

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN THE EU

Recovering Legitimacy



EDITED BY
STEVEN BLOCKMANS
AND **SOPHIA RUSSACK**

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11. GREEK PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY AS A POST- REPRESENTATIVE REGIME: CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES DURING AUSTERITY

FILIPPA CHATZISTAVROU*

This chapter discusses the transformation of representative politics in Greece during the austerity years. Greece's post-1974 republican regime aimed at ensuring constitutional continuity and stability, making parliament the guarantor of democratic legitimacy. Austerity policies and politics inaugurated a new period known as 'post-metapolitefsi', where the political and partisan system has undergone important shifts.

The chapter first deals with the repercussions of the sovereign debt crisis on the parliament's law-making and scrutiny role, revealing the increasingly shrinking space for exercising delegated authority and fostering democratic deliberation. Then, it outlines the new features of the party system, insisting on how it dramatically alters the political space for ideological and partisan competition as well as the relationship between the elected and the electorate.

Introduction

In just two decades, Greece achieved what took other democracies half a century: the triumph and the decline of the idea of representative democracy (Manitakis, 2012). Following the first institutional legitimacy crisis to strike the system of political

* Valuable research assistance was provided by Konstantinos Papanikolaou, ELIAMEP Junior Research Assistant.

representation since the end of the 80s (Manitakis, 2012), the forced Europeanisation of national economic policies gave rise to substantive shifts in parliamentary representativeness and partisan identity, thus further weakening national representative democracy.

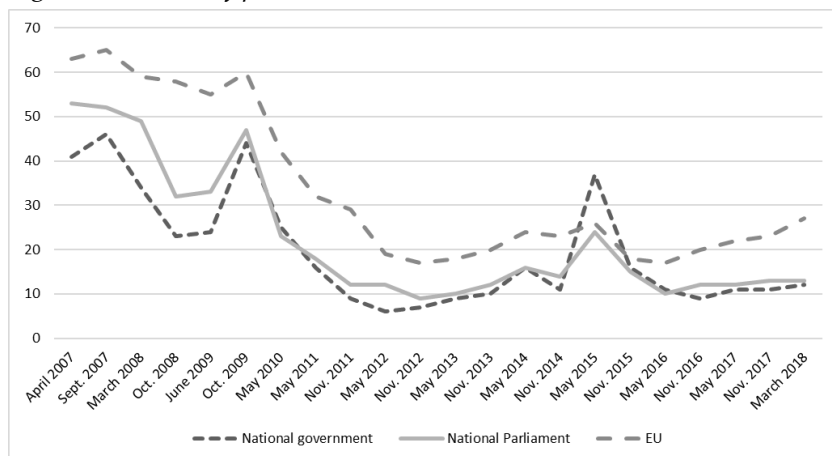
11.1 The weak safeguards of a ‘depressed’ parliamentarism

The main constitutional footprint of the *Metapolitefsi* has been the reinforcement of the executive branch in the legislative process, enhancing the formation of parliamentary committees controlled by the majority party. During the 1985-2008 period, the Greek parliament failed to react to the gradual erosion of its power and to the growing popular distrust due to the frequent allegations of opaque and

Since the outbreak of the economic crisis, public trust in institutions has sharply declined, except for a slight surge during Syriza’s first term in office.

unfair transactions with economic interest groups. Since the outbreak of the economic crisis, public trust in institutions has undergone a sharp decline, except for a slight surge of support during Syriza’s first term in office (see Figure 11.1).

Figure 11.1 Rates of public trust in institutions in Greece, 2007-18 (%)



Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys, National reports, Greece.

The government exercises almost exclusive legislative competence via the introduction of bills in a much wider range of issues than had been envisaged in the Greek Constitution.¹ With this trend, the parliamentary space of working and debating narrows, both at the level of committees as in the plenary session, while legislative proposals presented by the opposition are exceptional. This also explains why the Greek Parliament privileges a reactive and ex post, instead of anticipative and ex ante scrutiny process of the EU draft legislation in the ordinary legislative procedure. The Greek Parliament's working style is mainly oriented towards supportive scrutiny in the framework of advisory procedures without formulating and/or voting specific instructions.²

*The Greek Parliament
privileges a reactive instead
of anticipative scrutiny process
of EU draft legislation.*

The revisions of the Constitution in 2001 and 2008³ as well as the initiatives of amending the Rules of Procedures of the Parliament (RoP) did not succeed in improving its internal functioning and the way in which it exercises its competencies. Before 2008, traditional methods of parliamentary control such as petitions, queries, or the mechanism of the 'debates' agenda' rarely led to discussions with any significant political effect. Moreover, the strengthening of the role of parliamentary committees⁴ in relation to the plenary session, both in law-making and parliamentary scrutiny, proved insufficient to guarantee the conditions that promote democratic and accountable governance within the Greek parliament.

¹ Art. 73 of the Constitution stipulates this possibility only on pension issues.

² According to the article 70.8 of the Constitution and the articles 32A, 41B of the RoP.

³ The 1975 Constitution that proclaimed parliamentary democracy was revised in 1986, 2001 and 2008.

⁴ This includes the competence of parliamentary committees for passing bills, the publicity of their meetings and the use of exceptional specific parliamentary scrutiny instruments.

Austerity policies led to a further significant loss of Parliament's power to legislate and scrutinise government policies.

Austerity policies led to a further significant loss of Parliament's power to legislate and scrutinise government policies.

Most national parliaments are weakly involved with the various phases of the European Semester's workings and decisions at national level (European Parliament, 2018). During the memorandum era, Greece, exempt from all European Semester reporting

processes, was not subject to a macroeconomic imbalances review. The country did not have to submit a stability programme, but it had to accept the most stringent obligations – this is also the case nowadays in the context of the post-memorandum monitoring programme – for monitoring the implementation of the adjustment programmes that actually covered the policy areas reviewed under the Semester.

Parliamentary structures were not adapted to the new regime of external budgetary and financial monitoring for structural adjustment – a regime that included at least four Troika review missions per year, plus interim missions mainly through government channels.

A series of amendments of the RoP in 2010 brought some changes in order to improve parliamentary awareness of the government's work. The National Statistical Office has been put under the responsibility of the parliamentary committee on institutions and transparency, a State Budget Office has been established in parliament to facilitate the evaluation of budgetary data from the budget committee and to enhance parliamentary control of state finances. Moreover, a compulsory public consultation process has been introduced,⁵ while prime minister's questions and ministers' topical questions have been reformed in order to enhance the immediacy of these processes.

It is highly debatable whether these procedural changes increased parliamentary scrutiny of the Troika's views – on actions to undertake, recommendations and policy priorities provided in

⁵ In this process, each bill must be accompanied by a report on the public consultation and an assessment report on the consequences of the regulation.

the MoUs, or on Greece's national reform programmes. The reinforcement of throughput legitimacy has not increased parliament's influence on the policy outcome although, in principle, adjustment policies were intended to promote growth and employment in line with the Europe 2020 strategy.

All the above initiatives for amending the rules of the parliamentary process failed to mitigate the dominance of government parties – despite their progressively decreasing majorities after 2011 as we will see below – at the expense of opposition parties; on the contrary, they reinforced parliament's dependency on the government. Despite the controversial nature of austerity legislation, there have not been any motions of no confidence (art. 84 C) over the course of the last decade,⁶ no increase in the number of petitions (art. 69 C) or requests for deposing documents, no rise in the number of debates on the initiative of MPs or hearings of competent ministers to inform the committees. It is worth mentioning ministers' indifference to parliamentary procedures, since they were either absent or responded after a long time to submitted parliamentary questions or queries. As far as 'prime minister's time' is concerned, by reintroducing this previously abolished institution selectively and sporadically, the Syriza government increased talk time for the prime minister at the expense of that for MPs.

In principle, the President of the Parliament is called upon to transmit regulatory acts and consultative documents to the competent standing committee and the European Affairs Committee. The government has to inform the House about the follow-up given to the opinions expressed during hearings from the competent or joint committees forwarded to the responsible or competent ministers (art. 41B RoP). However, in the framework of parliamentary debates, while austerity legislative measures imposed by the MoUs have been accompanied by explanatory reports – a report by the General Accounting Office and by the

⁶ The only exceptions were the Syriza motion against the government New Democracy – Pasok in November 2013 after the shutdown of the Greek state broadcaster ERT and the New Democracy motion against the Prespa agreement in June 2018.

Minister of Finance and any other competent minister, and a report from the scientific service of the parliament – there was no substantial debate, where amendments or additions proposed by MPs could have been discussed and eventually accepted within at least the existing consultation processes.⁷

Effective scrutiny by national parliaments of their own governments was deemed extremely important for the credibility of the adjustment programmes given the fact that the MoUs were not taking into account the practice and institutions for wage formation, thus exempting concerned member states from reporting under the anti-poverty and social inclusion targets (European Parliament, 2014).⁸ Within a parliamentary assembly engaged in genuine deliberation, ministers of finance should have been regularly reporting and held accountable to the national parliament on what was being negotiated between the European and national authorities.⁹ In fact, in the Greek case, formal documents were not clearly communicated and considered in due time by Greek MPs, nor adequately discussed with the social partners.¹⁰

⁷ The Special Committee for European affairs (art. 32A RoP) in collaboration with the sectoral standing committees and, if necessary, the sectoral special permanent committees can express advisory opinions by submitting a report to the parliament and the government, in which any minority opinion is registered.

⁸ The EP Report also recalls that the recommendations contained in the MoUs were at odds with the modernisation policy drawn up in the Lisbon strategy and the Europe 2020 strategy without taking into account the national reform programme of the member state concerned in the context of the Union's strategy for growth and jobs as set out in Regulation (EU) No 472/2013 (art.7 (1)).

⁹ In contrast, the Cypriot parliament rejected the original MoU while in Portugal the MoU was not ratified by the national parliament.

¹⁰ "There has been a voluntary downgrading of the role of the parliament, thereby not allowing Greek deputies to address issues as sensitive as for instance the infrastructure concession agreements imposed under the MoUs", Interview with N. Voutsis, President of the Hellenic Parliament, 10.01.2019.

The EU significantly influences an increasing number of domestic processes of agenda-setting, thus covering a wide variety of issues that depend heavily on government policies and orienting the national parliamentary agenda. Nevertheless, this increasing Europeanisation of parliamentary work has neither resulted in a rise of awareness about EU affairs among Greek MPs nor a strengthening of their European 'expertise and competence',¹¹ nor in the effective adaptation of the Greek parliament's structures to the new requirements of overlapping and interlocking competences within the EU.

This increasing Europeanisation of parliamentary work has neither resulted in a rise of awareness about EU affairs among Greek MPs nor a strengthening of their European 'expertise and competence'.

Under economic pressure with tight deadlines, Greek governments abused specific urgent and emergency legislative procedures, thus *de facto* transforming an exceptional way of legislating into the 'ordinary legislative procedure'. Emergency bills were tabled and voted in a short space of time, restricting the public's access to information and neutralising attempts to generate an organised response through effective mobilisation.

Even earlier, the constitutional review of 2001 had already introduced derogations from the 'common' legislative procedure in order to further ease adoption of emergency legislation and tighten the way in which amendments and additions are made (art. 76.4 & 5 C). Emergency bills and draft laws are debated and put to the vote in one plenary session with no possibility of a time extension for further discussion; if they contain provisions unrelated to their main subject, these are not discussed.

This trend has been reinforced by the amending of the parliament's RoP in 2016. An assessment report, albeit concise, should also accompany the emergency legislation and ministers' amendments (art. 87 RoP). At the same time, new time limits are set for the submission of bills and amendments, so as to avoid

¹¹ "No more than half of Greek deputies have a relatively good knowledge of the EU; their scientific collaborators and the general staff of their respective parties are mainly taking charge of the related legislative work", Interview with N. Voutsis, *ibid.*

surprises. The one-week margin between the first and second reading debate on emergency bills and draft laws has been abolished (art. 109.2 RoP).

Greece's international commitments, legally and politically soft but financially hard, brought with them a marked increase in legislative output (see Table 1). This was accomplished mainly by way of the emergency legislative procedure, as well as by using flexible legislative instruments that are at the exclusive disposal of the executive branch in cases of urgent and unforeseen emergency, known as 'legislative acts'¹² and regulatory instruments (i.e. Acts of Council of Ministers, Ministerial decisions) (see Table 11.1 and Figure 11.2).

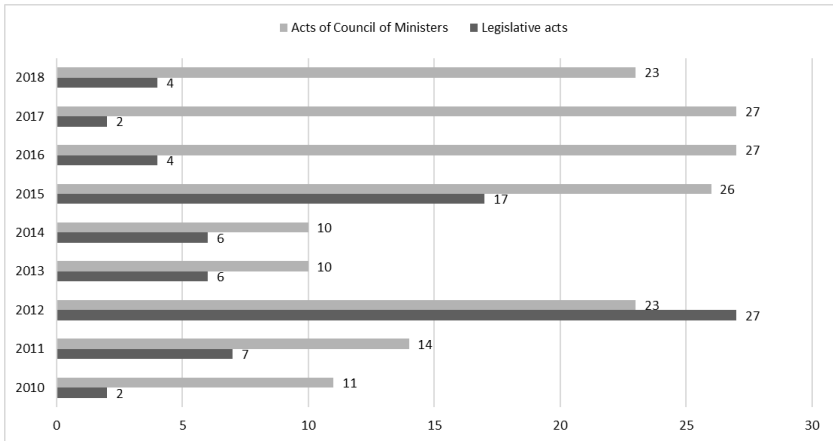
Table 11.1 Legislative output under the framework of memorandums, 2010-18

Multi-bills	26
Laws	over 717
Corresponding provisions of the memorandums	over 60,000
Legislative acts	75
Acts of Council of Ministers	171
Ministerial decisions	over 300,000

Source: Office of the Secretary General of the Government, 2019 and Directorate General of parliamentary work of the Hellenic Parliament, 2019.

¹² The bills introduced into parliament on the ratification of legislative acts, according to the art. 44.1 of the Constitution, necessarily contain one article which automatically ratifies the legislative act (art. 113 RoP).

Figure 11.2 Comparative numbers of legislative acts and Acts of Council of Ministers in the period of memorandums, per year, 2010-18



Sources: Office of the Secretary General of the Government, 2019 and Directorate General for parliamentary work of the Hellenic Parliament, 2019.

However, contrary to what is often said, the unconditional implementation of the memorandums' objectives through government policy did not take place in an emergency environment (Manitakis, 2012). The delegation of extraordinary legislative power to the Council of Ministers, which transformed the parliament into an *ex post* ratification institution, took place in a normal constitutional and political context. The new regime of permanent coercion became a facilitator for carrying out the legislative work, while at the same time exacerbated power asymmetries between national parliaments within the EU (Moschella, 2017, Nguyen, 2018).

While there was no unpredictable or exceptional danger, exceptional legislative processes have been normalised. The fact that the Troika was responsible for drafting the legislative measures and supervising their implementation¹³ certainly eliminated any

¹³ In 2015, there were some discussions, mainly launched by the re-elected Syriza government in September 2015, on the possible involvement of the European Parliament in monitoring the implementation of the economic

potential danger, whereas, on the other hand, it changed the nature of domestic political legitimacy. Instead of streamlining and improving parliamentary scrutiny, the further ‘executivisation’ of parliamentary power during the memorandum and the post-

Instead of improving parliamentary scrutiny, the further ‘executivisation’ during the memorandum and the post-memorandum eras weakened it.

memorandum eras translated into its long-standing weakening.¹⁴ While these excessive amounts of austerity legislative output covered a broad spectrum of public policies largely exceeding the MoUs’ objectives, they failed to provide efficient and equitable policies as well as to

preserve legal sustainability and future legislative stability.

Low levels of parliamentary expertise on EU affairs and the shrinking space for parliamentary debate and legislative initiatives are the features of a system that struggles to participate in the existing framework of European inter-parliamentary cooperation. This low-profile and non-binding cooperation scheme encouraging conferences and networks between national parliaments as well as between them and the European institutions basically aims at exchanging information and discussing matters of common interest.

However, in the framework of the political dialogue with the European Commission, the Greek Parliament demonstrates a markedly low institutional capability in comparison with other member states as far as the task of monitoring compliance of EU legislative proposals with the subsidiarity principle is concerned.¹⁵ Up to now, the Greek Parliament issued a small number of opinions

adjustment programmes of countries under financial assistance, but without success.

¹⁴ In the framework of the national parliamentary debate, the Committee of European affairs of the Greek Parliament holds formal hearings for European Commissioners-designate confined to questions addressed by one representative of each political party in a limited amount of time.

¹⁵ “The possibilities offered by the Lisbon Treaty are exploited. We could participate more actively, but this is a political issue”, Interview with E. Konstantinidou, former Director of the Directorate for European and bilateral affairs, Hellenic Parliament.

on Commission documents or policy areas and of reasoned opinions on draft legislative acts with no involvement in the three yellow cards triggered within the early warning mechanism.¹⁶ This allows us to include the Greek Parliament in the group of national parliaments that embrace low-profile activism at the European level (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Hungary and Lithuania).

However, while national parliamentary involvement in EU law-making is considered very important, it could not restore the problem of competence creep and the need to safeguard domestic socio-economic and politico-legal idiosyncrasies. The best way to alleviate the (national and European) democratic deficit and boost EU legitimacy is to ensure effective national parliamentary oversight of the quality of legislative output and the distribution of competences according to the principle of conferral of powers (Jancic, 2015; Garben, 2017).

11.2 Shrunken democracy

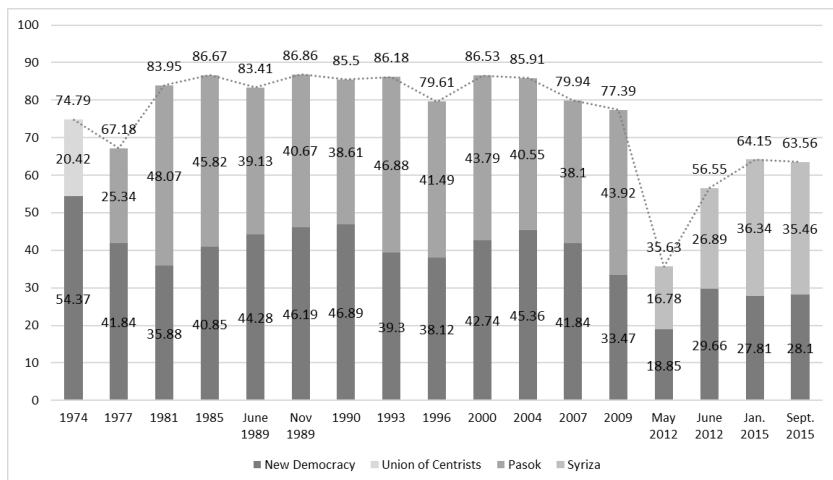
After the long post-war period of authoritarian parliamentarism, in the *Metapolitefsi* period Greece built a polarised parliamentary system based on a tripartite partisan system (Alivizatos, 1990). This partisan system reproduced the inherited opposition of the late pro-dictatorship period, i.e. the post-civil war opposition between the Right (New Democracy) and anti-Right/democratic forces (Pasok, Communist party of Greece),¹⁷ establishing a bipolar order of political competition, which was actually consolidated in the 80s (Nikolakopoulos, 1990). The Communist party's core ideology of anti-Americanism and anti-capitalist imperialism became an embedded feature of the one pole of the 'bipolar tripartism' (Nikolakopoulos, 1990).

¹⁶ Greek governments issued one opinion in 2017 and in 2016, two opinions in 2013, four opinions in 2012 and seven in 2010.

¹⁷ The Communist party of Interior came from the splitting of the Communist party of Greece in 1968. In 1989, an electoral coalition named 'Synaspismos (Bloc) of the Left' was established gathering together different factions of the Greek Left; much later, following the defection of the Communist party of Greece, this coalition evolved into the political party of Syriza.

Two shifts took place more or less in parallel. From the mid-80s, there was a progressive break between the two poles weakening the right / anti-right structure and moving to a genuine polarised tripartite system with two main governing parties. From 1989 to 1990, the formation of coalition governments reinforced bipartisanship (Foundethakis, 2003). The sovereign debt crisis, as a catalyst, dramatically shrank the ideological polarisation of the old adversarial politics, reinforcing personal leadership, and reinvigorated party fragmentation with the appearance of some flash parties,¹⁸ significantly weakening the long-established bipartisanship (see Figure 11.3).

Figure 11.3 The evolution of bipartisanship through elections, 1974-2015 (%)



Source: Election data, Greek Ministry of Interior.

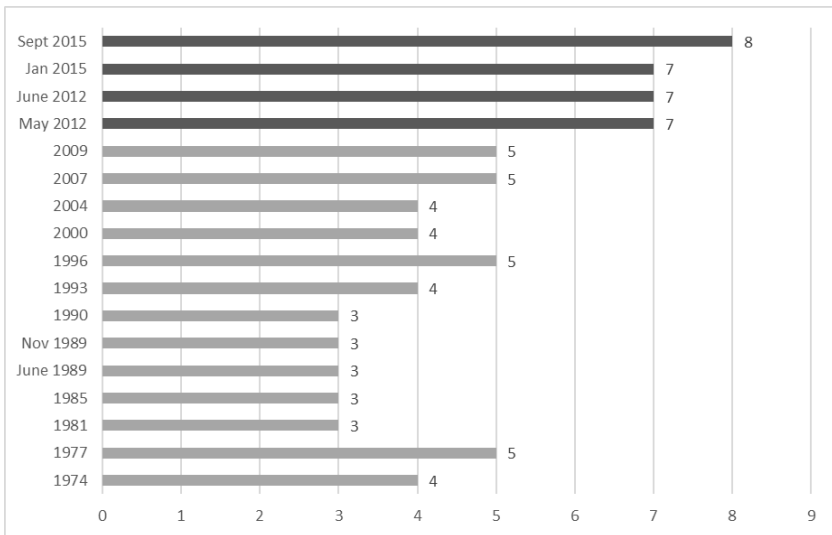
In the election of September 2015, the number of parties in parliament shot up to eight, the highest number in the post-dictatorship period. Indeed, this extreme fragmentation had not been seen before in Greek politics. When we observe the fluctuation of party numbers in the *Metapolitefsi* period, we see that party fragmentation was quite low in periods of stability, while it was higher in periods of political turmoil with shorter parliamentary

¹⁸ Small parties with minor ideological differences risk disappearing.

terms; this was particularly the case during the years of the economic crisis starting with the May 2012 election, the first election held after the implementation of the (first and second) bailout programmes (see Figure 11.4).

Party fragmentation was quite low in periods of stability, while it was higher in periods of political turmoil with shorter parliamentary terms.

Figure 11.4 Number of parliamentary parties, 1974 – 2015



Note: This chart takes into account parties with at least 5 MPs.

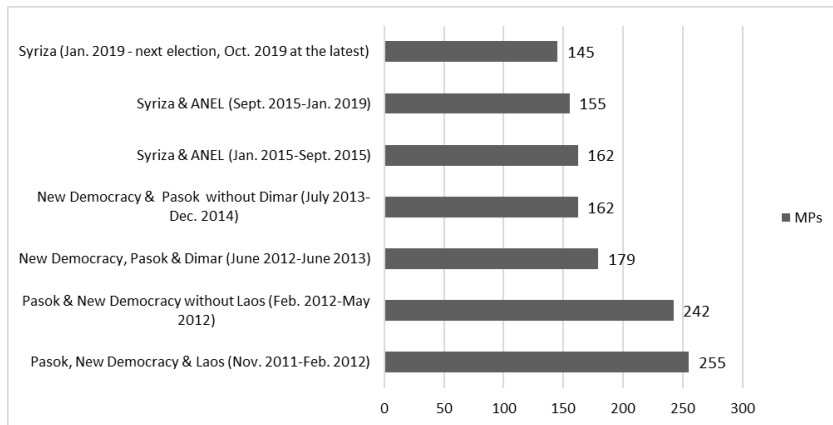
Source: Elections data, Greek Ministry of Interior.

According to the provocative distinction between competitive systems and ‘consociational’ systems, the latter are defined by a “non-competitive ‘cartelised’ pluralist pattern” in which “amicable agreement” plays the leading role (Barber, 2003). The consociational model avoids the fractiousness of majority decision through a process of what we might call holistic bargaining. Greece’s political culture has been previously shaped by a strong tradition of one-party governments neglecting the issue of intra-party democracy. Post-crisis Greece underwent a shift from a

Greece’s political culture has been previously shaped by a strong tradition of one-party governments neglecting intra-party democracy.

bipolar partisan system to a post-majoritarian political system, experiencing considerable pressure due to the ever-decreasing government majorities that it produces. This can be seen as a 'south-consociational' model that reinforces its consensual characteristics and favours the development of multi-party governments (see Figure 11.5).

Figure 11.5 Number of coalition governments MPs, 2010-19¹⁹

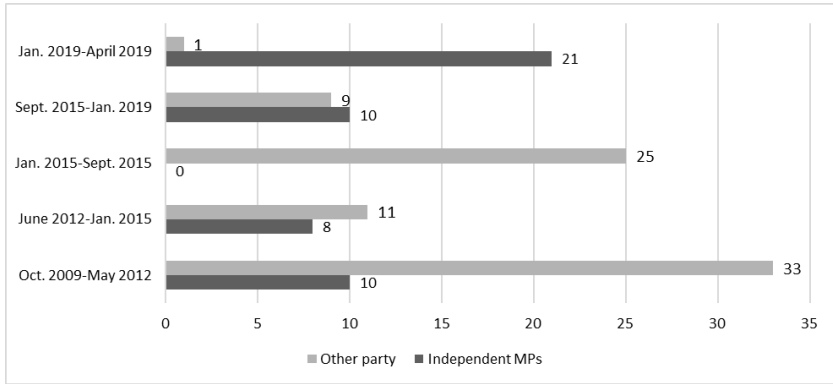


Source: Elections data, Greek Ministry of Interior.

Coalition politics increases the volatility of party preferences, contributes to the ideological vagueness of parties and jeopardises MPs' partisan identity. Parties' strategic rapprochements, along with their flagrant ideological incoherencies and mutations, further increase the growing disengagement of Greeks from parliamentary politics. Increasing numbers of MPs switch political party during their term or become independent, after either being excluded from or because of disagreement with it (see Figure 11.6).

¹⁹ Since January 2019, the disagreement of Syriza's partner ANEL on the Prespa agreement led to the break-up of the government coalition. Syriza government minority of 145 MPs has the support of 6 MPs (2 members of the parliamentary group of ANEL and 4 MPs becoming independent after being expelled from their parties (two former ANEL MPs, one former New Democracy MP and one former The River MP).

Figure 11.6 Number of MPs leaving their party, 2009-19



Source: Hellenic Parliament, 2019.

Currently, the 21 independent MPs compose the 'third' party in the outgoing parliament. While the Constitution guarantees that MPs can decide according to their own conscience (art. 60.1 C), political parties have always used disciplinary measures to achieve voting unity. Memorandums, but also the recently adopted law for the implementation of the Prespa agreement on the Macedonian issue, increased MPs' disloyalty to their party. This general trend may also have a deleterious effect on party identification of voters when elected members of parliament disregard main party lines and show shifting loyalty not firmly rooted in their psychological attachment to their party.

Another aspect of the above trend is the hazy affiliation of Greek political parties with the political groups in the EP. Their ideological commitments seem ever looser, which leads to divergent positioning strategies and political de-alignments within the European political spectrum. New Democracy has been misaligned with the EPP's position on the Prespa agreement as well as on the prospects for Euro-Turkish relations. The Movement for Change – the centre-left alliance of Pasok with other minor centre-left parties – has been misaligned with the Socialists and Democrats' position on the Prespa agreement. Syriza's flirting with the group of

Socialists and Democrats has been a sign of its gradual convergence with centre-left politics.²⁰

Syriza positioned itself as the best negotiator and executor of austerity norms and relevant policy actions embracing EU's protestant, positivist and liberal values; and all this within a public space where the margin of acceptable opinion has been strictly limited (Chomsky, 1998).

The three main issues influencing Greek voters were unemployment, economic growth and the future of pensions.

Three of the seven Greek parties that won EP seats in 2014 were generally registered as uncritical supporters of European integration and committed to keep crisis-stricken Greece in the Eurozone. The remaining four with Eurosceptic programmes won 12 of 21 national seats in the EP. According to a European Parliament survey, the three main issues influencing Greek voters were unemployment, economic growth and the future of pensions (European Parliament, 2014).

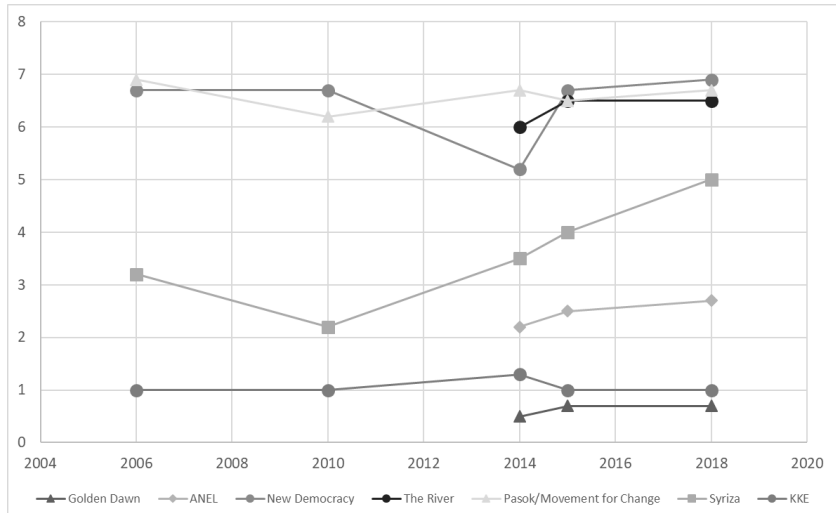
The 2015 referendum further widened the gap between pro-MoU 'globalists' and anti-MoU 'nativists'. It seemed that those voting for the first time and the unemployed had massively chosen 'No'. The voting pattern in the referendum was highly polarised, revealing the class-based division between pro-Europeanists (high-education, high-income) and Eurosceptics (low education, low-income), something that has also been observed historically in other relevant referenda on EU issues (Mavris, 2016).²¹ However, that did not prevent Syriza from becoming a prominent pro-European cartel

²⁰ Syriza is invited as an observer to the pre-summit gatherings of the political group S&D. In February 2018, J.-L. Mélenchon, the leader of the French left-wing party *France Insoumise* requested that Syriza - one of the oldest members of the European Left party - be expelled from the European Left party GUE-NGL because of its pro-austerity government policies and its rapprochement strategy with the S&D group. However, other members of the confederal group GUE-NGL such as the German *Die Linke* were opposed to the idea.

²¹ The most important employers' organisations were very active in the formation of the Yes Committee which was set up on 1 July 2015 (Mavris, 2016).

party, proving once again that Euroscepticism is more a strategic position than an ideologically motivated posture (see Figure 11.7).

Figure 11.7. Greek party positions towards the EU on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly in favour), 2006-18



Note: Calculations updated in 2015 and 2018 on the basis of a qualitative analysis of party programmes and positioning using the Bakker et al. numerical scale (1-7).

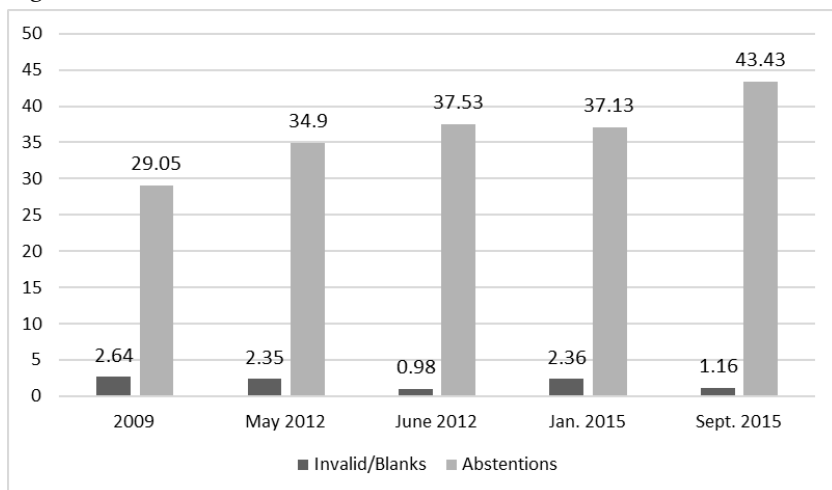
Sources: Bakker et al. (2015); Eimantas (2016), author's calculations (2019).

The September 2015 election had a much more direct effect on the social and electoral base of the party than the split between the leading group and the left-wing faction of the Syriza parliamentary group in the summer of 2015. Syriza's electoral base moved towards the centre of the political spectrum, while the complete disintegration of the remaining party mechanism of Syriza transformed it from a mass party to a cadre party structured around the leader and his leading group (Mavris, 2016).

Greece experienced tremendous social downgrading in much more heterogeneous social contexts. Commonly in established party systems, party identities are enmeshed with social identities erecting macro-partisanship as one of the most stable of political attitudes, more resistant to change than major economic or cultural policy positions (Converse & Markus, 1979). The progressive de-

ideologisation of Syriza disrupted Greece's traditional political geography, breaching the causal link between class and position towards the EU, thus defeating Mutz's idea about the social homogeneity of political behaviour (Mutz, 2006). Consequently, in a context of low or 'disembedded' politicisation, the repositioning by partisan actors in the political competition has entailed crucial consequences. First, there is a continuing rise in the abstention rate at national elections (see Figure 11.8).

Figure 11.8 Abstention rates in Greek national elections, 2009-15 (%)



Source: Elections data, Greek Ministry of Interior.

Second, there is an increase of unstable voters belonging to cross-pressured groups²² with no organised political participation by membership in a party. Decreasing voter loyalty is the result of increasing distrust not only in parliamentary democracy but also in partisan politics. The current electorate is older compared with that in the mid-2000s, with a higher educational level, mainly composed of retired people. Non-privileged people are more likely to

Decreasing voter loyalty is the result of increasing distrust not only in parliamentary democracy but also in partisan politics.

²² Cross-pressured voters express lower levels of political interest and participation, while their voting decisions come later.

abstain or to vote for small or flash parties. Flash parties that rapidly emerge on the political stage may be a legitimate expression of public interests, but they can also arise from political elites with exploitative intentions or be short-term reactions to a dramatic issue or event. The partisan dealignment is a persisting decline in the public's level of partisanship (Dalton, 2012). While macro-partisanship remains for the older or privileged people, the number of unattached voters can grow further due to the substantial instability of party attachments.²³

After drastically blurring the pro- versus anti-memorandum dividing line, Syriza's main objective now is to absorb centre and centre-left parties' middle-ranking cadres, thus becoming a mainstream party within a party system that is moving rightward. The Prespa agreement, in contrast with the issue of refugees, has been a good opportunity to attempt to reconfigure the political spectrum. Syriza followed the French LREM's electoral campaigning strategy by tracing a new dividing line in Greek politics between 'progressives' as they now represent cosmopolitanism and Europeanism, and 'nationalists' preaching anti-Westernism, localism and provincialism. Nevertheless, whatever the attribution of political 'roles' may be in the future, a more fundamental realignment of the party system between liberal progressives and backward-looking populists, as is currently taking place in other European countries, seems difficult to establish in Greece.

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The economic condition of the country does not make it possible to cultivate feelings of economic nationalism and liberal sovereignty within Greek society. Unlike other Europeans, Greeks seem to be more focused on socio-economic issues rather than socio-

²³ In the first post-bailout election of 2012, 'wasted votes' going to parties that did not achieve parliamentary representation climbed sharply to 19.2%, more than the vote share of the winning party New Democracy. In the next three elections, 'wasted votes' were significantly higher than before 2009 when they hovered below 5% (5.98% in the June 2012 election, 8.62% in the January 2015 election, 6.40% in the September 2015 election).

civilisational concerns and identity issues. This aspect is much more telling than analyses about populism in Greece. Contrary to what is often claimed, the degree of populist politics, despite the intensity of the crisis, has been lower than in other countries. Still, while the politics of normalisation seem to be gaining ground, there is a high risk of further shifts toward authoritarianism and right-wing radicalisation, given the fact that the class-based redistributive conflict has been largely wiped out.

Conclusion

The Syriza government initiative for a constitutional reform that could take place in the next parliamentary term intends to contribute to the reinvigoration of Greek parliamentarism in order to have greater “control of government power by the body”. The proposed changes aim to democratise the political system by introducing a citizens’ right to propose laws as well as proportional representation electoral rules for the parliament. They also stipulate that a prime minister should be elected and not appointed. And they introduce the ratification by referendum of international treaties or agreements transferring sovereign state powers.²⁴ Changes also aim to restore the credibility of the political class by limiting parliamentary immunity and office to three consecutive terms.

Furthermore, the recent Kleisthenis decentralisation reform in 2018 was an attempt to reinvigorate citizens’ interest in politics and link electoral democracy with European transnationalism by allowing EU citizens to participate in regional elections and the election of an EU citizen as a mayor and president of a regional council.

However, a comprehensive reform should first and foremost guarantee parliament’s area of competence, facilitate the release of and MPs access to information and arguably enlarge its legislative powers by introducing new pre-legislative scrutiny monitoring and

²⁴ “While the right-wing New Democracy party proposes that Greece’s membership of the EU should be constitutionally entrenched, Syriza considers that there is no need for such a constitutional guarantee”, Interview with M. Spourdalakis, Professor of Political Science, University of Athens and Chairman of the Constitutional Review Committee, 26.11.2018.

evaluation tools, such as the government's right to take legal action before the ECJ on behalf of the parliament in case of breaches of the subsidiarity principle.

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