first has been based on interviews and surveys, where researchers had specific questions and themes in mind, and discourse analysis was based on a grounded approach, where themes examined have emerged from the discourse analyzed, it is possible to identify a number of common threads that emerge in the examination of attitudes and public discourses of different categories of respondents. These are discussed in more detail below:

#### *(a) Rejection and loss of trust in the domestic political system*

The analysis of attitudes and public discourses on the issues of the origins and handling of the crisis, tells a story of rejection of and loss of trust in the domestic political system. Elites' attitudes present a high degree of uniformity in this respect; the origins of the crisis are identified primarily with domestic factors and particularly the domestic political system. Moreover, the responsibility for the current

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<sup>7</sup> The picture would be much "rougher" should one take into account non-mainstream media, especially, but not exclusively, on the internet. While there has been no systematic study of such media outlets, there is abundant anecdotal evidence of extreme anti-German and anti-EU rhetoric presented through them.

desperate situation of the country after six years of crisis is attributed for the majority of elites' representatives, to both the domestic political system and external factors, with the predominant view being that it is mainly the domestic political system to be blamed. The views of elites on the origins and handling of the crisis seem to be in sync with those of the general public/ voters, when we consider the almost total collapse of trust of Greek citizens towards their national government the years of the crisis, as documented by the Eurobarometer surveys.

This pattern of attitudes is largely compatible with the political discourse articulated by both politicians (part of elites) and online commentators from the general public. Of course there are differences, especially in the politicians' discourse, which presumably have to do with the public exposure of their statements and comments, which dictates a degree of alignment with their party's overall strategy and rhetoric. Thus, the politicians' discourse is not uniform (contrary to their opinions as expressed in the interviews) and when the same factors are identified, they are often translated in a different context. Accordingly, the structural problems of the Greek economy and the corresponding necessity, to some degree, of the reforms in the MoU are mainly advocated by MPs of the governing parties, which also adopt a self-critical stance by blaming, at least partly, the domestic political system's behavior during the previous decades for the origins of the crisis. This critique is also shared by opposition parties, which however do not reach the same conclusion about the necessity of the MoU policy programme. This discourse is in its general direction compatible with the diagnosis offered by the readers' online comments, which also display a differentiated account of the crisis; nonetheless here too, the domestic political system is largely considered responsible for outbreak of the crisis.

#### (b) Disappointment and loss of trust in the EU

The role of the EU during the crisis is considered uniformly negative. Among elites the focus is on the policy handling of the crisis, which they criticize as inefficient in general and to a large degree responsible for the deterioration of the Greek economy and society during the years of the crisis. Another aspect of EU's role which receives strong criticism, especially by some of the technocrats among elites, is EU's inability to oppose Germany's domination. In this context, the responses from elites' interviews indicate less a sense of hostility towards the EU, rather than a sense of disappointment of its inability to deliver better results for Greece. This interpretation is also in line with the attitudes of the majority of the respondents from elite groups, which view EU's motives in dealing with the crisis as "benign".

These views are also consistent with the attitudes expressed by the general public through Eurobarometer surveys. As we saw, there is a dramatic decline in the image of the EU and a disapproval of its direction during the years of the crisis, combined with a sense that Greece's voice and interests are not taken into account. As a result, trust in the EU has declined in Greece. Again however, it is more a sense of disappointment rather than rejection that seems to emerge from these surveys, as despite the critique, Greeks seem to continue to trust the EU more than their own government and they still believe that their country is better off in the EU and the Eurozone.

The analysis of the online readers' comments reveals a similar pattern of thought, where the EU is not so much an object of attack, but rather a relic of hopes betrayed. This is evident in the loss of trust in the European Idea mentioned previously, but also in the feeling of resignation that is communicated as EU is considered hostage of powerful countries' national interests. In the discourse of politicians, the critique towards EU focuses on its failure to safeguard the Greek interests; EU is considered both too weak to resist Germany and too harsh/ interventionist vs. Greece, since the MoUs are perceived as compromising Greece's national sovereignty. Here, expressions are much harsher and there are verbal attacks against the EU. In this sense, it would seem that the discourse of politicians reflects a different approach to the crisis and the role of the EU; however, such a reading may be exaggerated. While there are some attacks against the EU, these are few in number and relatively moderate in their ferocity. Moreover, we should not underestimate the impact of party strategies on the discourse of their members and MPs; as noted in section II.b.2, statements seem to be differentiated according to the place of the party on the government – opposition dichotomy. Thus, there is a distinction, with governing parties portraying EU's approach as necessary, even if some of its aspects are denounced, while the opposition parties criticize fiercely, and often in strong language, both the EU's approach and the governments' acceptance of it. As noted earlier, a similar analysis holds for the media, which to a large extent follow the politicians' lead.

*(c) Germany's domination of the EU*

A common theme that emerges from all analyses is that Germany's insistence on austerity politics has dominated and shaped the European response to the crisis. This understanding is a source of disappointment for the EU, but for Germany it is a source of outright critique. This is a view shared by both elites and the general public. As we saw previously, the majority of representatives from all elites' groups have attributed the bad handling of the crisis and the negative effects for the Greek economy and society to both the domestic political system and external factors. It is telling that this majority view has identified, in all groups, the interests of specific members of the EU and especially those of Germany, as a significant external factor. The statement of one of the professional associations' representatives is characteristic in this respect: "Germany has replaced the European Parliament and policies particularly on economic issues, are formulated by the German Chancellery" (Employer Association Representative (Papakonstantinou 2015, p.30). Also, when questioned directly about the importance of Germany in the formulation of the policy to tackle the crisis, the overwhelming majority attributed to Germany a "major role" (Papakonstantinou, p. 28).

The analysis of politicians' discourse reveals, in line with the discussion in (b) above, that the principal criticism of EU is in effect that it has been high-jacked by Germany and its allies. Zafiropoulou et al. (2015) document a rise of Eurosceptic argumentation, particularly by MPs of smaller opposition parties, which is closely linked to German hegemonic strategies during the crisis: "...we have no natural leadership in the EU. Those of us who believe in the EU see that it has been abolished in practice. It is a German union with characteristics similar to those you will find in Hitler's book. That's exactly what it is like!"(Georgios Karatzaferis, LAOS, minutes of the Plenary Session on 12/02/2012 for the 2nd Memorandum), (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p. 51). What is more, this rhetoric is not only produced by

members of opposition parties, but also by members of the governing coalition parties: “Everything we do is included in a policy that Germans want to impose to us, in order to “Germanize” Europe” (Evaggelos Papachristos, PASOK, minutes of the Plenary Session on 12.02.2012 for the 2nd Memorandum), (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p. 50).

This view is also evident in the online comments. As mentioned before, according to many commentators Germany is “at the heart of the problem” of the European crisis. Readers’ comments, especially during the second visit of Chancellor Merkel to Athens, are “characterised by the division of the EU into two camps: the elitist club of Northern countries (or creditors) and the weak links in the chain (or debtors)” (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p. 67). It is telling that even comments from readers who identify the ills of the country primarily with the domestic political system and the “Greek” way of doing things, that is, from people who generally adopt a self-critical stance, acknowledge Germany’s importance in the face of Chancellor Merkel: “As the head of Europe’s biggest economy and the largest contributor to bailouts for Greece she is the only one who detains the key of “Greece’s salvation” (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p.71).

*(d) Rejection of Germany’s policy*

The view of Germany’s role among Greeks is a particularly negative one. This evaluation holds true in all the preceding analyses, without however positive attitudes and statements being entirely absent. The intensity of this rejection ranges from a “rational” critique of Germany’s approach, usually advocated by elites (with differentiation occurring primarily among politicians as expressed in their discourse) to outright hostility and aggression when examining the online comments of readers. Among elites we find in each group a small minority, which actually assesses Germany’s role, positively; however the overwhelming majority (with the exception of journalists and editors where the negative majority is rather slim at 53%),<sup>8</sup> gives a negative assessment of Germany’s role. Also, a common theme among elites’ representatives is that they attribute Germany’s approach to self-serving reasons, ranging from the defense of its national interests broadly conceived, to saving its banks, making sure there is no threat of inflation, or ensuring the strength of its exports. This negative view of Germany’s role is reproduced in the opinion polls by Public Issue. As described above, the image of Germany throughout the crisis is steadily negative (above 60%), peaking in February 2015 at 78%, while similarly negative attitudes are recorded concerning Chancellor Merkel and Finance Minister Schäuble. The handling of the crisis by Germany in the 2013 poll is viewed relatively or absolutely negative by an overwhelming 93%, while in both polls, despite an improvement recorded between 2013 and 2015, an equally overwhelming majority, 91% and 80% respectively, believes that Greece and Germany have different interests.

This negative view is expressed by politicians in their discourse, often in particularly strong language. In the analysis by Zafiropoulou et al. (2015), various themes emerge, all of which signify a critical stance vis a vis Germany: the Germans as “privileged”, the Germans as forgetful of the solidarity other Europeans

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<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that the remaining respondents find the policy of Germany positive; positive assessments are at approximately 24%, while the rest do not answer.

showed to them after WWII, the Germans as violators of international law, the Germans as wanting to create a “German Europe”. The substance of the German approach to handling the crisis, which is identified with austerity, is heavily criticized and rejected and linked with the ambition of Germany to become a European hegemon. Thus, according to the leader of DIMAR, “Merkel’s visit highlights the need to change policies, that only the end of the austerity, imposed by Germany across Europe, could mark a real recovery of the economy and society and that we need a “European Germany and not a German Europe” (Zafiropoulou et al. 2015, p. 49). In this context, a common practice is by MPs is reference to Germany’s history to denounce it and employ cultural stereotypes to describe its behavior. Last but not least, some MPs also refer to “dark forces” or to “Germany’s interests” in the context of some mystic plot to undermine Greece’s interests and create profits for Germany. As we saw previously, these types of practices and themes have also been used extensively by Greek media to describe Germany’s role during the crisis, often employing fittingly edited images (e.g. Chancellor Merkel or Minister Schäuble dressed as Nazis) to reinforce the message conveyed in their articles.

The discourse of politicians and the media demonstrates a number of parallels with that of the online readers. Here too feelings of anger and hostility are vented and name-calling and abusive labeling is often employed by commentators who characterize Chancellor Merkel a “persona non-grata”. However, there is a marked difference with the discourse of politicians, in that a significant part of online readers’ comments are equally derisive and aggressive towards the domestic political system, not only for “collaborating” with Germany, an accusation also employed by politicians from opposition parties, but for the way they have run the country in the past and how they have handled the crisis, both when in power and when in opposition. In this respect, the anger and hostility of online readers are much more equally distributed between the “foreign oppressors” and the domestic “corrupt and incompetent”.

*(e) Greece’s place is in the EU and the Eurozone*

Despite the deterioration of EU’s image in the public, the denunciation of its role in the crisis by all elite groups and the widespread feeling of disappointment described above, the examination of both attitudes and political discourses reveals that Greeks want Greece to remain in the EU and the Eurozone. Among elites a significant majority (76%) retains a positive image of the EU, despite the fact its handling of the crisis is universally considered bad. Indeed, in two elite groups (politicians and technocrats) none of the respondents said that their image of the EU had turned negative after the crisis. Among trade unionists and representatives of professional associations three respondents changed their view about the EU (into negative), while the most important change is documented among journalists, where seven respondents changed their view from positive to negative. This is an interesting finding and is in sync with the aggressive discourse of the media towards the EU and particularly Germany, described previously. As far as the general public is considered, the Eurobarometer surveys, as discussed above, show a clear support for the country’s position in both the EU and the Eurozone, despite the deterioration of EU’s image and the negative evaluation of its direction by the majority of the respondents.

The analysis of political discourses similarly does not lead us to the conclusion that Greeks want to leave the EU. Indeed, while politicians mainly from the opposition parties, but occasionally also from the

governing coalition parties, denounce the role of the EU and its domination by Germany, they never question the country's place in it. On the contrary, they request more solidarity, respect for Greece's sovereignty or (particularly in the case of SYRIZA) a change of politics across the EU, so that Europe is not abolished but reinstated in its true form as a "Europe of peoples", where the vision of the founding fathers of the European integration project is made justice. As Zafiropoulou et al (2015, p. 51), put it, Greek politicians adopt the "discourse of the hysteric" (Lacan 1977); although Greek politicians unmask the others (i.e. the Germans) and challenge the status quo, nevertheless they secretly and symbolically stay united to them.

Online readers' comments, display a similar orientation; in fact, given that the readers' comments are often strongly self-critical, a common theme is the presentation of Greece's exit from the EU in ironic or catastrophic terms. So, for a number of commentators, those who argue that Greece should exit the EU (or the Eurozone) want to turn the country into North Korea or Cuba, while others speculate ironically on the conditions that would prevail in the eventuality of a Greek exit from the Eurozone or the EU. For some commentators the destruction that would prevail from such an exit is well deserved, because Greece does not belong to the group of modern, well-run countries that make up the EU. On the other hand, those commentators who adopt a much more critical stance against the EU, compared to Greece itself, also do not support a Grexit; in a similar fashion to politicians' discourse, they argue that the solution is not the exit of Greece, but rather the change of EU, which should operate more in terms of solidarity and focus on growth and abandon the current, unjust and inhuman, austerity programme. Indeed, as was the case with many of the opposition parties, their representation of Europe as one which comprises the countries in crisis, or even all European countries (with the exception of Germany) has a positive connotation.

#### **IV. Implications for European Integration**

The Eurozone debt crisis is the most important economic crisis that the EU has ever faced. It has dominated the 2010s decade and has led to significant economic hardship and sacrifice for large parts of the population in a number of EU member states. For Greece, which has experienced the worst crisis in EU, pessimism for the future has become accepted wisdom. In these conditions, the role of the EU and of certain influential states, particularly Germany, in the handling of the crisis has become one of the most important political issues in both European and domestic politics. Indeed, if anything good can be said to have come from this crisis is the possibility of the emergence of the long sought European public sphere (Habermas 2001); for the first time the European publics have paid so much attention to both EU institutions and other states' domestic developments and politics. Unfortunately, this attention has rarely been for good, as criticism (albeit for different reasons) of the way the crisis has been handled is the one thing voters in most countries have in common. As Hooghe and Marks (2009) have pointed out, the more the EU becomes politicized, the more the domestic political parties' and general public's preferences become important for outcomes. In this context, the findings regarding the attitudes and public discourses of Greek elites, including politicians and of the Greek general public towards the EU and Germany during the crisis in Greece are particularly interesting for the wider European integration

project. In this paper, we will try to review briefly some of these implications for two major areas of theoretical, but also political, interest in relation to the future of European integration: (a) euroscepticism and (b) the elites – voters' rift.

#### **IV.a. Euroscepticism**

One of the most influential definitions of euroscepticism is that proposed in Taggard's pioneering work: "Euroscepticism expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (1998, p. 366). This encompassing definition allows us to discuss both outright opponents of the EU, as well as sceptics, who may disagree with particular aspects of the EU, or simply faced with the uncertainty of an ambitious ongoing project, remain cautious in their support, without necessarily condemning outright the idea (Taggard 1998). This approach to euroscepticism is particularly useful for this study, as the attitudes and discourses analyzed are formed in, and affected by the circumstances of the crisis and hence may represent an outright rejection of the EU project as well as disappointment and disapproval of EU's particular handling of the crisis. Following this rationale, the subsequent qualification introduced by Szczerbiak and Taggard between "hard" and "soft" euroscepticism, with the former denoting "principled objection to the project of European integration" and the former, "opposition to the EU's current or future planned trajectory", without however denouncing in principle the European integration project (2003, p.12), serves well our purposes and will be used in this paper.

Euroscepticism's marginality is a particularly significant criterion when gauging its impact in a member state. This is even more so in conditions of extreme crisis where marginality would be a robust test of the resilience of the European Idea and the commitment of national parties and publics to the future of the EU. Following Verney (2011), we examine party euroscepticism using two different sets of criteria: (a) Ray's (2007) basic features of Eurosceptic marginality, that is, ideological extremity (ideological positioning), unpopularity (share of the national vote) and opposition (participation in government) and (b) Szczerbiak and Taggard's (2000) core – periphery argument, which posits that Eurosceptic parties are to be found at the periphery of the political system and when they become parties of power they change their stance.

The first, obvious conclusion from the preceding analysis of attitudes and discourses is that there has been an outburst of euroscepticism. The previous analysis revealed widespread, and often harsh, criticism against the EU in all types of public discourses. Moreover, the findings on attitudes show that Greeks now have more negative than positive views on the EU and they feel that the general direction of the EU is wrong. While elites remain on the whole positive towards the EU, they also express severe criticism for the handling of the crisis by the EU.

Moving beyond the general observation of the increase in Eurosceptic discourses and attitudes, in terms of the party euroscepticism criteria, we observe the following:

- Euroscepticism is not limited to extreme parties. Eurosceptic discourse has been articulated by representatives of both extreme and mainstream opposition parties, ranging from neo-Nazi

*Golden Dawn*, to *New Democracy*, the centre-right pillar of the Greek political system during the past four decades and from the *Greek Communist Party* to the moderate centre-left *Democratic Left*.

- Euroscepticism is not constrained to unpopular parties; *New Democracy* has been one of the two main political parties of Greece following the restoration of democracy in 1974, and was in power for fifteen years during this period. *SYRIZA*, a party of the radical left, was transformed from a fringe party that hovered in the area of 4% of the vote, to major opposition and ultimately governing party, in the space of 6 years, during the crisis. Both parties employed Eurosceptic rhetoric, especially when in opposition. Similarly, newly formed parties such as the *Independent Greeks*, literally gained their entry into parliament by adopting a hard Eurosceptic discourse. Therefore, during the crisis, it seems that not only euroscepticism was not confined to fringe parties, but on the contrary it became a means to gain increased popularity.
- Euroscepticism is not limited to opposition parties. The previous analysis has showed that politicians from governing parties also criticized publicly the EU and its role during the crisis, while the results of the elite interviews show that the overwhelming majority of politicians from both opposition and governing parties criticize the role of the EU during the crisis. Having said, that, there is a clear tendency for parties which become government (*New Democracy* in 2012 and *SYRIZA* and *Independent Greeks* in 2015) to change their public discourse. While this is not documented in our analysis for *SYRIZA* and *Independent Greeks* (due to the time horizon of the analysis), it can be seen more clearly in the case of *New Democracy*. Indeed, some of the MPs who expressed strong criticism in the early years of the crisis when *New Democracy* was in opposition left the party in 2012, when it joined a coalition government and formed or joined parties with a strong Eurosceptic rhetoric. Therefore, there is evidence to suggest that when coming to power political parties tend to change their public discourse –even if their members may not change their attitudes.
- The last point does not mean that as parties became more popular and closer to power they shed their Eurosceptic rhetoric. As we have seen from developments in the last year, *SYRIZA* kept up and if anything intensified its rhetoric up to the February 2015 elections, despite the fact that since 2012 it is the major opposition party. Thus, while being in power may lead parties to nuance their public discourse, being a potential governing party does not seem to have the same effect; in this sense *Szczerbiak* and *Taggard*'s argument does not seem to apply in this case.

In sum, euroscepticism does not appear to be marginal anymore in Greece. On the contrary, it is widespread and indeed popular. On the other hand, this observation needs to be put into context. There are significant qualifications that need to be made here, before we reach any final conclusions about Greece's surrender to Euroscepticism. The first has to do with the fact that this research has investigated attitudes and public discourses in a time of a severe crisis in whose evolution the EU has played a critical role. Therefore, neither the degree of politicization of EU's actions, nor their critique and rejection by a substantial part of the population and the elites are surprising. Accordingly, the real test is times of crisis is not the increase of euroscepticism as such; as we saw previously, attitudes towards the EU tend to be significantly affected by the prevailing economic conditions. In this sense, the

rise of euroscepticism could be a transient phenomenon, which could go away once economic normalcy is restored. To see whether this is the case, the distinction between soft and hard euroscepticism is pertinent; since soft euroscepticism could be considered more “reversible”, depending on the general economic conditions, the key “measure” of euroscepticism would be the recording of a substantial rise of the levels of hard euroscepticism, which would indicate a more permanent and overall rejection of the EU by a large part of the population as a result of the crisis.

Is this the case in Greece? It does not seem so. As the preceding analysis showed, both elites and voters, despite their critique of the handling of the crisis by the EU, they want Greece to leave neither the Eurozone nor the EU. Indeed, as argued previously, the main feeling towards the EU is one of disappointment, not rejection, and the main criticism seems to be that it has “surrendered” itself to the economic hegemony of Germany, which exerts a disproportionate amount of influence on policy making at the EU level. What we also saw, is that even parties which have employed strong Eurosceptic language such as SYRIZA, do not advocate an exit from the EU, but rather propose the rebuilding of EU on a new basis. Even Golden Dawn, the neo-Nazi party, which denounces Europe and Germany with the harshest characterizations in all its public statements, has not openly advocated that Greece should leave the EU at this moment. Indeed, with the exception of the Greek Communist Party, which has a decades-old hard Eurosceptic stance (Verney 2011), no other parliamentary party has openly and consistently supported the view that Greece should leave the EU, or even the Eurozone.<sup>9</sup>

This in turn would mean that the widespread, popular euroscepticism, which has been documented in the preceding analysis, should be considered soft euroscepticism, as it does not lead to an outright rejection of the EU, but rather signifies the rejection of the handling of the crisis by the EU and Germany in particular, and demands for a new direction. This finding corroborates other recent research on Greek popular attitudes towards the EU (Clements et al. 2014). Also it is in line with recent research concerning populism and political discourse in Greece during the crisis, which reveals populism (and therefore popular forms of Euroscepticism) as a key strategy of political parties in Greece (Vasilopoulou et al. 2014). This reading would explain the differences between the public rhetoric and attitudes of politicians recorded in this study and seems to indicate that party Euroscepticism during the crisis has been in Greece often “for show”, aiming to attract angry and disappointed voters, but without signifying a radical change of heart vis a vis the EU. In this sense, the really surprising finding is the fact that during the worst and most prolonged economic crisis in a developed country in the post-war period, while both elites and voters seem to attribute a substantial part of the blame for the magnitude and depth of the crisis to the EU, and while political parties adopted a Eurosceptic rhetoric, there is no evidence of a surge in hard euroscepticism. This indicates that the pro-European feelings documented in Greece the decades before the crisis, reflected a deep commitment to the European project, which has managed to

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<sup>9</sup> The interpretation outlined above is also supported by the electoral performance of Popular Unity, a left wing splinter party from SYRIZA, which was formed following the voting of the third MoU by the SYRIZA- Independent Greeks government in August 2015. In the elections of September 2015, the party campaigned on its proposal to reject the third MoU even if that meant leaving the Eurozone. Although the party featured some of the most well-known SYRIZA party members, which had enjoyed considerable electoral success on a personal level at the January 2015 elections, in the September elections, it failed to reach the 3% threshold for entry into parliament.

survive despite the crisis. Having said this, there is no guarantee that this will continue to be so, particularly if the Greek crisis continues to drag on for an indeterminate amount of time.

#### IV.b Elites vs Voters

In the literature on European integration it is widely accepted that the drive for further integration has typically come from elites. European Union and its institutional predecessors have been interpreted largely as an elite project, which was possible due to the “permissive consensus” of European publics, at least until the Treaty of Maastricht (Hooghe and Marks 2008). Since Maastricht however, things have started to change as further integration impacted peoples’ lives in new and more intrusive ways. The result is that European integration has become increasingly politicized. Indeed, since the mid-1990s an elite-public gap has been identified concerning support towards the EU (Hooghe 2003). This divergence of views on the EU, has acted as a break on further integration initiatives, as was demonstrated with repeated rejections of new European Treaties in the 2000s by European publics in national referenda. This new reality has been termed a “constraining dissensus” (Hooghe and Marks 2008). In their post-functional theory, Hooghe and Marks (2008), propose that this is happening because increasingly issues of identity are related to discussions on the EU; identity is a very emotional and highly politicized topic, which seems to have structured the debate over European integration in a manner which is different to the traditional ideological left/ right divide, as it tends to divide people also along a libertarian/ nationalist-traditionalist dimension (Hooghe and Marks 2008). Tensions are also fueled by the fact that elites themselves are becoming increasingly differentiated in their preferences, as the collapse of the former soviet bloc and the integration of a large part of it into the EU, lifted a significant common external threat that imposed the necessity of compromise on national elites, and introduced new elites with different preferences into the game; as a result, the options available for national elites increased and the pressure for compromise decreased (Best et al. 2012).

Given that these developments were observed before the eruption of the crisis, it would be rational to expect that following the outbreak of the crisis, both the gap between elites and the public concerning the EU and the gap between different national elites have grown. Is this hypothesis corroborated for the case of Greece from our findings?

First, we record a clear division in the attitudes between elites and the public, concerning the image of the EU. As was described earlier, the attitudes of elites towards the EU following the crisis, despite a decline of positive views, remained largely positive (Table 1).

<b>Positive Views (%)</b>	Politicians	Technocrats	Trade Unionists and Representatives of Professional Associations	Editors and Journalists
<b>Before the Crisis</b>	84.2	100.0	94.1	94.1
<b>After the Crisis</b>	73.7	85.7	58.9	76.5

Source: Papakonstantinou 2015

It is worth noting, that even for the two elite groups that display the largest decline, trade unionists and representatives of professional associations and editors and journalists, the balance of opinions is not all negative, as a significant part of the remaining answers are neutral; indeed, 17.6% and 11.8% of respondents respectively, adopt a neutral stance vis a vis the EU.

This finding is in sharp contrast with the attitudes of the public as represented above, through the use of Eurobarometer surveys. Since 2010, there is an increasing deterioration of the image of EU among the general public; since 2011 the most popular answer is constantly “negative”, a trend which peaked in 2013, when the majority (54%) of respondents had a negative view of the EU. In contrast, positive views since 2010 have not surpassed 30%, dropping to as low as 18% in 2012 and 16% in 2013 (Table 2).

**Table 2. General Public’s Attitudes towards EU**

	<b>Positive Views (%)</b>	<b>Negative Views (%)</b>	<b>Neutral Views (%)</b>
<b>2010</b>	29	32	39
<b>2011</b>	28	35	35
<b>2012</b>	18	49	33
<b>2013</b>	16	54	29
<b>2014</b>	23	34	32

Source: Eurobarometer Surveys

A similar picture emerges when we juxtapose the answers of respondents concerning the issue of trust. In the relevant question in the Eurobarometer surveys we saw that during the crisis there was a reversal in the public’s attitudes. While in 2007, 58% of respondents trusted the EU and 36% did not, since 2010 the balance turned negative, and since 2012 more than 75% of respondents do not trust the EU, while the percentage of those who state that they still trust the EU lingers in the area of 20%.

In contrast, when asked about the incentives of EU in the handling of the crisis, we saw that elite groups display an overall positive attitude towards the motivation of the EU, with the exception of trade unionists (primarily) and representatives of professional associations where a minority (47%) of respondents believed that the EU really wanted to help Greece. While, the questions are not exactly the same, the assessment of EU’ motives in handling the crisis, can be viewed as a test of EU’s trustworthiness for the elite groups’ respondents. Therefore, it seems that elites on the whole, seem to not have lost their trust in the EU.

In sum, the picture that emerges is that there is a substantial gap between elites and voters in Greece, regarding the attitudes towards the EU, with voters being much more disappointed and alienated and thus much less trustworthy towards the EU, compared to the elites, which on the whole seem to retain a positive view of the EU and continue to place trust in it.

On the other hand, it is obvious that preferences between elites have diversified further. Greek elites reject the policy recipe promoted by German and other European elites. The assessment of the handling of the crisis by the EU and Germany is overwhelmingly negative for all elite groups (Table 3).

<b>Negative Views (%)</b>	Politicians	Technocrats	Trade Unionists and Representatives of Professional Associations	Editors and Journalists
<b>EU</b>	73,7	64,3	88.2	64.7
<b>Germany</b>	73,7	64,3	88,2	64,7

Source: Papakonstantinou 2015

What do these findings mean for European integration? The previously documented gap between elites and voters has intensified in Greece and most likely in all countries going through a crisis. The increased divergence in the opinions of the general public and the elite groups indicates the fact that the EU's legitimacy among the public has suffered a substantial blow. There is no doubt that the crisis increased the politicization of EU to unprecedented levels. European initiatives to manage the crisis surpassed in terms of intrusion into national politics and the everyday life of Greek citizens all previous policies at the European level; besides, these initiatives for the first time were not efforts to promote European integration, but referred to country-specific interventions. In other words, the EU became highly politicized in Greece due its role in the design and implementation of the "Greek programme" and not so much because of the efforts to reform the Eurozone governance. The rejection of this intervention and the disappointment with EU for not being able to help Greece, without causing a devastating economic and social crisis, have alienated the EU in the eyes of the general public. Does this translate into a constraining dissensus? There is no doubt that social reaction has been a key factor for the inability of Greek governments to complete successfully the first two bailouts. However, again this refers to the ability of national governments to implement national policies that affect Greece specifically, not the ability of Greek politicians to promote the idea or policies of further integration.

Indeed, given that the dominant criticism from the general public is that EU's economic policy has been dictated by Germany, it could be argued that the critique against EU and the rejection of the MoU policies do not create obstacles for further European integration. On the contrary, it seems that the public (but also the elites) reject a "German" Europe and would like to see more, not less, European integration, in order, on the one hand, to constrain the ability of Germany to dictate unilaterally its policy preferences to the EU and on the other hand to make sure that there are solidarity mechanisms capable of helping countries in crisis without imposing harsh austerity policy programmes. In this sense, paradoxically, the crisis in Greece, not only has not created a constraining dissensus, regarding further European integration, but seems to have created an "enabling consensus" to move forward with European integration. In contrast, the break on further integration initiatives seems to come from societies in countries, which have acted as creditors during the crisis, that is, countries like Germany.

## **V. Concluding remarks: can the rift be mended?**

The preceding discussion demonstrated the effects of the crisis on Greek attitudes and public discourses regarding the role of EU and Germany. Based on FRAGMEX's research reports and new data from

Eurobarometer surveys and opinion polls from Public Issue, we documented the emergence of a normative/ discursive rift in the Greek public sphere, whereby the EU and Germany in particular, are distinguished as largely responsible for the crisis suffered by the victimized Greeks. The EU is held responsible because of its inability to contain Germany and display a more solidary face to Greece, Germany for being a privileged economic superpower, which dictates a harsh economic policy that serves its own national interests, which seem to differ than those of Greece. In this context, verbal attacks and aggressive public discourse more generally against both the EU and particularly Germany have been articulated by both politicians and the general public.

Having said that, the preceding analysis also showed that Greeks do not reject the EU and still want their country to be part of the European integration project. The widespread Euroscepticism documented is not a hard Euroscepticism, which denounces the European Idea, but a critique mainly associated with the way the EU has managed the crisis. Indeed, as we saw above, this critique may actually translate into a demand for more, not less, “Europe”, forming the basis of a potentially “enabling consensus”. The same cannot be said about the image of Germany; the critique of Germany is much more intense and the policy that it promotes is overwhelmingly rejected. This of course is not as significant, as would be the recording of the emergence of hard Euroscepticism, in the sense that the Eurozone crisis is not a bilateral issue between two countries, Greece and Germany. Its management and ultimately resolution is undertaken by EU institutions and procedures. While the prevalence of intergovernmental dynamics in the management of the crisis has undoubtedly strengthened the role of Germany during the crisis, nonetheless, even Germany has to articulate its views in the context of EU’s institutions and in cooperation with other EU member states. Indeed, this is why Greeks, seem to seek further and deeper integration, in order to safeguard “European interests” against the domination of particular national interests. In this context, the reorganization of EU into a more efficient manager of the crisis and the concurrent improvement in the economic circumstances of the country could lead to a reversal of Euroscepticism and accordingly, to a demotion of the hegemonic view of Germany and therefore to a gradually less hostile view of it among Greeks. Indeed, as we saw before, in both Eurobarometer surveys and the opinion polls about Germany by Public Issue, in 2014, when an economic recovery was under way in Greece, negative attitudes on both the EU and Germany recorded a considerable decline.

Is such a development probable? No, it does not seem so, at least for the foreseeable future. The revamped architecture of the EMU, including the new European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which is responsible for the third Greek loan, is based to a large degree on intergovernmental consensus and agreement. In this context, it is not likely that German dominance over the decision of the EU in the management of the crisis will abate in the short-term. While ambitious ideas about the deepening of European integration are now on the table, their adoption and implementation is not something that could happen in the next two or three years. This is evident in the case of the so-called Juncker investment plan, which despite its ambition, is granted very limited (already existing) funds by the EU budget, and depends for its success on the attraction of new private investment in the EU. Obviously, there is a faulty circular logic at play here, since the lack of growth (through, among other things, public investment) is what keeps private investors at bay in Europe. In this sense, the third MoU will be the frame of reference for the Greek economy and politics in the foreseeable future. Given that the third

MoU follows closely the same policy recipe of the two previous agreements, the chances for a different policy mix, which gives priority to growth and investment, over fiscal consolidation, are slim. This has been confirmed in the progress of the negotiations over the first assessment of the third MoU with the representatives of the European institutions and the IMF, who have kept a particularly strict stance, with no inclination to deviate from the agreed measures, despite the fact that the economy has taken a turn for the worst in 2015.

The continuation of the same devastating economic and social situation in Greece for the next years, could lead to a further deterioration of the image of the EU. The real danger is that the widespread soft Euroscepticism recorded here, turns into a hard Euroscepticism, which rejects European integration as the only conceivable avenue for Greece. Despite the failure of Popular Unity at the recent elections, the idea that perhaps Greece would be better off outside the EMU and the EU, is now something which has become part of the public debate. While, the signature of the third MoU seems to have instilled a sense of resignation among the Greek public about the possibility of another policy mix inside the EMU, the continuation of the same policy for another three years, may make the idea of an alternative route more attractive to an increasing part of the Greek population. Even if it doesn't, the normative/ discursive rift that has been formed, will linger in a populace, which will increasingly view its participation in the EU, as a "necessary evil". Surely, such an EU cannot hope to instill a sense of European identity to its citizens.

In this context, and failing a surprising dramatic change of policy at the European level, the achievement of a consensus among the Greek political elites, which have been totally discredited in the minds of Greek people during the crisis, in an effort to promote united, a national, credible development plan may be the only way that the country could recover from the crisis. In such a context, the political establishment may be able to negotiate and achieve a better policy mix.

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