

Political Blogosphere Meets Off-Line Public Sphere: Framing the Public Discourse on the Greek Crisis

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This study, based on a selection of four popular Greek political blogs expressing the main ideological directions in the Greek political public sphere, undertakes a qualitative content analysis of the blog discourses to make intelligible how the deep Greek financial, political, and social crisis is framed by these blogs. After sketching the theoretical debates on the sociopolitical origins of the Greek crisis, we focus on blog participants' perceptions of democratic principles and institutions. We conclude that what dominates in the debates of the far left and far right blogs belongs to the same rigid ideological raster that excludes an understanding of the principles and grounds of democracy. The right-wing blog's ideological orientation includes antidemocratic strands of the far-right and far-left blogs, while the center-left blog is characterized by a liberal democratic stance.

Keywords: Greek political blogosphere, ideological orientation, Greek crisis, blog debates, polarization, international and European institutions, national sovereignty, understanding of democracy

Introduction

The outbreak of the Greek economic, political, and social crisis took place in a time of a historically, politically, and culturally conditioned self-transformation of Greek society, when the Internet and the increasing use of networking applications had changed the conditions of social and political life. The dialogic character of new media has fostered debates, arguments, and commentary and has given people previously excluded from the one-way communication of the traditionally biased Greek mass media of political communication the opportunity to make their voices heard (Kondopoulou, 2002, p. 8; Psychogiopoulou, Kandyla, & Anagnostou, 2014, p. 220). This is important in a time of economic and

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social crisis, when people have access to various forms of digital communication and information and can make their viewpoints heard in reference to existential social and political issues.

This article focuses on Greek political blogs in a time of crisis; they constitute only one element in the broader Greek virtual arena of actors of public discourse. Unlike other Western countries, where the political blogosphere has an important impact on the political setting, the party system, and people's political and social engagement (Farrell, 2007, p. 2), political blogs in Greece do not play such a decisive role in the turbulent political environment. Blogs, like all other virtual communication forms, are rooted in the specific history, institutions, and culture of the country in which they are acting and that shape the public arena in different ways. The motivation for this study was to see how the Greek economic crisis is framed by four influential political blogs expressing the four main ideological orientations in the Greek public sphere and whether the quality of discourse corresponds to the conditions of democracy.

The Greek Political Blogosphere in a Postmodern Public Sphere

Under the conditions of Greece's serious economic, political, and social crisis, we can observe an increasing interest in news and public affairs information concerning the problems of the society in connection with the supranational institutions involved in the crisis management. The explosion in recent years of media outlets on the Internet—such as multimedia platforms, Web radio, blogs, news portals, and social networks—allows the public a wide range of media choices and a greater variety of information. Among the new media outlets for political information participating in the Greek online sphere of discussions since the end of 2000 are blogs (Zafeiropoulos, Vrana, & Vagianos, 2012, p. 399), an interactive medium that fosters the involvement of citizens in public debate (Farrell, 2007, p. 3). Blogs with a political orientation are a small part of the Greek blogosphere and do not attract the same audience as social networks (Makri, 2012); nevertheless, they do attract media attention and have active audiences (Zafeiropoulos, Vrana, & Vagianos, 2012, p. 397).

Greek empirical studies in the last years have focused on the role of political blogs on political communication (Zafeiropoulos, 2012; Zafeiropoulos & Vrana, 2009, 2012). Based on a mixture of hyperlink analysis and influence measures, these studies arrive at the conclusion that central political blogs are more appreciated and recommended by the blogger community and are characterized by high activity among users, thereby promoting debates and affecting politics. They find also patterns of homophily and polarization among blogs with the same political inclination. In theory, it is widely assumed that changes in media technology have an impact on the political process and democracy (Prior, 2007). Blogs are considered to be a consequential technology that is conducive to the production of variety in political agendas and ideologies (Lawrence, Sides & Farrell, 2009). But whether it is sufficient for understanding the effects of information technology on crisis-ridden Greek politics and the highly conflictual public sphere to rely only on the instrument of domain-based links analysis and the networking properties of the blogs is a controversial issue (Lawrence, Sides & Farrell, 2009; Sunstein, 2006). The complexity and dynamics of public opinion forming, deliberation, and participation in the Greek public sphere in the era of crisis require the integration in the research design of qualitative methodologies such as the examination of ideologically different blogs as heterogeneous units of analysis and qualitative content analysis of a diverse set of discursive practices within the blogs (Barzilai-Nahon & Hemsley,

2011). It is necessary to discuss conditions that support democratic practices, and this is especially interesting to study during a crisis era, because an extremely polarized social and political climate has been created (Georgiadou, 2013).

Overpoliticization (Demertzis, 1997, p. 113) combined with polarization in the Greek society is not a recent phenomenon of the crisis era. The high political interest of the Greek public in politics despite the widespread political dissatisfaction was an endemic element of Greek political culture (European Commission, 1993). Demertzis (1997) argues that the increased interest in politics and the adversarial political culture have not to do with an orientation to common good but to the main strands of Greek political culture. The prevailing role of the family in Greek society in connection with the dominant features of statism and clientelism lead to an understanding of politics as a private issue' rather than a public one (Demertzis, 1997, p. 114). Now the breakdown of the party system triggered by the crisis and the emergence of a serious social crisis has increased the politicization and polarization of the society (Pappas, 2013). These far-reaching phenomena in Greek society occur at a time of a radical self-transformation of societies and the public sphere in the era of the Internet (Habermas, 2006a, p. 4), which makes them all the more complex. Because the political blogosphere is one of the digital forums of the networked public sphere, the question is to determine the position of Greek political blogs in the digital public sphere in relation to the state of traditional Greek mass media and journalism.

The modern conception of public sphere as a common public space (Habermas, 1996, p. 359) was founded on a shared understanding of common expectations, matters, and conventions (Ladueur, 2007, p. 94) in a world of stable social relations. According to this understanding, the public sphere accomplished a mediation function between the processes of experience production in the society and the political through the reflecting and processing of the cognitive infrastructure of society (Ladueur, 2006, p. 129). In the postmodern pluralized society, which has been broken up into a plurality of groups, milieus, and identities, the relation of the public sphere to the social realities has changed (Habermas, 2006b, p. 425). There has emerged a dynamic self-transforming process of public communication that takes on a plurality of communication forms. The emergence of a postmodern public sphere is followed by the immediate intrusion of private lifestyles (reality TV) and the dominance of the individual. From this process results a mixture of an overpoliticized public sphere of civil society and an overprivatized entertainment public sphere (Ladueur, 2006, p. 127). The Internet has radically changed the conditions of communication of the real public sphere. As "a network of networks characterized by volatility and ubiquity it has undermined all forms of communication" (Ladueur, 2009, p. 1209). The highly fragmented digital public sphere involves loose talk, polarized opinions, rumors, and unreliable information, but also high standard knowledge. As a part of the virtual public sphere, blogs—in this case, political blogs—are a virtual form of commenting and debate. They foster the "spontaneous, partial, subjective and adversarial discourse connected with the diminishing of the quality and reliability of qualitative reporting" (Ladueur, 2011, p. 2). With many other forms of digital communication, blogs have a deep impact on the traditional media and their self-understanding as they change the reading habits and social expectations concerning information changes.

In Greece today, these changes in society and the traditional media are happening in an already problematic media environment. The traditional press and electronic media, despite their adaptation to the digital media reality (Spyridou & Veglis, 2008, p. 16), are characterized by historically explicable

distortions, lags, and particularities concerning their democratic function (Papathanassopoulos, 2001, p. 508; Psychogiopoulou et al., 2014, p. 220). The Greek press and broadcasting system until the outbreak of the crisis were dependent on political elites, economic interests, and the state, and vice versa (Leandros, 2010, p. 891). The adjustment program of Greece's international lenders has led to the closing of the obscure funding sources of the Greek media. The result was mass layoffs of journalists and the closing of traditional media outlets. Greek journalism was hit hard by the crisis, but its troubles are an old phenomenon (Papathanassopoulos, 2001, p. 513). Greek journalism, its practices, and professional and political culture were and are characterized by ethnocentrism, partisanship, lack of objectivity, liberal spirit, and qualitative cognitive values (Kontopoulou, 2002, p. 8; Psychogiopoulou et al., 2014, p. 229). These characteristics of Greek journalism are exacerbated in the online news media of blogs and news portals, which, by their nature, foster partisanship, subjectivity, aggressiveness, often incivility and where norms of ethics are not valid (Bolz, 2007, p. 29).

As mentioned above, empirical analysis of the Greek political blogosphere gives evidence of and confirms the findings of the relevant U.S. studies (Barzilai-Nahon & Hemsley, 2011, p. 4) that political bloggers are divided along partisan lines, a fact that promotes processes of ideological coherence, homophily, and polarization among the blogs within an already polarized public sphere. As argued by Sunstein (2009), "the Internet-like setting is more likely to create a strong tendency toward group polarization when the group feel some sense of group identity" (p. 81). To ascertain the quality of blog discourse for a democratic public sphere, we will explore which worldviews, values, ways of thinking, and practices are reflected in four popular Greek political blogs that follow the four main ideological orientations in Greek political life concerning the Greek economic crisis.

Research Questions and Methodology

This article undertakes a qualitative content analysis of the debates in four Greek political blogs with different ideological directions to decipher deeply rooted political convictions and the way social and political forces perceive and address public issues concerning the Greek crisis. Each of the four selected political blogs was representative of the four political orientations that have dominated the Greek party landscape since the 2012 elections: the far right, the center right, the center left, and the radical or far left. An important element for the selection of each political blog was its ranking in the top 100 Greek blogs, which was assessed according to the inbound hyperlinks as measured by the Sync.gr popularity index, the largest blog aggregator at the time. The final selection of the four blogs from among others in the top 100 was made after an extensive examination of their content. The similar thematic structures, communication forms, and speech quality of the four ideologically coherent blog groups facilitated the definitive preferential decision. A basic understanding of Greek politics was enough to obtain a comprehensive view of the political profile of each blog. We surveyed the content of the posts and all the comments in these four blogs during a 10-day period, from February 28, 2012, to March 9, 2012.

The first political blog, *ant-ntp* ("anti-new order of thing"), is ranked 29th on the popularity blog index and constitutes an antisystemic far-right conversation digital platform of like-minded far-right participants. *ant-ntp* can be associated with the far-right parliamentary parties, the neo-Nazi Chrissi Avgi (Golden Dawn), and the new populist right-wing party Anexartitoi Ellines (Independent Greeks). The

second blog, which is ranked 19th on the political blogosphere, is one of the most popular current news right-wing blogs without interactive involvement of its readers, and it is associated with the government center-right party New Democracy. The third blog, *parapolitiki*, ranked 58th on the scale of the political blogosphere, is a center-left liberal blog with a carnation, the socialist symbol, on its logo and is related to the socialist party PASOK. The fourth blog, *Bathy Kokkino* (Deep Red), ranked 67th on the popularity index, is an anticapitalist discussion forum of political and social groups of the far left party scene (the main opposition party Syriza, the communist party KKE, and the far left political group Antarsya).

To shed light on the evolving debates in the discussion forums of the four political blogs concerning the contested nature of democracy in the era of the multifaceted Greek crisis, we undertook a qualitative content analysis. The qualitative evaluation of the communication content comes after a theoretical discourse on the challenges posed to Greek democracy and the democratic institutions in consequence of the implementation of a harsh austerity program enforced in Greece on the basis of the European Union/International Monetary Fund (EU/IMF) bailouts. Based on these reflections, we attempt to answer the following questions: Which understanding of democracy is expressed in the blog debates? How is the relation of Greece to supranational and international institutions perceived in the blog discussions in a time of economic surveillance over the country by these institutions? Does the image of society and economy reflected in the blog arena comply with that of a democratically constituted society?

For the qualitative analysis of the communications content of the political blogs selected for this study, we developed three frames to contextualize the blog discourses and attempted on their basis to interpret the ideological basic structure, key statements, and core passages of the blogs that are relevant for the research questions (Blatter, Janning, & Wagemann, 2007, p. 75). The first frame refers to the perception of the democratic political institutions by the blog participants; the second concerns the blog discourse on national sovereignty; the third frame refers to the conception of the democratic ideal of society as it is expressed in the blog debates. In the literature, it is argued that qualitative research emphasizes a meaningful case selection and a tightly formulated research object that limits the generalizability of the results (Blatter, 2007, p. 29). It is a study that "aims to capture and analyse a specific moment in time" (Kennix, 2009, p. 797). Its main purpose is to decipher the meaning of statements and texts by reconstructing interpretations of meaning for understanding the social world and its artifacts (Blatter, 2007, p. 26).

The Greek Political Blogosphere and the Greek Crisis

Theoretical Discourse on the Greek Crisis and Democracy

The occurrence of the Greek economic crisis within a turbulent global financial environment had a dramatic social and political impact following the implementation of harsh austerity measures amid a series of EU/IMF bailouts. The starkly fragmented Greek society, with its countless particular and vested interests, was hit hard by the reform measures, which led to the outbreak of a social crisis with the shutting down of small enterprises on a huge scale, an unprecedented increase in unemployment, and widespread poverty (Triandafyllidou, Gropa, & Kouki, 2013). The breaking apart of the social fabric coincided with the collapse of the traditional polarized two-party system. The deterioration of the social

situation associated with political disenchantment and a humanitarian crisis concerning illegal immigration created fertile soil for the entry into the central political scene of Golden Dawn, a politically marginalized, extreme neo-Nazi party that succeeded in obtaining a significant parliamentary representation in the general elections of 2012 and that is, according to recent polls, the third largest party. The electoral rise of Golden Dawn went together with that of the far-right party Independent Greeks, which won a voter's share of 10.6% (Georgiadou, 2013). On the other hand, the once-marginal radical left Syriza coalition, an antibailout party, rose spectacularly in the June 2012 elections and became the main opposition party, leaving behind the socialist party (PASOK), which, together with the right-wing party New Democracy, had held office alternately for three decades. With the entrance of new parties in the political competition, a new extremely polarized multiparty system arose (Pappas, 2013).

In the last years of the economic crisis, violent social protests have multiplied, particularly violent actions against the implementation of laws in many social fields (education, the nautical and agrarian sectors, and the wider public-service sector); trade unions, radical left-wing parties, and far-right-wing parties do not comply with the established democratic procedures and often act against them. An antiparliamentarian, antigovernment, antiparty, anti-European, and anticapitalist public discourse and protest actions are on the agenda. The extreme violent activities and public hate and vulgar speech of Golden Dawn have received international publicity (Dinas, Georgiadou, Konstantinidis, & Rori, 2013). The question is how democracy fares in Greece in general and, in particular, in the era of this dramatic multifaceted crisis. What challenges are posed to the democratic institutions and procedures, and what is the perception of democracy's objective? What challenges are associated with the international and European institutional environment in a time of general structural transformations, turmoil, and uncertainty?

A vivid theoretical discussion exists on the question of Greek democracy, Greek democratic governance, and its problems as they become evident in the era of crisis. In one essay, the emergence of a new polarized multiparty system and the challenge of legitimate political institutions are considered the causes of the deficiencies of the democratic system that was established in the postauthoritarian era after the fall of the dictatorship (1967–1974) (Sotiropoulos, 2012, p. 27). It is argued that the crisis of governance can be attributed to phenomena endemic to the Greek political system after the 1974 transition period—namely, the penetration of party competition in every formal or informal social and political institution, the exorbitant politicization of the economic policy domain, widespread corruption and tax evasion, the capture of the state and various policy sectors (public enterprises, national defense, shipping, private media, construction business sectors, health, education, pensions, and professionals) by organized favored groups of beneficiaries (Featherstone & Papadimitriou, 2008), and institutional rigidities in overregulated parts of a multifaceted labor market. These considerations led to the conclusion that the Greek crisis has revealed a low quality of democracy as it is expressed in a deficient rule of law, a lack of adequate mechanisms of checks and balances at the central and local political levels, and a weak influence of civic associations in the policy-making process.

In a different strand of analysis, Diamandouros (2013) argues that the Greek crisis, unlike that of Ireland and Portugal, is a political crisis insofar as the financial crisis brought to the fore the structural weaknesses of the dominant paradigm of the Greek state in the last 100 years. It stresses the structural

incapacity of the Greek state to face up to the challenges of the European, international, and regional environment in which Greece has been integrated since 1980 and 2001. Despite the impressive modernization accomplishments of the last decades, the fundamentals of the country's political culture have not been overcome. According to this argument, Greek historical development to this day is marked by two powerful cultural traditions. One is the "reformist culture"—outward looking, for rationalization of state and societal structures, liberal, democratic, and respectful to the rule of law; the other, the "underdog culture," is paternalist, parochial, precapitalist, protectionist, intolerant to the alien, with a xenophobic view of the world and prone to conspiracy. It has a diffident attitude toward risk and innovation and tends to encourage resistance to authority as a mechanism of social action. The underdog cultural tradition has a dominant position in Greek politics, society, and economy; is deeply entrenched in the public sector (health, education, and judicial system, security apparatus, local government, public utilities) and in the trade union movement; and is reflected in a dense network of protection of privileges and preferential arrangements that is against every reform in contemporary Greece. Put otherwise, the underdog culture has seriously affected the quality of democracy in the postauthoritarian era. It is the "least patriotic culture" (Offe, 2013, p. 607).

In a different interpretation strand, the Greek crisis is presented as the result of a two-party political system of a populist democracy that has prevailed over a liberal one (Pappas, 2013). From 1981 until the 2009 elections, there was a regular alternation of power, in a single-party government, of the socialist PASOK and the conservative New Democracy, competing in a strategically polarized climate to control state resources. The foundations of this system were laid by the socialist PASOK that rose to power in 1981 after seven years of a liberal postauthoritarian conservative government. PASOK established a policy of state-directed distribution of political rents and of allocation of state benefits to voters. The New Democracy, in a single-party government from 2004 to 2009, followed the same policy. In the three decades of alternating power of these two parties, the public sector skyrocketed, social spending rose steadily, corruption flourished, and tax evasion, pension fraud, and unauthorized construction remained unpunished. The large global financial crisis of 2008 affected dramatically the Greek state, which had run out of resources.

It is generally assumed that the Greek sovereign debt crisis is not only an endemic political, economic, and cultural crisis that was brought to the fore following the deep international financial crisis of 2008 (Thomadakis, 2013), but that it results as well from an EU integration/democratic deficit crisis (Featherstone, 2011; Offe, 2013; Simitis, 2014). The deepening European divide of core and periphery makes it all the more difficult to deal with the crisis in a politically and economically feasible way given the different socioeconomic history of the European Monetary Union (EMU) members and the diversity of interests, pursuits, and ideologies. It is argued that the introduction of the euro into a "fundamentally flawed currency zone" was a huge mistake (Offe, 2013, p. 596; Rogoff, 2011) because of the deep heterogeneity of its members. What is needed to redress the imbalances between core and periphery is to initiate an institutional framework of a collective fiscal, economic, and social policy within the euro zone (Habermas, Bofinger, & Nida-Rümelin, 2012). This basically means introducing a policy of a large-scale debt mutualization and redistribution measures, a procedure that is "hardly acceptable by the voters of the core member states and democratically not feasible" (Offe, 2013, p. 595). On the other hand, in the crisis-ridden countries, the bailout programs associated with strict austerity measures, fiscal adjustment

policies, and structural reforms failed to produce economic growth and competitiveness; instead, they resulted in recession, economic stagnation, social downturn (European Parliament, 2014), and turmoil in the political systems of both core and periphery. As mentioned above, Greece has been deeply socially and politically affected by the adjusting EU/IMF and the European Central Bank (ECB) program more than all the other crisis-ridden countries.

Under the social impact of the austerity programs in southern Europe, the vision of a united Europe that is connected with the principles of democracy, mutual solidarity, civil and individual rights, education, and common interest has evaporated. The weak democratic accountability and legitimacy of the Troika (European Parliament, 2014), a technocratic EU//IMF/ECB institution responsible for the rescue operation of the program countries as well as the de facto exclusion of the weaker states from the participation of their governments and parliaments on matters concerning them, are stirring social uproar, widespread conspiracy theories, lawlessness, euroscepticism, and "shrill and anti-political forms of fundamental opposition" (Offe, 2013, p. 610). To put it otherwise, these democracies are in a wrecking process. The half-hearted expression of moral responsibility and mutual solidarity by the core states toward the crisis-ridden periphery is a sign of the integration crisis of the EU, the democratic deficit at the level of EU governance, and the trap in which the EU is caught.

Four Political Blogs: Framing and Contextualizing the Greek Crisis

After having outlined the theoretical discourse on the sociopolitical background of the Greek crisis and on the challenges posed to the democratic system in an age of Greek austerity, we will examine how four political blogs that represent the main ideological orientations in the Greek political spectrum debate the ways in which the social and political forces tackle the problems of the Greek society concerning democracy. We use three frames to contextualize the public discourse in the four blogs concerning the complex Greek crisis and the perception of the democratic ideal. The first frame refers to the way the democratic political institutions are perceived both by the political and social actors and the blog participants who make themselves heard in the blog debates. The second frame examines the discourse on the loss of national sovereignty in the examined blogs. The third frame investigates which understanding comes to the fore in the blog debates concerning the public interest, the core principle of democracy, and an institutional democratic "ethics of order" in the economy and society.

The Democratic Political Institutions in the Crossfire

We first delve into the question of how the four blogs consider and process the functioning of political institutions in a democratic political system and which conception of a democratic political state have party officials, readers, or representatives of social movements that are expressed in the blog debates.

In the far-left blog Deep Red, a wide spectrum of the radical and far left participates with outgoing posts, comments, and discussions. The calling into question of the parliamentary system, democratic procedures, the democratically legitimated political institutions, and the rule of law belongs to the standard repertoire of the blog discourse.

The election battle is an important way of fighting, but a parliamentary procedure cannot bring any essential change to Greece. Instead people must take matters into their own hands. . . . A strong people's alliance shall fight for a subversion of the power of monopolies, for the exit from the EU, the cancellation of the public debt, the socialization of the means of production.

This is an extract from the speech of the general secretary of the communist party KKE in Thessaloniki, posted on February 18, 2012. In the last elections of 2012, KKE won a voter's share of 4.5%. The subversion of the parliamentary system is an idea that runs throughout the posts and commentaries of Deep Red. The democratically formed political institutions are rejected as such. The constitutionally established government of former vice president of the ECB Lucas Papademos—supported by the socialist party PASOK, the conservative party New Democracy, and the populist right-wing party LAOS—charged with the implementation of broad-based structural reforms under the supervision of Troika (EU-IMF-CEB) is characterized in posts and comments as “a coup d'état régime of *PASOK, ND, EU and IMF*” and as a “government of nazi collaborators and hangmen” that must be overthrown. This antisystemic rhetoric is used in an outgoing post of the movement “I don't pay” that is supported by the far-left party Syriza, which, as noted, became the main opposition party in parliament in the 2012 elections. It says: “Let us throw the government into the sea and build from the bottom up a new society of solidarity and a cooperative way of thinking.”

The extreme-right blog ant-ntp is a political virtual platform on which an antisystemic, antiparlamentarian debate takes place whose jargon differs little from the far-left discourse in Deep Red. A post reads:

The Greek people must overthrow the powerful group that oppresses nations and peoples for the maximization of their profits. That powerful group does nothing else but rob them through their banks and establish the governments in order to control the society.

This ideological frame is in line with the political manifesto of the new far-right party, Independent Greeks, which is often mentioned in ant-ntp, speaks against the banks and the international controller of Greece, and stands out in the public sphere with a diffusion of conspiracy theories (Anexartitoi Ellines, 2014).

The right-wing blog fimotro, a current news blog, has particularly fostered the image of the leader of the main center-right party New Democracy and now prime minister. In some of its news posts, what is obvious is its negative attitude toward the banks and the international financial institutions, a feature also of the far-right blog ant-ntp. The former prime minister Papademos, an ex-banker, is specifically attacked as a representative of the financial world. His economic adviser was characterized as a “Hawk of the Banks” for saying in a TV interview that “the Europeans exert pressure on us so as to get the state in order.”

Parapolitiki is a center-left liberal blog that follows the tradition of a critical stance toward the mismanagement of public democratic institutions. In one of its posts, criticism is expressed against some practices in the Greek parliament and the former president and ex-deputy of the former Synaspismos left party who still maintains an open office in parliament and has hired a clerk to run it. The post reads: "Now, for that office, which had no reason for existing for several years, a clerk was hired. Nobody mentioned this, although we are living in times of cuts in public expenditure."

The Narrative of National Sovereignty

Rhetoric about the loss of national sovereignty has dominated public discourse, political statements, and the media since the outbreak of the crisis. It has gained ground because of the submission of the Greek state under international financial control in view of the threat of an uncontrolled Greek default. The social crisis and the political turmoil are additional factors. The construction of the ideology of the loss of national sovereignty has a long tradition in Greece (Koliopoulos & Veremis, 2010). It has as well to do with the role of the great powers for the existence and development of the Greek state from its establishment in the 19th century to the 1970s (Clogg, 2002). How far this ideology was culturally and philosophically conditioned is an open question. In the discourse of the far-right, far-left, and right-wing blogs, the narrative about the loss of national sovereignty has a dominant position. In contrast, the liberal center-left blog parapolitiki is free of ideological blinkers.

The far-right blog ant-ntp contains many posts and comments concerning the loss of national sovereignty. The lenders (EU/IMF/ECB) and Germany as the leading European power are considered the only politically responsible actors for the Greek social and economic crisis that have no democratic legitimacy to control the implementation of the adjustment program. "The unofficial economic minister of Greece and representative of IMF, Paul Tompson, has made an intervention in favor of the pay-off of outstanding loans to banks," states one post (a similar post appears in the far-left blog Deep Red). In another post, an excerpt from a speech of a European parliamentarian of the far-left Syriza, states:

You are Mr. Juncker [the prime minister of Luxembourg at the time] a worthy representative of the authoritarian German Europe and the Middle Ages in social and employment affairs, where commissioners and Gauleiter dominate. . . . I see in your face a worthy representative of a Europe that has created a banking and financial Dachau.

The far-left blog Deep Red moves within the same ideological raster as the far-right ant-ntp. In an outbound post, an excerpt of an opinion column from a nationalist magazine is used as a reference:

Even Luxembourg tells us which political party to support. There is a plan in implementation, which shall prepare the next government scheme in conformity with the directions of the lenders and the 4th Reich [Germany] that in reality will exercise power.

In an outgoing opinion post, the right-wing blog fimotro adds to the frame of the loss of national sovereignty:

The nightmare scenario of the subjection to the orders of Troika is a reality. Greek ministers cannot take an important decision without the permission of Troika. We must now recognize that our lenders determine at present even the content of the ministerial decisions.

The posts of the far-left, far-right, and right-wing blogs and the political actors who express their views in these blog discourses move in the same ideological system (Reemtsma, 2002, p. 105). They consider, on the one hand, the integration of Greece in supranational and international systems as a loss of national independence and, on the other, the submission of the Greek state under international financial control, on the basis of the memorandum, a bilateral agreement, as a subjection to the dictates of supranational powers.

Public Interest, Economy, and Society

We will further examine which image of society and economy is reflected in the debates and political activities mentioned in the four political blogs and whether this image is consistent with that of a democratically constituted society.

A post of the far-left blog Deep Red concerning the closing of two Coco-Cola plants in Greece as a result of poor performance reads:

The capitalists make a class war against the working people in conditions under which "the winner takes all." The future, that the coup d'état government of *PASOK-ND-EU-IMF* has reserved for the working people, is the continuous deterioration of its position and the establishment of a hostage regime that will extort new measures for more profits. . . . All these belong to a restructuring plan of the multinational company, which aims at the maximization of its profits.

The same mind-set of bad capitalists and a blackmailing alliance of dictatorial indigenous and foreign powers is expressed in the election manifesto of the main opposition far-left party Syriza (2012). The credo is that capitalism and the ruling political indigenous and European and international institutions are responsible for the complex Greek crisis.

The rhetoric of the far-right blog ant-ntp concerning the economy in the crisis era focuses on the bankers. An outbound post about the ex-banker and former Minister of Parliament Papademos, who had given a press conference in Brussels, states:

The puppet of the banks has given a press conference after the summit in Brussels. He was asked about oil [alleged massive untapped reserves of oil in Greece] and answered about incomes and jobs as if others have told him what to say, as if others have arranged everything.

The problems of rigidity in the labor market (Lyberaki, 2009) and the high unemployment rate in Greece are considered minor in relation to the allegedly valuable oil reserves whose exploitation is supposedly blocked by indigenous and foreign forces. In a comment about the above-mentioned closing of the two Coca-Cola factories, a racist outbreak comes across: "This Jewish rabble must go to the devil." Both ant-ntp and the far-left Deep Red contain posts of the movement "I don't pay" (i.e., the foreign debt of Greece). A statement reads:

The politics nourished by Troika, banks and the native puppets aim at the violent redistribution of the income of the broader social classes, in favor of the banks. . . . We can altogether win and take our lives in our hands and set the foundations for a new just society without exploitation.

In the far-right and far-left blogs a way of thinking prevails that abstracts from the reality and reviews without explication; it is limited in complaints and accusations against the indigenous democratic and foreign institutions and politics. Another common feature of the discourse of these blogs is that there is no effort to reflect on, understand, and question the common serious problems that the crisis poses, the threats to social cohesion, and the economic, social, and political dynamics of the norms that rule common life. In other words, an understanding of the grounds of democracy does not exist.

The right-wing blog *fimotro* seems to be against the efforts of the state to tackle the problem of widespread tax evasion, one of the causes of the Greek fiscal derailment. Until the fiscal crisis of 2010, the Greek state had taxed only one-third of the officially declared income (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). An outgoing post from the business newspaper *Imerisia* states:

Hard and unbearable will be the bill of the tax office this year for three millions taxpayers who will be caught in the nets of the tax office because of 12 new trapping methods. Two million taxpayers will pay taxes for the first time.

Another post on the same blog opposes the effort of the state to touch on benefits of acquired rights whose unconditional protection has led to a rigid economic system. This post contains the following critical remark against the government and the Troika: "The president of the national confederation of Greek trade is against the reduction of salaries. The dialogue of the social partners was ignored by the government and by Troika." The scientific literature gives evidence that the arbitrariness in the labor market, where the social partners represent a small part of their potential public, has led to proportionally high wages at the EU level and to an unemployment system functioning at the expense of the unemployed (Lyberaki, 2009). The expressed stance in the blog is that "justice" means better salaries only for some interest groups regardless of the social conditions.

The center-left blog *parapolitiki* provides space for the presentation of liberal initiatives. An outgoing post publishes communication about an event taking place in the venue "free thinking zone," where questions would be addressed such as, "How much state one wants, if one would make his house accessible for immigrants, junkies, etc., how much freedom one can stand?" These questions are especially important in Greece, where the results of the 2012 elections show a significant potential of

people who support social and political forces that have no tolerance for other and no respect for the principles of democracy.

Conclusion

This study, based on a selection of four political blogs representing the four main directions in Greek political life—the far right, the center right, the center left, and the far left—observes and reflects on the cognitive patterns that emerge in these blogs concerning the contested nature of democracy in the era of the multifaceted Greek crisis. We have first referred to the Greek political blogosphere and the contribution of the Greek literature in its exploration, the character of the Greek real and virtual public sphere in general, and particularly in this era of crisis. After sketching the theoretical debates on the sociopolitical origins of the Greek crisis, the international implications, and the challenges posed to the Greek democratic system, a qualitative content analysis is presented of the discourses that took place on the four blogs. We have focused on questions about how the blog participants perceive the democratic political institutions, the relation of the Greek state to its European partners and the international institutions involved in the crisis management as well as the institutional democratic ethics of order in the Greek economy and society.

The participants in the four examined political blogs are like-minded people with a “tightly homogeneous ideology” (Putnam, 2000, p. 25). In the discussions of the far-left and far-right blogs, an extremely polarized atmosphere prevails. The posts and comments of participants in these blogs move in the same rigid ideological raster with the “underdog culture” scheme (Diamandouros, 2013, p. 212) that dominates in Greek society and whose main features are an anticapitalist and anti-Western stance, conspiracy theories, engagement for the protection of privileges, and a hostile attitude against reform. Responsible for the multifaceted Greek crisis are capitalism, the ruling indigenous political forces, and the European and international lenders that supervise the adjustment program. Although Greece is a bankrupt state and depends on money borrowed from its European partners and international lenders, there is no effort in the far-right, center-right, and far-left blogs to reflect on, understand, and question Greece’s self-inflicted humiliating dependence on the lenders to the country and the serious problems that the crisis poses, threatening social cohesion. There is no nugget of thinking on collective responsibility; on the economic, social, and political dynamics of the norms that rule common life; on the use of democratic forms for the management of common risks (Manent, 2003, p. 114); or on the social, political, and economic bankruptcy of the country. In other words, there is no understanding of the principles and grounds of democracy. The right-wing blog does not allow debates; its ideological orientation includes, however, elements of the far-right and far-left blogs such as ethnocentrism, conspiracy theories, hostility to reforms, and a positive attitude toward privileges for social groups. The center-left blog distinguishes itself from the other three by taking a critical stance toward the mismanagement of the public democratic institutions and its engagement for the respect of individual rights and freedoms. It could be said on the basis of the reviewed Greek literature and the findings of this study that the four Greek political blogs represent an excerpt of the real Greek social and political life on the Greek virtual arena of public discourse.

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