Greek political elites and political discourse in the era of crisis: between populism and "elitism"

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Abstract: The adoption of the first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in May 2010 signaled the most significant turnaround of the Greek Third Republic, both in socioeconomic and political level. The austerity policies implemented during the last years with the adoption of two more MoUs, and two Medium Term Fiscal Strategies (MTFS), resulted in the creation of a totally new environment within the political field. Democratic participation, decision making processes, democratic deficit, renewal of party system and political personnel, emergence of intense anti-elitist (populist) discourse are only few of the most evident parameters that have been fundamentally influenced during the years of the "memoranda".

Within the abovementioned political context, the current research seeks to examine the rate and characteristics of either "elitism" (pro-elites statements) or populism (pro-people and/or anti-elites statements) appearing in the political discourse of the two pre-electoral periods of 2015. In this way, we will be able to trace the integration rate and rationale of the new political reality that has been formed in the Greek political domain under the influence of the crisis, into the public political discourse. Our theoretical background derives from the

notions of political elites and its "counterpart" populism, as they "materialize" within the context of the Greek financial, social and political crisis.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Political elites under crisis conditions

Elite theories, estimate -among others- the impact that rapid social changes and crises have on the representation of political elites. Although the specific approaches differ depending on the period they refer to, the definition of what constitutes a crisis (i.e. regime change, deterioration of socioeconomic conditions) or the methodology they follow, an assumption tends to be common; there is a strong impact within crisis conditions in multiple levels (i.e. democratic representation, role of political elites and citizens, political parties, elections) of the political system.

During crisis periods the *lack of democratic legitimization* (Lipset, 1963: 64-65) and the consequent *increase of the democratic deficit* (Putnam, 1976: 210) are more than evident, since practices that can enhance citizens' involvement and influence (i.e. referenda, elections) against their representatives' power are rejected (Mosca, 1939: 157; Hayward, 1996: 17; Best, 2010: 104-113). Though the Greek political system has a strong tradition of rather frequent elections, that wasn't the case during the first period of crisis, between 2010 and 2012. Despite the fact that the adoption of the first MoU and the first MSTF caused a significant social turmoil, due to the lack of legitimization for the adoption of the austerity policies, elections were conducted only two years after the signing of the first MoU. This avoidance of elections brought about the argument of legitimization that was heavily used during that time on behalf of the majority of the opposition parties.

A strongly influenced -during crisis periods- parameter of the function of the political system is the *decision making process* (Isakhan and Slaughter, 2014: 13-15). In Greece, the

"state of emergency" rationale that emerged during the last years, and the necessity for the adoption of new -mostly austerity- policies within a very limited time frame, resulted in the marginalization of the Greek parliament. This marginalization came as a result of the procedures, which according to the Constitution (Art. 44) are followed 'under extraordinary circumstances of an urgent and unforeseeable need'. The "Legislative Content Act" (Standing Orders of the Hellenic Parliament, Article 109) and "Very Urgent Procedure" (Standing Orders of the Hellenic Parliament, Art. 44 Par. 1), are the two most important procedures, which influence directly the decision making process. In the case of "Legislative Content Act" the parliament is circumvented, since the government implements directly a new law and the parliament decides on the new law after a certain period of time. In addition, under the "Very Urgent Procedure" the debating role of the parliamentary committees is downgraded, while the plenary sessions of the parliament are to a large extent curtailed.

Two additional instances enhance the democratic deficit of the contemporary crisis period in Greece. The first was the intended effort on behalf of political elites to delay and avoid the influence of citizens and civil society over the adopted policies. Besides the delay in conduction of elections, the conduction of a referendum was also rejected. Back in 2011, same as in 2015, the call for a referendum was rejected both on behalf of the main opposition parties in Greece and mainly on behalf of European officials (Pitty, 2014: 133-134). Especially in the case of New Democracy the declaration of the referendum of 2011 resulted in the shift of the attitude and discourse of the party, since in spite of its previous anti-memorandum stance (Karoulas and Poulakidakos, 2013: 365-378), New Democracy adopted a pro-memorandum rationale. Furthermore, the process of "public debating" was fundamentally transformed, not only at the political level as described above, but also at the social one. Social dialogue was marginalized or even absent due to the urgent adoption of

policies (i.e. lack of participation of social partners and representatives of society from parliamentary committees, diminished role of the National General Collective Agreement, which until the crisis was defining the minimum wage).

In addition, what seems to be evident during the period of crisis is the break of bonds between the Greek and the international elite institutions like ECB, IMF and European Commission (Pitty, 2014: 126-138), a condition that verifies the thesis that in case of crises the support of "international elite cartels" is of outmost importance (Higley and Pakulski, 2007: 20-21). All the important policies, that have been up to now implemented, are actually debated and negotiated only with the representatives of the "troika" (IMF, ECB, EC), institutions whose members are being appointed by specific institutions and are not directly elected by the citizens (Pitty, 2014: 125-126). Besides the direct intervention on behalf of the European officials regarding the conduction -or not- of elections or referenda, similar interventions were also evident regarding the evaluation of the Greek political elites, the effective implementation of MOUs' policies or the adoption of bills on behalf the Greek governments without the former approval of the "Institutions" (Pitty, 2014: 125-126). The specific conditions caused dissatisfaction on behalf of the Greek political elites regarding the representation of the Greek interests within EU level (Tsirbas and Sotiropoulos, 2015: 15-16)

Despite the above mentioned "differences" between European and Greek elites, during crisis periods the *consensus between political elites* may be enhanced as well (Mills, 2000: 274-278; Higley and Burton, 2006: 55-103). The specific condition constitutes a major parameter of the dominant political parties in order to retain their influence and access to power. The intra-elite consensus is evident in the Greek political system of the period 2010 – 2015. A first proof was the creation of coalition governments, a condition which strongly opposed the up to 2010 dominant practice of single party governments. These coalition governments

lacked internal ideological coherence, since they were formed by parties coming from different sides of the political spectrum, as is the current case of the coalition governments between the radical left party of SYRIZA and the populist right wing party of Independent Greeks (ANEL). What seems to be more than evident during the last years is a considerable change in the attitude of political elites in terms of their willingness to co-operate in order to maintain their governing status.

Crisis conditions influence in a direct manner the attitude of political elites and political leaders. The necessity for assuring elites' reproduction, results in *the increase of elites' power* at the expense of intraparty participation (Putnam, 1976: 2010) and other institutions that may have a role to play in the adoption of specific policies, like the parliament or the citizens (Michels, 1997: 62 and 90). During the crisis period in Greece, the already marginalized role of parties' organs is even more evident. These conditions have resulted in the break of bonds between party elites and party members, and the consequent withdrawal of the latter from party organs (i.e. Central Committees, District Committees). Additionally, the lack of intra-party negotiation with the MPs resulted in the increase of disagreements, as opposed to the "traditional" obedience to the party's central position on a given issue. The lack of negotiation resulted several times in the voluntary withdrawal or the deletion of the dissidents.

The aforementioned differentiations of party elites are attributed to the fact that there are power inequalities even among political elites. According to the categorization made by Dogan there are "ordinary deputies" and "great parliamentarians" (Dogan, 2003: 64-65). In our case the category of "great parliamentarians" consists of the political personnel closely related to the political leadership of the power parties. These personnel mostly undertake initiatives for proposing and implementing policies. In the Greek case we cannot ignore the fact that the last elections of September 2015 were actually declared in order for SYRIZA to

regain its lost parliamentary majority after the voting of the last bailout program during August 2015.

In addition, the consequences of rapid social changes on political elites (i.e. lack of intraparty and parliamentary negotiation and consensus), as well as on the citizens (i.e. fluidity of electorate) result in the *fragmentation of the party system and the emergence of new political powers* (Dogan and Higley, 1998: 269-279; King and Seligman, 1976: 263-264; Jahnige, 1971: 466-500), a condition which is closely related to the prevailing conditions of the crisis. The up to 2010 predominantly bi-partizan party system has become highly fragmented, since a considerable number of new political parties emerged. On one hand, PASOK, the first main pillar of bi-partizanism, has been transformed to a party with very limited social acceptance (from 43,92% in the elections of 2009, PASOK was voted by the 6,29% of the electorate in the elections of September 2015, YPES 2016). Moreover, New Democracy, the second pillar of the pre-crisis bi-partizanism, has lost a considerable amount of electoral support.

On the other hand, SYRIZA, until recently a minor opposition party, has become a power party, "replacing" PASOK, while a significant number of small parties have introduced themselves to the central political scene during the last -crisis- years. In addition, the electoral turnout of MPs during the crisis has been the highest of the last decades, since similar percentages can be detected only during former crisis periods (i.e. restoration of democracy in 1974 or during 1989 a period stigmatized by serious accusations for political scandals) as can be seen from Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of Newcomers per national elections[1]

Year of National Elections	Percentage of Newcomers
1974	63,60%
1977	40,00%
1981	41,00%
1985	16,00%
1989 (June)	47,00%
1989 (November)	13,00%
1990	12,66%
1993	25,66%
1996	30,66%
2000	30,33%
2004	30,66%
2007	26,66%
2009	28,00%
2012 (May)	49,33%
2012 (June)	11,66%
2015 (January)	40,00%
2015 (September)	20,33%

All the above mentioned evolutions in the Greek political system resulted in *the rejection of the party system and the traditional political elites*, by a significant part of the society (King & Seligman 1976; Cotta και Verzichelli, 2007: 463). The specific rejection has taken the form of two main attitudes on behalf of the citizens. The first is the abstention percentages in the elections that were conducted during the crisis period which have been increased by more than 20% compared to the elections of 2004 (from 76,5% in the elections of 2004 the participation of citizens have decreased to 56,6% during the elections of September 2015). The second is the emergence of the far right party of Golden Dawn which has gained a considerable electoral power during the last years (between 6-7%), being the third most

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[1]The table combines a number of different sources. For the period between 1974-1988 data are coming from the book Tziovaras, G.- Chiotis, V. (2006) *The political map of the Metapolitefsi 1974-2006* (in Greek), Athens: Livanis. The data for the period between 1989- 2011 from the unpublished dissertation Karoulas, G. (2015) *Political parties and the emergence of political elites in the Greek party system of the period 1989-2011: factors of conformation of the leading political groups* (in Greek), PhD, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Finally the data for the elections of 2012-2015 are deriving from the official website of the Hellenic parliament.

powerful party during the elections of January and September 2015, a case which is also closely related with the crisis conditions (Linz and Mir and Ortega, 2007: 317-318).

Finally, an alternative form of politicization during period of crisis is the activation of social groups through social movements or civil society formations (Dahrendorf, 2004: 5-6), as it happened in several cases in Greece during the last years (i.e. "Indignados Movement" or "I don't Pay Movement"). The emergence of alternative forms of political activity derives from the fact that specific social groups cannot be expressed or represented through the existing political parties (Best and Cotta, 2007: 23-24). Especially the last two parameters –the rise of Golden Dawn and the emergence of social movements- are related to the public expression of a populist discourse and rationale that has gained dynamic in Greece within the condition of crisis (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 135).

1.2 Populism and its emergence under crisis conditions

Thus, apart from the above mentioned theoretical and phenomenological approach of the elites' theory and its relation to the contemporary Greek political system, the current research will focus on the political discourse, as expressed by party representatives, during the two pre-electoral periods of 2015, trying to locate populist elements in the opinions expressed through the televised appearances of party members.

To begin with, "populism" belongs to the controversial concepts of the social sciences. Each time the word is used, depending on where and on what circumstances one uses it, it may acquire a different meaning (Borges, 2005: 2; Laclau, 1977: 143). Its application and rationale varies widely across different countries, contexts, and historical time periods (Borges, 2005: 4; Howard, 2000: 19-20; Laclau, 1977: 144; Aslanidis, 2013: 18; Borges,

2005: 5). After all, political survival in almost any regime (even authoritarian ones) demands that some kind of "populist" measures be taken (Borges, 2005: 15).

Populism as a term is often employed in loose, inconsistent and undefined ways to denote appeals to 'the people', 'demagogy' and 'catch-all' politics (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008a: 2). We are usually left with the paradoxical situation that we think we know clearly who to call populists, but not what to call populism (Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004a: 4). In a nutshell, populism remains a fuzzy concept, loosely defined, disconnected from a specific type of regime, ideological content or position in the political space, since it ranges from left-wing to right-wing (Mayer, 2005: 2; Papadopoulos, 2004: 5; Howard, 2000: 19-20; Jones, 2007: 37).

Definitions of populism range from characterizing it an ideology (Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004: 6), a sum of procedures utilized to ascertain the will of the people (Radcliff, 1993: 131) or a "tactical device" in the form of rhetoric strategy or style of communication (Raadt, Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004b: 1). Most theorists, though, agree that two are the basic principles inscribed in populism: the appeal to the people and the anti-elitist discourse (Aslanidis, 2016: 7-8, Mouzelis, 1985: 330; Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004a: 4; Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004b: 1, Lyrintzis, 1990: 45).

Under this rationale, populism can be defined either as a "thin-centred ideology" or a political/discursive logic, "that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the people' versus 'the elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people" (Mudde, 2004: 543; Aslanidis, 2016: 7-8; Aslanidis, 2013: 19, Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 122) against the elites, who aim to deprive the people of their rightful democratic capacity, for their own personal benefit (Aslanidis and Lefkofridi, 2013: 26). This brings with it a certain notion of

the people, perceived as one, united and organic. No cleavages exist but one: elite versus mass (Lyrintzis, 1990: 48). The former has "hijacked" representative democracy, and populists will bring it back to the people (Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004a: 8). Populist political leaders appeal to the need to restore whatever is perceived to be missing: be it honesty, leadership, social justice, national pride, strong-hand against crime-violence and/or political disarray, etc. (Torres, 2006: 4).

In this sense, populism may be also seen as a communication style or strategy which is adopted by political actors seeking to display their proximity to the people (Mazzoleni, 2008: 58). Given that populism can be considered a strategy, it constitutes a "tool" used by any political actor regardless of her/his ideology. Populism can be a fundamental ingredient of the rhetoric of all parties, either traditional or radical ones, creating 'systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects' through the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 122). What differs is the range of use of the populist rhetoric (Aslanidis, 2013: 21). As Ernesto Laclau has put it, populism 'is not a fixed constellation but a series of discursive resources which can be put to very different uses" (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 136).

On one hand, right wing parties represent "exclusionary" populism. The core of this political doctrine consists of a restrictive notion of citizenship, which holds that genuine democracy is based on a culturally, if not ethnically, homogeneous community (Betz, 2001: 2). Contemporary radical right-wing populist parties are anti-foreigner parties, or, perhaps more precisely, anti-"foreignization" or "anti-multiculturalism" parties. (Betz, 2001: 10). On the other hand, left-wing "inclusionary" populism (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 135) -as it is taking place mainly in Latin America and recently in European periphery (Greece,

Spain)- appears to be expressed mainly through a social classes- stratification rationale (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 123, Aslanidis, 2013: 19-20).

Due to its ability to spread at the same time in the whole ideological width of the political spectrum (from extreme right to radical left- horizontal spread) and to "intrude" in any kind of specific political discourse (vertical infiltration), having its own distinguishable characteristics (appeal to the people, anti-elitist rationale), populism can be considered an ideology and discursive practice at the same time. As such it will be researched for the scopes of the current paper. After all, discourse constitutes the basic carrier of ideology. Hence, the predominant dimension of populism depends on the way one observes it. From a political point of view, populism may be primarily seen as an ideology, whereas, from a communicational point of view, populism may be examined as discourse. In any case, these two dimensions are mutually inclusive.

Due to its predominantly Manichean rationale of approaching the political and social reality ("us" vs. "them", "people" vs. "elites", direct democracy vs. representative democracy) (Lyrintzis, 1990: 48), and the moralism pervading the populist rhetoric, populism has been attributed several negative connotations and severely criticized due to this rationale (Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004b: 1, Aslanidis, 2013: 20; Aslanidis, 2016: 7-8). According to its ideological opponents, populism does not take into consideration intra-society pluralism, since it downgrades the internal "divisions" of the people (Aslanidis, 2013: 26; Lyrintzis, 1990: 48). In the same "monolithic" view populism addresses the "corrupt" elites as well, omitting the fact that not all elites or elite members are the same, presenting an oversimplified version of the social, economic and political arena. For these reasons "populism" has become so ideologically charged that most of the time its meaning is imprecise, if not outright lost (Borges, 2005: 13), serving as a scape-goat for both the left and the right for everything that each sees as problematic (Borges, 2005: 2-3). Despite that,

according to several theorists, "populism" per se is not the problem, but the practices and the aims associated with it, which can be totally separated from the overarching concept (Borges, 2005: 12).

The emergence of populism is historically linked to a crisis of the dominant ideological discourse, which is in turn part of a more general social and political crisis (Laclau, 1977: 175-176; Holman, 2003: 15-16, Torres, 2006: 4). Populism is developed within conditions of crisis and transformation of the cultural values and social structures. It can be developed in rather "stable" societies, in which market mechanisms downgrade the prevalent cultural standards and weaken civil society mechanisms. (Lyrintzis, 1990: 54) The key feature of populists is their claim to be the 'true democrats', fighting to reclaim the people's sovereignty from the professional political and administrative classes (be they in regional or national capitals, or at supranational level in Brussels) (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008: 4). One can claim that populism flourishes in a context of radical social and political changes and is connected to the emergence of new social powers in the political domain (Lyrintzis, 1990: 55), which is the case in Greece during the contemporary crisis period.

Focusing on the supranational level of governance at a European level, although international organizations have become the locus of important decisions and will doubtless continue to be in the future, they include a certain grade of democratic deficit, since international governance is conducted mainly by bargaining among bureaucratic and political elites, operating within limits set by treaties and international agreements. (Dahl, 1999: 16) We have thus moved, into a form of democracy where 'the people' of twenty-first century Western Europe may enjoy more enshrined rights than ever before, but in exchange for less real (or at least less perceptible) voice and sovereignty than in the past (Mair, 2006). Citizens are thus steered away from direct participation in politics (other than voting). In this context, national political elites can easily be depicted as having 'sold the people out' to an

unelected (and uncontrollable) supranational oligarchy in Brussels and to the rapacious financial elites of multinational corporations. All the above is "fuel to the fire" of populism (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008b: 218-219).

Another important factor that enhances the emergence of populist discourse is the media. The contribution of the media to the establishment of a 'populist *Zeitgeist*' in the twenty-first century appears to be threefold (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008b: 220). First, through the highly important role of media to political education of the masses. The relevance of the media, and particularly television, as the main mode of communication between a party and the public, is of utmost importance. Second, the media now play a growing role in setting the political agenda. For a party to win back at least some of its control over this agenda and make sure that its priorities gain visibility, it needs to manage the media and create 'media events'. This clearly benefits populists, who tend to be the most adept of all when it comes to spectacular politics (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008a: ch.4; Axford and Huggins, 1998: 6; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008b: 221). Third, the values and practices of tabloid press, have led to the increasing personalization of politics. Moreover, the tendency of the media to present complex problems in black-and-white terms, sensationalize events, focus on scandals, reduce political competition to personality contests and dramatize questions presents a welcoming environment for the communication style of populist leaders (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008b: 221).

In order to locate it in political discourse, populism can be defined through specific characteristics. Several components have been repeatedly identified by various theorists: 1. Presence of a charismatic leader; 2. Saying what "people want to hear"; 3. The instigation of "class warfare" by pitting rich against poor; 4. Constant mobilization of the "masses" 5. Mention of "external threats" or "foreign enemies" that threaten the "gains of the people"; 6. Distrust of the legal order and appeals to "direct and popular justice" (Borges, 2005: 7-8). In

addition, party programmes reflect the populist democratic ideology when three indicators are present: (1) references to 'the people' in the sense of 'common people' or the 'ordinary man', as a single entity without internal cleavages; (2) proposals to create a direct relationship between the people and the power holders; and (3) anti-establishment and anti-elite statements (Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004: 8-9).

Greece's recent history, after the seven-year military dictatorship (1967–1974), has been marked by populist movements of all kinds, ranging from the popular-democratic left to the religious far-right (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 124; Aslanidis, 2013: 17). The Great Recession that emerged in early 2010 triggered an unprecedented level of political turmoil in Greece, leading to a major readjustment of the party system (Aslanidis and Lefkofridi, 2013: 29; Aslanidis, 2013: 22). Within the crisis context that emerged in the European periphery (e.g. Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal), new political parties that based their rhetoric on populism came to surface.

2. Research

2.1 Methodology- Aims of the research

Our attempt to track both pro-elitist and populist (pro-people and anti-elitist) characteristics in political discourse will focus on the two pre-electoral periods of the general elections held in Greece in January and September 2015, making use of the methodology of quantitative content analysis. Content analysis transforms material of mainly qualitative nature into forms of either qualitative or quantitative data. It can be briefly defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative or qualitative analysis of the characteristics of various messages (Neuerdorf 2002:1). It is related to the analysis of written and oral discourse in the media domain, though it can be implemented in any form of communication (Berelson 1952, Kyriazi 2001). It is a systematic reproducible method of compression- transformation of the words of a text into fewer categories of content, based on specific coding rules (Berelson 1952, Stemler 2001, Miller & Brewer 2003), allowing researchers to analyze big chunks of data through the use of a systematic methodology. According to Weber, content analysis is "the research method using specific rules to export valid conclusions from the analysis of texts. These rules are set each time by the theoretical background and the issue under scrutiny" (Weber 1990: 9). All the above mentioned characteristics describe a method leading to the systematic coding and quantification of the written and oral speech, which are being analyzed with the use of statistic tools. Through the statistic elaboration of the data one can reveal statistic correlations, based on which the researchers control the theoretical hypotheses of the research or come up with new theoretical approaches for the social issues under scrutiny (Kyriazi 2001: 84-85).

The current research will focus on the political discourse as it was expressed through the representatives of political parties that participated in political talk shows of the Greek

nationwide television channels (both public and private) during the two pre-electoral periods of 2015 general elections (approximately three weeks before each election). Our research seeks to examine either the conflict or the transgression of both elitist and populist elements of discourse in the statements of the Greek politicians. Our unit of analysis is the individual politician participating in the talk shows. A total number of 226 politicians were examined participating in 33 talk shows of the majority of the Greek nationwide public and private TV stations (ALPHA, MEGA, SKAI, STAR, NERIT/ERT). The 226 politicians are divided as follows: PASOK 30, New Democracy 33, To Potami (The River) 31, KKE 29, SYRIZA 27, AN.EL. (Independent Greeks) 24, Laiki Enotita (People's Union) 20, Golden Dawn 12, KIDISO (Socialists Democrats Party) 8, DIM.AR. (Democratic Left) 7, ANT.AR.SY.A. (Anti-capitalist Left Collaboration for Subversion) 3, Enosi Kentroon (Central Union) 1, LA.O.S. (People's Orthodox Alarm) 1.

Our main research question is in what extend and in which ways can the pre-electoral discourse of party representatives in Greek televised political talk-shows be considered as either pro-elite (supporting the political status quo) or populist (pro-people and anti-elite), reflecting the new conditions formed in the Greek political system within the crisis context. Our research question, based on our theoretical background can be further analyzed in several research hypotheses and additional research questions:

- H1. Based on our theoretical background, we expect that the urgent procedures in the decision making processes, even if they undermine democracy, will be characterized as necessary, mostly by the parties participating or having participated in the coalition governments. Under a similar rationale, the "normal" democratic procedures (elections, referenda) will be approached in a rather "negative" way, as "unnecessary" under the crisis conditions.

- H2. Given that during the Greek crisis, a rather evident "break of bonds" between the Greek and European elites has been taking place, we expect that the political discourse of the party representatives will reflect that situation.

- H3. Given that during crisis periods the intra- elites consensus is enhanced, a condition reflected on the formation of coalition governments, we expect that this consensus will be affirmed through the rather positive reference of the political elites to either the emergence or the necessity for collaborative governmental formations.

- H4. Under the rationale of the prevalence of a populist discourse in crisis periods, we expect that the politicians will include a rather generic pro-people rationale, by unanimously commenting on the citizens in a positive way.

- H5. At the same time the politicians will include a rather generic anti-elite rationale in their discourse, by mainly criticizing specific elite groups (e.g. financial elites, political opponents, European elites) for the emergence and intensity of the crisis.

- H6. As basic characteristic of the populist discourse -especially within crisis conditions-, the politicians include "dichotomies" in their discourse (e.g. pro/anti-memorandum, pro/anti-Europeanism, Euro/Drachma, Left/Right). Thus we expect this rationale to be significantly evident in the political discourse of the two pre-electoral periods under scrutiny.

- Q1. How are the interventions on behalf of civil society, social movements and citizens evaluated by the politicians? Under the pro-elite rationale, we expect the politicians to undermine the significance or even criticize such manifestations. Whereas, under the populist rationale we expect the politicians to praise such actions as pure manifestations of the people's true will.

- Q2. Under the same rationale as Q1, how are the processes that enable citizens to participate in the decision making process (e.g. elections, referenda) characterized by the political elites? Are they predominantly approached with a pro-elite or a populist rationale?

2.2 Results

Even though legal acts and urgent procedures have played a significant role for the maintenance of power on behalf of the elites during the Greek crisis, the politicians prefer not to comment on them during the pre-electoral periods we examined. In January talk shows only two politicians referred in a negative way to the role of the legal acts, while in September only four. The same thing occurred with the urgent parliamentary procedures, which appeared in the discourse of only four politicians during the September 2015 pre-electoral period. The vast majority of the total number of ten references to legal acts and urgent procedures in both pre-electoral periods comes from opposition parties (KKE, Golden Dawn, To Potami and New Democracy as opposition party after January 2015). Regarding the referendum, out of a total of 22 references in both pre-electoral periods, only 3 of them are under a positive rationale and the rest (19) are negative ones. Almost identical is the reference rationale for the elections as well, where 20 out of 23 references are negative. Based on the abovementioned results, we partly accept our first hypothesis on the presentation of legal acts and urgent procedures as necessities in the decision making process in crisis periods and the negative approach of democratic procedures like the elections and the referendum.

Due to the crisis during the last years, a condition of "conflict" between the Greek and the European elites has been more or less evident within the public dialogue. Under this

rationale we examined a variety of different references to the European institutions (EU as a whole, European Commission, European Parliament, ECB, European officials in general, specific European officials and Institutions/ Troika). The majority of the relevant references has to do with the EU as a whole (78 references), the European officials (34 references) and Institutions/troika (32 references).

Graph 1: References to the EU as a whole per party
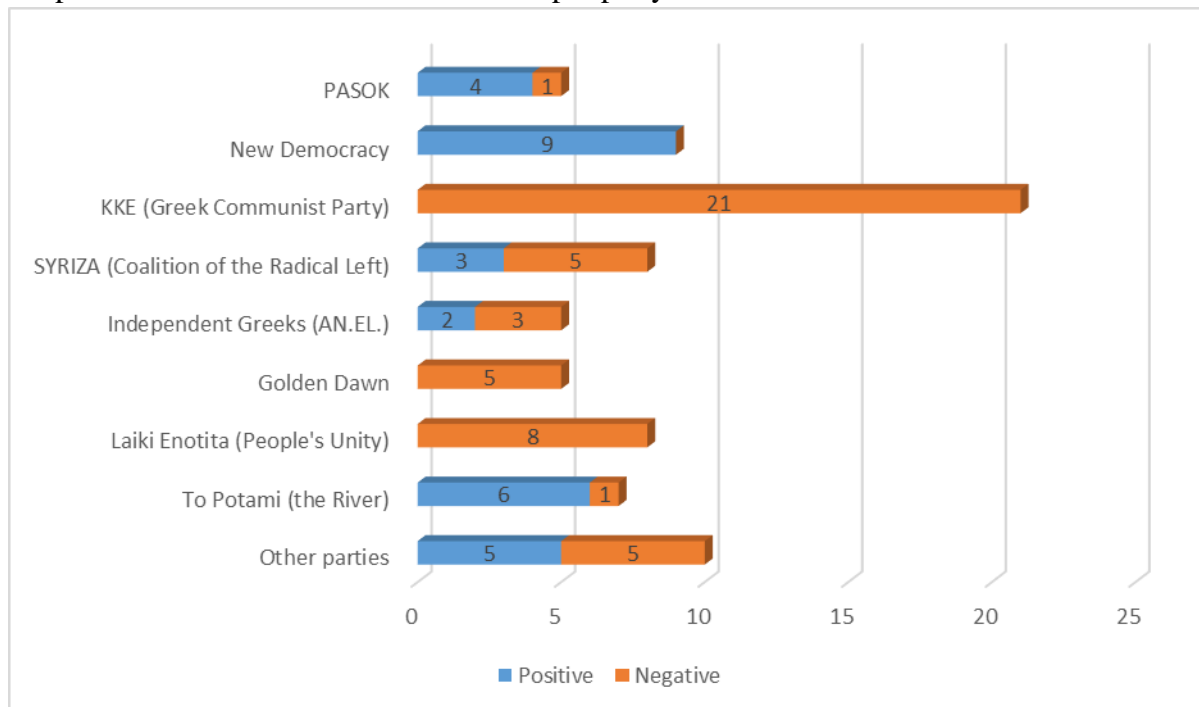
Graph 2: References to the EU as a whole per period (sig.= 0.006)
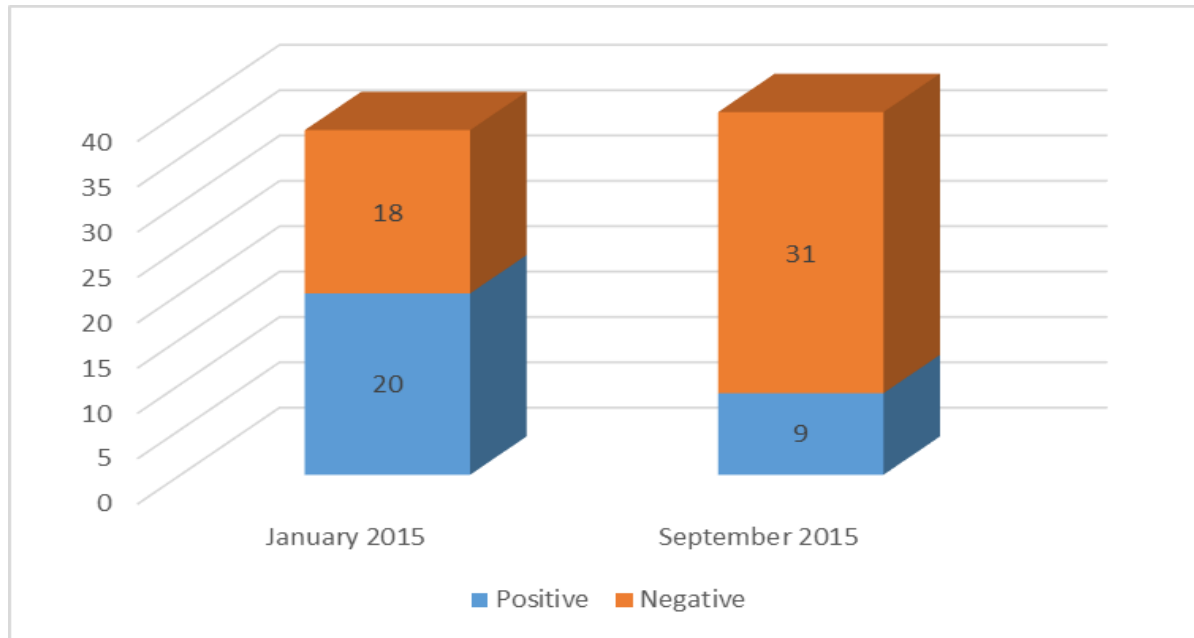
In terms of the references to the EU as a whole per party, PASOK, New Democracy and To Potami adopt a positive stance, whereas KKE and Laiki Enotita -more intensely-, SYRIZA and AN.EL., express themselves in a predominantly negative way. A similarly significant difference is to be observed in the two pre-electoral periods as well. In the January 2015 period the positive and negative references are rather balanced, whereas in the September 2015 period the negative references significantly outnumber the positive ones[2] (Graphs 1 & 2).

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[2] The significant difference is reflected in the p value of our statistical test for the current cross tabulation as well. In this case the chi-square p value is significant at the 0.01 significance level.

Graph 3: References to specific EU officials per party
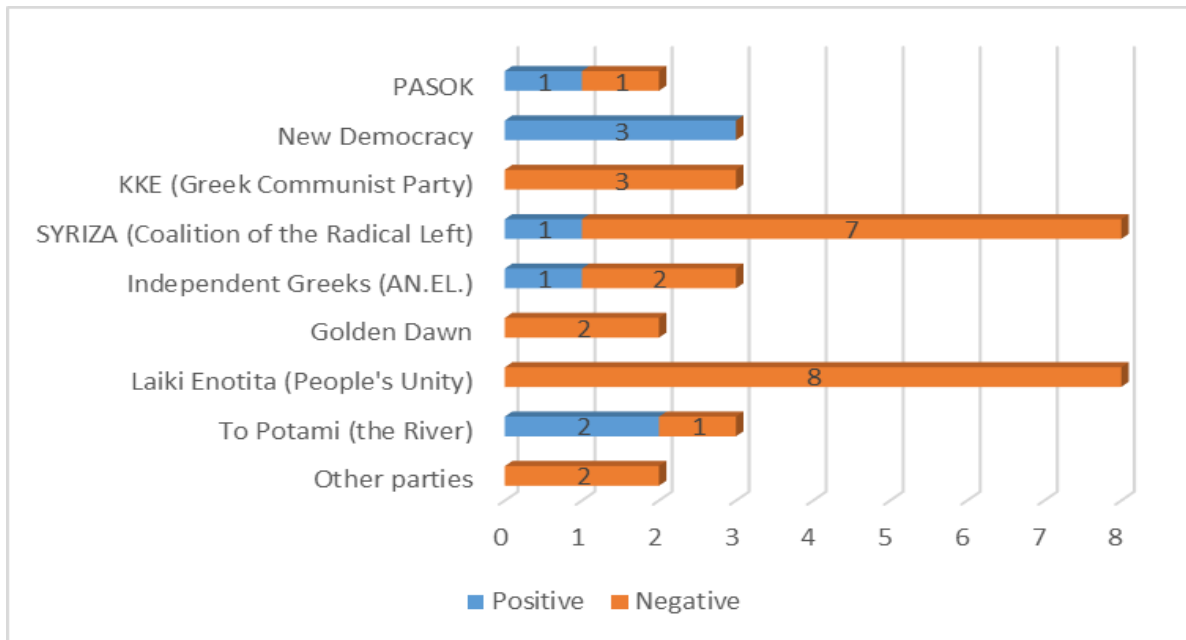
As far as the references to specific European officials are concerned, the per party "image" is similar to the general references to the EU, with PASOK, New Democracy and To Potami politicians appearing to express the most positive opinions towards specific EU officials and the other party representatives appearing as negative towards them (Graph 3).

Graph 4: References to specific EU officials per period
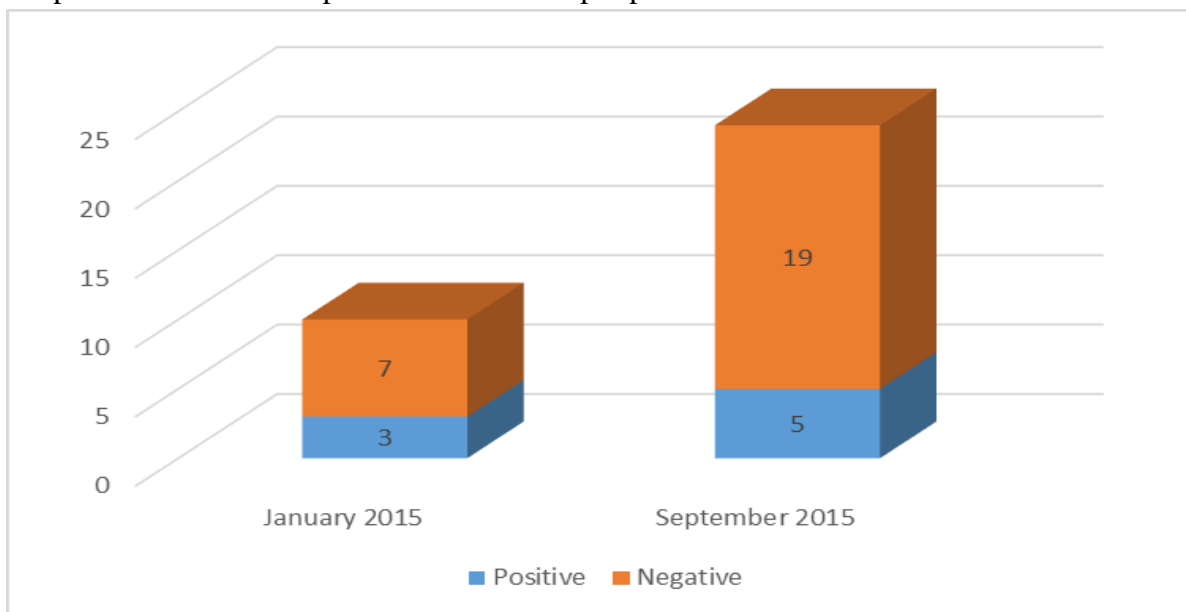
Regarding the different periods, the negative references to specific EU officials outnumber the positive ones in both periods, with the pre-electoral period of September appearing to be

more EU oriented and more negative in terms of the relevant references compared to January (Graph 4). Having all the aforementioned results in mind, we accept our second hypothesis on the "conflict" between the Greek and the European elites.

When it comes to the institutions/troika, the references are again predominantly negative, especially in the September pre-electoral period, when only one positive opinion is expressed on the specific "formation" (Graph 5).

Graph 5: References to Institutions/troika per period
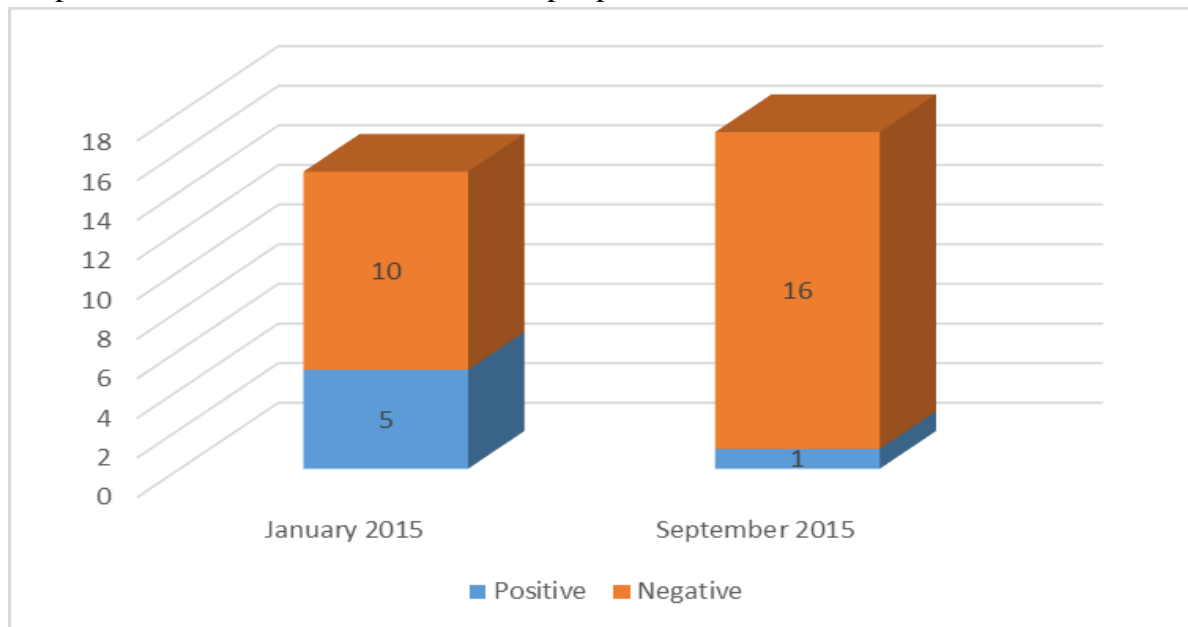
A significant part of the pre-electoral pubic dialogue focused on the coalition governments, in terms of their emergence and necessity. Based on the findings shown in Graphs 6 & 7, the majority of the political representatives appear to comment in a positive way on the emergence and necessity of coalition governments, a fact further affirmed by the high percentages of the relevant statements in both pre-electoral periods. Hence, we accept our third hypothesis.

Graph 6: References to the emergence and necessity of coalition governments per party
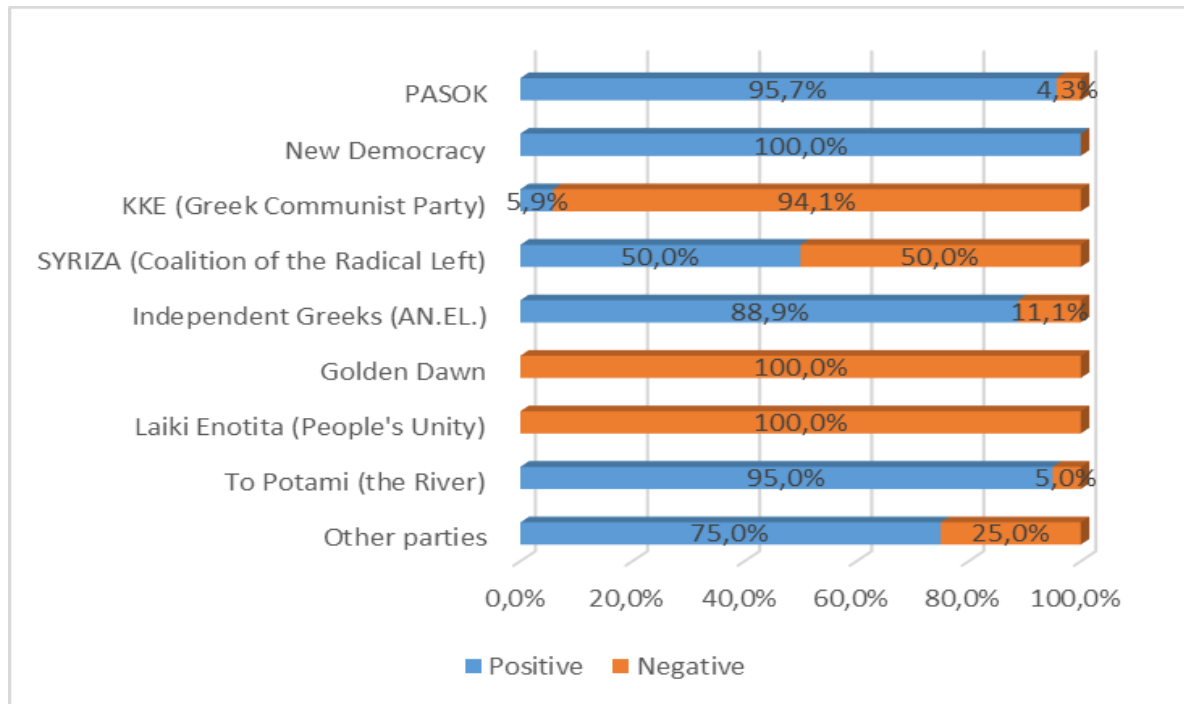

Graph 7: References to the emergence and necessity of coalition governments per period (sig.= 0.273)
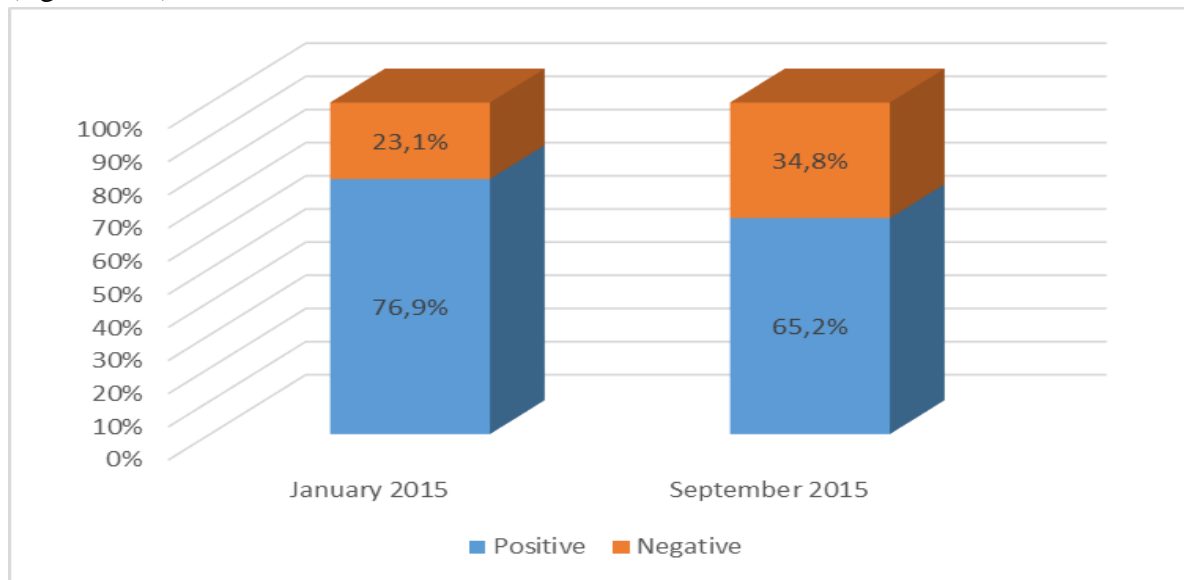

A specific discourse can be characterized as populist when it "satisfies" two basic conditions: the existence of both pro-people and anti-elite characteristics, considering both categories (people and elites) as homogeneous categories. In the current research there were quite a few instances when politicians adopted a generic evaluative approach of either or both of the basic pillars of the political and social system.

Graph 8: Evaluation of the people per party
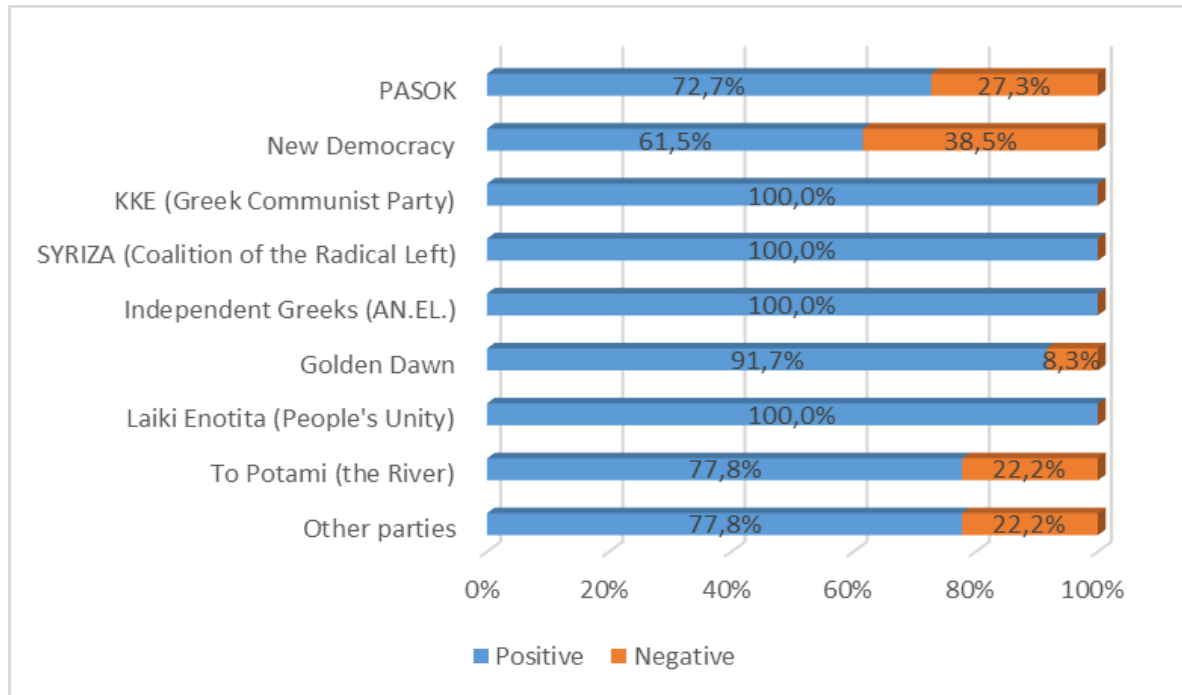
As shown in Graph 8, all representatives adopt a positive stance towards the "people", even in the cases of the parties that formed the up to early 2015 coalition governments (mostly New Democracy and PASOK) and faced the "menace" of the people through various manifestations (general strikes, rallies and demonstratins). The opposition parties' representatives, with the exception of To Potami and Golden Dawn members, unanimously express themselves in a positive way for the "people". This condition in the public dialogue is further confirmed by the very high percentages of positivism towards the people in both pre-electoral periods of our research (Graph 9).

Graph 9: Evaluation of the people per period
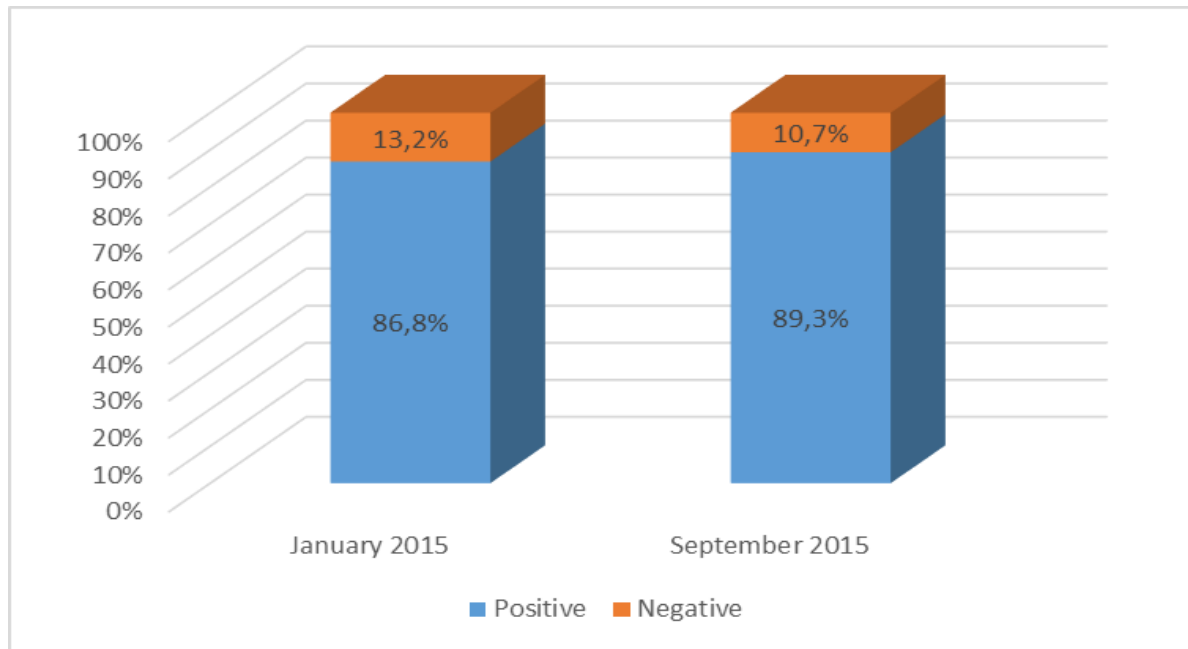
Quite the opposite is the evaluation towards the elites[3] on behalf of the party representatives. As regards the different parties, only the main pillars of the traditional bi-partizanism in Greece (PASOK and New Democracy) appear to approach in a rather positive way the elites as a whole (mainly the political and financial ones). At the same time, the opposition parties -especially KKE and Laiki Enotita- appear to adopt the most critic, in quantitative terms, discourse towards the elites. Even though ANEL has been serving as a govenmental partner since January 2015, its members appear to adopt a totally enti-elitist discourse. This is related to the party's inherent anti-elitist discourse, as well as its criticism towards the European elites regarding the austerity measures imposed in Greece (Graph 10).

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[3] Reference to the elites is considered to be the one including either the whole party system or the inclusion of at least the majority of the different parties.

Graph 10: Evaluation of the elites per party
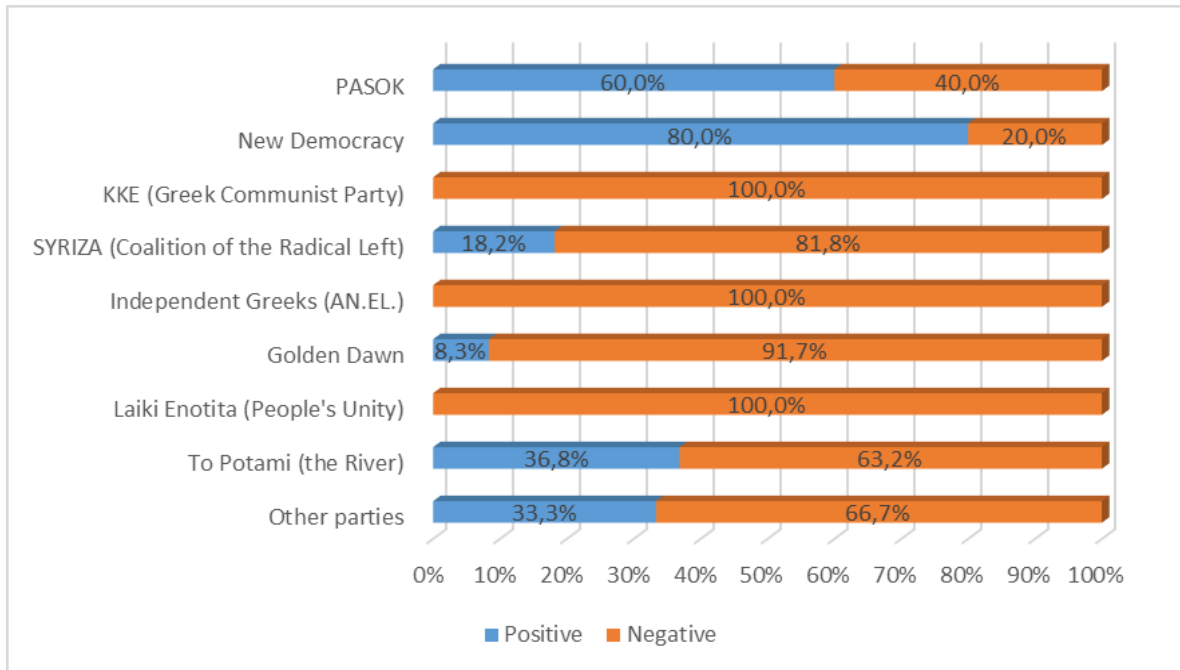
The anti-elitist discourse has prevailed in both pre-electoral periods in a rather intense way, as shown in Graph 11. Both the pro-people and anti-elitist discourse adopted by the vast majority of the party representatives appearing in talk shows during the January and September pre-electoral periods, lead us to the acceptance of our fourth and fifth hypotheses.

Graph 11: Evaluation of the elites per period (sig.= 1.000)
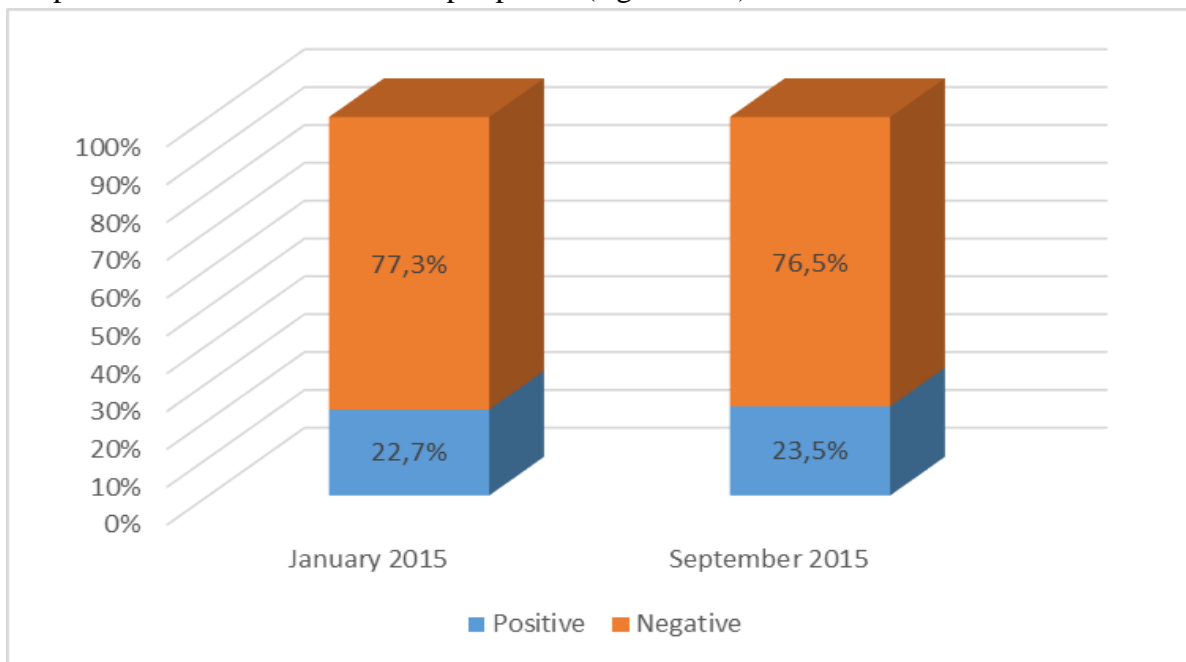
The presentation of the political, social and ficancial context in a Manichean- bisecting way is among the most important characteristics of populistic discourse. As shown in Graph 12, the main "dichtomies" emerging from the political discourse we examined in both pre-electoral periods are the pro/anti memoranda rationale (35,4% and 42,9% during January and September respectively), followed by the pro/anti Europe dissection (34,2% in January and 23,1% in September) and the euro/drachma dichotomy (25,3% in january and 27,9% in September). It is quite evident that all these "dichotomies" emerge from the memoranda and the austerity policies implemented in Greece since 2010, as "antidote" to the financial deficiencies of the Greek economy.

Graph 12: "Dichotomies" per pre-electoral period
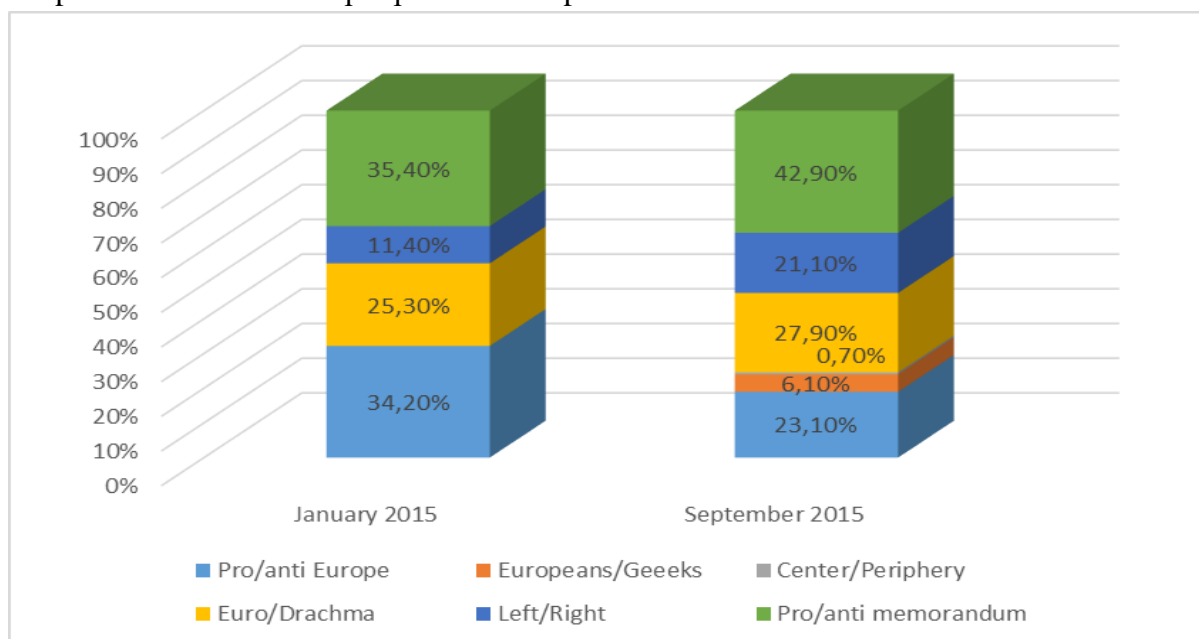
Based on the abovementioned results, we could argue that the "dichotomy rationale" is evident in a rather significant percentage of the political representatives during the two pre-electoral periods, hence we accept our sixth hypothesis.

As regards our additional research qustions, hence the references of the politicians to the participation on behalf of the citizens in the political and social life through social movements, voting in general elections and the referendum, participation in party organs and parliamentary sessions and contribution to solidarity networks, we encountered a very

limited number of commentaries. It appears that even though the politicians talk as representatives of the people, they -at the same time- fail to introduce in the public discourse the active role the citizens themselves have to play within a democratic political system. There are only 12 references, during both pre-electoral periods, to the civic participation in the elections and the referendum, only three comments on the civic participation in party organs and parliamentary sessions, only 14 references to the citizens' participation in social movements and protests and only five references to bottom-up civic organized actions as solidarity networks and social convenience stores. Even though the references are limited, all of them are made in a positive rationale, signifying a strong pro-people approach of the political actors.

3. Conclusions

Based on the above presented results, one could argue that the fundamental transformation of the Greek political system during the "age of the memoranda" is not fully reflected on the pre-electoral discourse of the political representatives. Still, one can locate specific elements that show the either pro-elite or anti-elite and pro-people rationale of the political actors.

The peculiar relationship between the Greek and the European elites is confirmed by the negative references towards the EU as a whole and the institutions/"troika" especially during the September 2015 pre-electoral period, after the long negotiation procedure of the first SYRIZA government. This negativity demonstrates a certain rate of dissatisfaction on behalf of the Greek elites towards the European ones (Tsirbas and Sotiropoulos, 2015). This dissatisfaction is further re-assured by the negative -though rather limited- references in both pre-electoral periods to specific European officials, mostly the ones related to the Greek issue (Angela Merkel, Wolfgang Schauble etc.).

The enhanced role of coalition governments during crisis periods, as significant proof of an intra elites' consensus (Mills, 2000; Higley and Burton, 2006) is among the most characteristic elements of the discourse of the politicians in both the periods we examined. With a few exceptions (KKE, Golden Dawn and Laiki Enotita during the September pre-electoral period), the parties' representatives -independent from their ideological orientation- expressed themselves in a positive way on the emergence of and the need for coalition governments due to the crisis situation that Greece is undergoing.

In addition, on one hand the "appeal to the people" and on the other the criticism towards the elites (Mazzoleni, 2008, Aslanidis, 2016, Mouzelis, 1985; Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004a; Raadt and Hollanders and Krouwel, 2004b, Lyrintzis, 1990), according to each party's ideological orientation, appears to be the case in the discourse of the majority of the politicians. Almost all representatives "praise" the people, commenting on the citizens in a positive way, whereas their attitude towards the elites appears to be almost the opposite. Under this rationale, the politicians seek to placate the people, who suffer under the austerity policies that keep on being implemented in Greece through the consecutive "memoranda". Though their discourse can be initially characterized as populist, a more thorough examination is needed on the intensity and the specific characteristics of the populist aspects in the politicians' discourse.

Under the populism scope, a significant percentage of the politicians under scrutiny used a Manichean rationale (Lyrintzis, 1990) to describe several aspects of the difficult reality in Greece and in Europe so as to underline an "us vs. "them" dichotomy. The dualistic references through the creation of pro/anti Europe, pro/anti memorandum and Euro/Drachma cleavages serve the scopes of a populist discourse that claims to be the defender of the people's interests against the -European in most cases- elites (Aslanidis and Lefkofridi, 2013; Mudde, 2004).

A last -but not least- important aspect of the political discourse that signifies the relationship and simultaneously opposite character of the elite and populist theories is the co-existence in the political discourse of limited references to the "in crisis" decision making processes and the participation of the people in social and political processes. On one hand, the limited and negative references to procedures that undermine the democratic character of the political decision making (Lipset, 1963; Putnam, 1976), such as legal acts and very urgent procedures might imply, among others, a rather uncomfortable stance on behalf of the political elites, since several parties were "forced" to make use of them so as to quickly implement the prearranged -at European level- austerity policies. The "defensive" attitude of the elites is further evident by their negative comments regarding the elections and the referendum (mostly characterized as "non-necessary" and "obstacles" to the exit of Greece from the financial crisis), the fundamental expressions of the people's participation in the democratic procedure. On the other hand, the limited, but positive reference of the politicians to the people's -need for- participation in the public life may act as the counterweight to the degradation of the democratic procedures imposed by the function of the political system within the condition of the crisis. Hence, the elite representatives discredit on one hand the democratic procedures, but "praise" on the other the participation of the citizens in the same procedures.

The current research may be seen as a first step towards the examination of the interweaving of elite theories and populism in the political discourse. The conditions formed in the Greek political scene with the emergence of the financial crisis and the consecutive memoranda and austerity measures that they bring along, have formed rather "suffocating" conditions for the whole range of the political spectrum exposing its weaknesses. Within this context, at a first glance, the Greek political system functions through limited democracy, but talks through plenty of populism. Does this contradiction signify the consolidation of a new era?

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