

**Political Crisis in Greece and Italy: a comparative analysis of
SYRIZA and 5 Stars Movement**

Raffaele Borreca

PhD Candidate

University of Peloponnese

Department of Political Science and International Relations

Abstract

The spaces opened by the economic and political crisis offered many rooms for manoeuvre to those opposition forces able to canalise in electoral terms the protest and translate its claims in specific demands or a coherent political narrative. Strong of their electoral results, the Greek SYRIZA and the Italian Five Stars Movement (M5S) assumed soon a pivotal role in their political systems. However, although the demands and the objectives of both SYRIZA and the M5S are, to a certain extent, similar, the two parties differ in terms of political background, ideology and internal organization. The success of the M5S trace its roots in the context of deep distrust against the political system reigning in Italy since the 1990s. In the M5S problematically coexist a grassroots direct democracy approach and the charismatic and substantially unchallenged leadership of the founder Beppe Grillo. The capability of the radical left SYRIZA to convey the anti-Memorandum contestation and its constitution in an unitarian party following the 2012 elections reaffirmed the centrality of the traditional mass party in the Greek democratic representation. However, its electoral drive towards the centre poses major ideological challenges. Finally, the scepticism towards the European governance of both parties cannot be mistaken for anti-europeism. SYRIZA and the M5S canalized the protest from the streets to the national Parliament giving democratic representation to the contestation and contributing in the politicisation of the European polity.

Introduction

The European debt crisis constituted a crucial event with important social and political consequences, notably for the southern European states. In 2011, Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Italy and Spain changed their governments, before the natural end of the legislature. In Spain the government called for snap elections, in which the governing party suffered a large defeat. Governments resigned in Ireland and Portugal and soon after new elections were held. In Greece and Italy, Loucas Papademos and Mario Monti, two non-elected professionals, were appointed as caretaker Prime Ministers after Georgios Papandreu and Silvio Berlusconi decided to step down. Provisional coalition/unity-government were formed under their supervision. New elections then followed both in Greece (May and June 2012) and Italy (February 2013), that resulted in governments supported by the same centre-left – centre-right grand coalitions that provided the parliamentary majority to their “technocratic” predecessors. In these countries, the elections saw the electoral exploits of new major opposition parties, able to convey and express the large discontent towards the crisis management and the failures of the national political system.

The sequence of events that led to the political crisis in all these countries began to unfold with the sudden stop in private capital inflows caused by the international financial crisis, as well as by the developments of the European sovereign debt crisis (Merler & Pisani-Ferry 2012). Governments found refinancing and repaying their debt increasingly difficult. The response was a first round of austerity measures that were adopted both autonomously and as part of an international bailout agreement. However, as the Greek crisis went on and the risk of contagion reached other Eurozone countries, the governing parties were pressured to take on further cuts, amidst public opinion’s distrust and the pressure from the parliamentary oppositions. Trade unions, organised interests and new social movements took the streets, the latter calling for a radical change of the political and economic system. Finally, the governments in charge announced their resignation or promised elections after the vote of a new, important austerity budget and/or the adoption of a bailout deal with the EU and the IMF, as was the case in Ireland, Portugal and Greece. As a consequence of their involvement in the austerity campaigns, most of the former governing parties underwent historic electoral backlashes in the general as well as in local elections. At the same time, the protests against the austerity measures and the major political parties, held responsible for the economic setback, translated in different political representations and led to the emergence of new organised political actors.

SYRIZA and the MoVimento 5 Stelle: the electoral rise

The debate over the EU/IMF bailout plan for Greece, the Memorandum of Financial and Economic Policies, monopolised the heated political campaign that led to the snap elections in the spring 2012. The Memorandum / anti-Memorandum divide proved to be a transversal cleavage, bringing to the breaking point established balances of power inside the Greek party system. This new kind of split generated by the financial collapse of the country divided equally the public opinion and the electorate. The Memorandum became the symbol of the country's place in Europe, of the powerlessness of the Greek state, relying on decisions coming from Frankfurt or Berlin, and of the impossibility or inability for the national leaderships to provide a convincing response to the country's economic and social crisis. No less important, the Memorandum constituted the battleground on which the showdown of the Greek party system, as established since the return of the country to democracy, was played. Thus, the months preceding the 2012 snap elections fixed the Greek political forces in two opposed camps. On the one side those calling for the respect of the agreements and of the objectives set by the Memorandum in the name of responsibility and Greece's European membership. On the other, the parties, flanked by a large part of civil society, that harshly contested the Memorandum and the European governance of the crisis, in the name of the country's dignity and independence. Both the camps, highlighted the necessity of a change, be it in terms of socio-economic model and practices (Chalari 2012) or assuming the form of anti-establishment and anti-system contestation.

PASOK and Nea Demokratia, the two columns of the Greek bipartitism established since the return to democracy, aligned both on the side of the respect of the bail out conditions, though the attitude of Nea Demokratia towards the bailout changed only after its participation to the coalition government led by Papademos. However, both the PASOK and ND were held as responsible for the country's economic failure and both parties accused each other of the financial mismanagement of the country. The fact that the respect of the bail out programme united the two major parties was an element of further radicalisation of the Greek political divide. Finally, the general elections held on 6th May 2012 crashed the Greek bipolar system. For the first time since 1974 the sum of the parliamentary seats gained by the PASOK and Nea Demokratia did not cross the threshold of 150 out of the 300 seats of the Hellenic unicameral Parliament. This despite the generous majority prize of 50 seats granted by the Greek electoral law to the first party. After its electoral fall, the PASOK became the third force in the Parliament, with only 41 seats. However, Nea Demokratia was not spared by the anger of the Greek electorate. The 108 seats obtained by ND did not correspond to the strong electoral mandate called by

its leader, Antonis Samaras, during the electoral campaign.

SYRIZA was the political actor that better translated the anti-Memorandum discontent. The coalition of the radical left became the second political force of the country gaining 52 seats in the Parliament with 1,061,158 votes, not even 100,000 less than ND. The coalition tripled its preferences obtained in the general elections of 2009 and largely improved the exploit of 855,944 preferences and 28 parliamentary seats performed in 1989 by *Synaspismos*, the coalition of the lefts of which SYRIZA is the political heir. Both ND and SYRIZA increased their electoral performances by 10% during the June 17 elections, gaining votes mainly from those political forces that in May had remained under the minimum threshold of 3% necessary to enter the Parliament.¹ Nea Demokratia rose to 29,66% obtaining 129 seats, while SYRIZA with 26,89% secured 71 seats. The PASOK managed to maintain 33 MPs who proved crucial for the new coalition government formed with Samaras as Prime minister.

The rise of SYRIZA drained an ample share of the constituency from the PASOK, overtaking the socialists even in their traditional strongholds such as the prefectures of Achaia, Chania (Crete) and, in June, in all the four prefectures of Crete. However, the Coalition of the Radical Left represented not only an ideological redefinition for those voters of the left who were disappointed by the PASOK's centrist drift but it was also seen as a real possibility to unhinge the PASOK-ND duopoly. The success of SYRIZA was most evident in the main cities. On the whole, it came first in prefectures within the four major Greek urban centres (Athens, Thessaloniki, that was eventually reconquered by ND in June, Patras and Pireas) as well as in the whole Attica, the region of Athens, where almost a third of the Greek population lives. Under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras the Coalition of the Radical Left campaigned for the unilateral cancellation of the public debt and for the withdrawal from the Memorandum's engagements. The other parties of the left did not manage to reach the results of SYRIZA or to overtake the PASOK. This was due both to the lower appeal of a more pragmatic or moderate profile held during the electoral campaign, as in the case of *Demokratiki Aristera*², or, on the contrary, as in the case of the KKE, to an outspoken Euroscepticism that warded off all those voters, both radical and moderate, who considered the country's participation in the European institutions and in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) as an essential conquest. A deeper reason resides also in the capability of SYRIZA to reach and convey the reasons of the grassroots contestation.

While SYRIZA established itself as the major party on the left, in Italy, the *MoVimento 5 Stelle* (Five Stars Movement - M5S) demonstrated to be more than a protest movement, being able to compete and win elections. In fact, during the local elections of May and June 2012, involving the administrations

of 1,007 towns, among which twenty-eight capital of province and four regional capitals, the M5S became, on the whole, the third Italian party in terms of total preferences, after the centre-left *Partito Democratico* (PD) and Berlusconi's *Il Popolo della Libertà* (PDL). Among the mayor elected from the ranks of the movement there is also the “first citizen” of the important town and provincial capital of Parma. The electoral results of May were confirmed during the regional elections of October 2012 in Sicily. The party became the first of the island, his candidate collecting 18,20% of the preferences. However, these elections, characterised by a very low voter turnout (only 47,2% of citizens entitled to vote), saw the victory of the coalition made up of the PD and the christian-democratic party *Unione di Centro* (UDC).

The 2012 local elections imposed the M5S as a serious challenger for upcoming parliamentary elections of February 2013. These elections marked the end of the Italian bipolarism established since the arrival in politics of Berlusconi in 1994. The results saw an extremely tight victory of Pierluigi Bersani's centre-left coalition over Berlusconi's centre-right coalition. In the lower chamber the centre-left obtained 29,54% of the total preferences while the centre-right 29,13%. In the senate 31,60% of the votes went to the centre-left, 30,66% to the centre-right. That is the centre-left prevailed with a difference of less than a percentage point in both the houses. However, more than the political survival of Berlusconi and the minimal distance between the two main coalitions, the most impressive result was the exploit of the M5S. The party, running outside any coalition, became the first most voted single party in the Chamber of Deputies with 25,55% of votes and the second most voted in the Senate, with 23,79%, behind the PD. The M5S even overcame the other coalitions in five regions for the chamber of deputies.

According to the 2005 electoral law the winning coalition was provided with 55% of the seats of the Chamber of Deputies, in the case its result is below this percentage. Thus, the centre-left obtained 340 of the 630 lower house seats, that is an absolute majority. In the case of the Senate the majority prize is distributed on a regional level. This means that the winning coalition in each of the twenty Italian regions elected at least 55% of the region's senators, more populous the region more senatorial seats it assigned. The centre-left coalition achieved a relative majority in the higher house with 119 seats out of 315, only two more than those gained by the centre-right that won the majority in some key regions. It should be mentioned that in the Italian system the two houses have the same importance and competences, thus a bill has to pass in both the branches of the parliament to become law. The same applies to the confidence vote. Finally, three antithetical political forces separated by few or less than one percentage points in terms of preferences led to a contradictory situation where a coalition majority could be formed in the lower house

but not in the higher. In the aftermath of the elections Grillo made clear that the M5S would have not voted the confidence to any government proposed by the traditional parties. The M5S would have evaluated the bills presented from time to time in the parliament, giving them a positive vote in case they matched the Movement's program.

Soon after the elections, Bersani engaged the M5S proposing to work together on bills concerning the reduction of the costs of politics, tougher norms on corruption, a law on the conflict of interests, a law on the political parties internal democracy and an ethical code for their members, as well as on social legislation. However, Grillo refused his support to a centre-left government in exchange of a common programme focusing on central points of the M5S programme. The opinion polls showed that the M5S electoral growth had not reached its limit. Furthermore, both a centre-left - centre-right grand coalition and a new technocratic government would have promoted the image of the M5S as a movement fighting the partitic system and its backroom deals and Grillo's undifferentiated condemnation of all political parties. Nevertheless, the M5S base proved to be split over the tactical support of the government in exchange of its commitment to the realization of the movement's proposals. Finally, as in the Greek case, the parties of the centre-left and of the centre-right that once competed against each other were compelled to form a coalition government, since they had not the numbers to form stable majorities on their own and out of fear that new elections would further reduce their votes. Moreover, the embrace between the “old” parties, accounted for the country's dire economic situation, reinforced the status of the M5S in Italy and SYRIZA in Greece as the “new” herald of radical changes.

The 5 Stars Movement: populism or politics 2.0 ?

Unlike the case of other anti-austerity parties and movements that rose to prominence during the sovereign debt crisis all over Europe, the success of the M5S has to be placed in a context of deep distrust against the political system reigning in Italy since the 1990s. In 1992, the investigations that followed many important corruption scandals (the so called “Tangentopoli”) crashed the Italian post-war political system giving the way to a bipolar coalition system. However, what is improperly referred as the Italian “second republic” was no less rich in scandals, involving almost all the political parties, at any level of government and administration, let alone Berlusconi's own record of legal troubles and scandals. In the last two decades, legality and the moralization of public life constituted the central issues of the Italian public debate. The diverse front of the “anti-berlusconism” was mainly federated by the defence of the Constitution and rule of law, against the attempts of the media tycoon to change the fundamental charter,

notably giving a dominant role to the executive, or to pass legislation to accommodate his legal issues. Moreover, the privileges enjoyed by the Italian politicians and the wastes of the public administration attracted increasing discontents and criticisms. *La Casta* (“The Caste. How Italian politicians became untouchable”), the book written by two journalists of the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in 2007, became soon a best seller in 2007, the term “caste” becoming of current use when referring to the corruption and privileges of the Italian political elite and its alienation from the citizens. It is not a case that the first statement made by Beppe Grillo, the founder of the movement, after the results was a tweet announcing that “honesty will be fashionable”.

The irruption of the M5S in the Italian national politics is without precedent in the electoral history of contemporary western democracies due to the party organisational model, its post-ideological profile and the magnitude of its electoral exploit at the first national elections. All the 108 deputies and 54 senators elected with the M5S, mostly under forty, had no previous experience neither in national nor in local politics. The M5S refuses any ideological label, stressing its civic nature, and in effect the profile of its electorate displays an almost perfect balance among voters which position themselves on the left / centre-left, on the right / centre-right and those refusing to place themselves on the left-right spectrum (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2013). The story and the rise of the M5S are strictly linked with Grillo, a comedian known for his political satire. Marginalised from the Italian national TV networks Grillo started a series of theatre's shows in the mid-1990s where he denounced the misgovernment and the political and economic scandals of the country as well as the networks of power linking politics, media and finance. These issues, along with environment and transport, constitutes the main themes of the blog *beppegrillo.it* opened in 2005 with the support of Gianroberto Casaleggio, owner of a society of marketing and web strategy and Grillo's closest collaborator.

Events like the V-Day (“fuck off day”) definitely consolidated the movement and the media figure of Grillo. The V-Day³ held on 8th September 2007 in many Italian squares was a public event whose aim was to promote a bill of popular initiative proposing: i) the ineligibility of any Italian citizen to the post of MP if he/she has been sentenced for any offence ii) the limitation of the number of the parliamentary mandates to two legislatures iii) the modification of the electoral law by the reintroduction of the direct preference. During the second V-Day of 2008 Grillo proposed three referendum demanding the abolition of public funding for newspapers, of the order of journalists and of a law regulating radio and television broadcasting enacted by Berlusconi government. Journalists, daily newspapers and television companies are equally targeted by Grillo, who rarely gives interviews and openly avoid (and ban to the M5S

representatives) the participation in TV political talk show.

Finally, the *MoVimento 5 Stelle* was founded in October 2009. The five stars represent its original missions: the safeguarding of public water and the environment, the growth of public transport and connectivity and development. Before the constitution of the movement the five stars were granted to any civic list or local administration promoting or pursuing these objectives. These core objectives coupled with the assertion of no ideological affiliation on the left-right spectrum make the M5S a good example of a political party or movement whose instances are traceable on the postmodern politics dimension (Inglehart 1997, pp. 243-252). However, it is not so evident on which point of the axis the M5S can be placed. In fact, if ecology is a key postmodern value standing at the core of the M5S discourse, diverse sensibilities inside the movement and the contradictions between Grillo statements and the base orientations emerged on issues like the *ius soli* or the abolition of the crime of illegal immigration, with the leader promoting an exclusivist discourse contested by the base.

According to its charter, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* is not a political party, its objective being the realisation of an effective exchange of opinions and democratic debate outside the associational and party bonds and without the mediation of directive or representative bodies, recognising to the totality of the Internet users the role of government normally entrusted to a minority (art. 5 of the M5S statute). This self-definition and identification highlights a typical aspect of the relationship between parties and civil society. In the case of a social movement becoming a political party or of a political party aiming at establishing itself into civil society, the term “movement” and the like is often employed to claim or reaffirm a political formation's popular grass-roots or to convey a message of radical change towards the dominant political and economic establishment. The elected members of the M5S lists should act according to the movement's principles considering politics like a form of civil service and not as a career: they can assume political charges for a maximum of two mandates; self-reduce their salaries; reject electoral reimbursements; submit themselves to the judgement of the voters through votes on the web.

The movement's “headquarters” are, by statute, the Internet blog of Beppe Grillo. The role of the web is central in defining the organisational model and a new conception of democracy where the members of the parliament are supposed to be constantly monitored and required to act according to the political decisions and preferences discussed and adopted by the citizens on the web platform. The base of the Movement are the “meetup” groups, pre-dating the launch of the party and organised through the social media with the same name. They constitute local groups (1326 as of February 2014 for a total of more than 150,000 members, distributed in 1,058 cities)⁴ that enjoy considerable independence from the

centre (that is Grillo and his blog's collaborators) in undertaking initiatives at the local level. This activist grassroots dimension and its civic nature have been fatally overlooked by the major parties and media in dealing with the M5S phenomenon, before it entered the Parliament. Grillo's aggressive rhetoric with its populist undertones was accorded more attention than the political engagement of thousands of Italians and their demands.

Nonetheless, the role of the former comedian as founder, spokesman and leader constitutes the biggest contradiction in the grassroots direct democracy approach advocated by the movement. According to the art.3 of the statute, the name of the movement is combined with a symbol whose only legal owner is Beppe Grillo. Grillo ownership of the movement and the control of the medium of deliberation and votation constitute the greatest difference with other experiences of direct democracy based on web platforms like the German Pirate Party or the Spanish 15M movement (the *Indignados*). Moreover, the "one man one vote" principle that gives every single militant the same weight, irrespectively of his or her political charges or functions inside the movement, is undermined by the absolute power of Grillo (and his closest collaborator) to determine the expulsion alone of members expressing dissent to the official line. This eventuality has verified several times so far, leading also to the expulsion of several MPs from the M5S parliamentary group. Bordignon and Ceccarini highlight how the M5S organisational model, and notably the relationships between central leadership and meetup groups, *can be likened to the idea of the party as franchise organisation* and how it displays to an extreme degree the characteristics of the business firm model of party organisation, that Berlusconi and his Forza Italia introduced on the Italian political scene.

It is interesting to compare Grillo's charismatic leadership to that of Berlusconi and how both reflect their privileged strategies of communication. The personalities of Grillo and Berlusconi dominated and set the pace to the electoral campaign for the 2013 elections, the former mainly on traditional media the latter on the new media and the squares. On one hand we have the old media mogul accustomed to the language of the commercial television and whose messages are crafted for a passive television audience. On the other, the comedian and internet guru who calls for the active participation of common citizens, of whom he declares to be a simple spokesman, although his scenic presence dominates over his followers. Both Grillo and Berlusconi resent the internal dissent and lament that media and journalists serve their opponents' interests. Grillo goes so far to avoid and forbid the elected members of the M5S to speak in political talk shows or to freely give interviews to newspapers. A skilful use of the Internet, local actions and obviously the successes in local and national elections forced the traditional media to give spotlights

and headlines to Grillo and the M5S, although being deliberately snubbed by them. Eventually, the comedian performances and communication strategy outclassed those of the old TV tycoon.

SYRIZA, the return of the left ?

The comparison between the Greek protest and the contemporary street mobilizations and new movements in Italy and Spain shows how the Greek society's deep disillusion with and its anger towards the national political system did not give birth to - nor was shaped by - new mass movements stemming from the society's grassroots and not referable to traditional social actors, political parties and ideologies. During the European debt crisis, the 15-M movement (the “*indignados*”) was able to lead the contestation in Spain, dictating the times, the places and the themes of the protest, through a keen combination of traditional forms of mobilisation and the use of the Internet and social networks. This resulted in the symbolic (and physical) occupation / re-appropriation of the public space by a citizen-led umbrella movement ready to further its demands without the mediation of parties or trade unions. Certainly, this kind of citizen mobilisation was present also in the streets of Greece, as in the case of the movement of the “*αγανακτισμένοι*” (indignants), that drew direct inspiration from the Spanish *Indignados*. However, its influence in structuring and leading the protest was limited.

In Greece, the critical mass reached by the street protests was due essentially to the mobilisation of traditional social actors like trade unions. The call of a strike by one of the national trade unions, with the ADEDY (Civil Servants' Confederation) and the GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers) usually taking action together, constituted the main event that, especially in case of general strikes, attracted to the streets other actors such as opposition parties, civil society associations, extra-parliamentary political groups and violent rioters. Furthermore, the electoral rise of the anti-Memorandum parties cannot be likened to the electoral exploits of the M5S and its post-ideological profile and citizen activism. The anti-Memorandum parties are, for all means and purposes, traditional parties: their ideological profile, their collocation on the left-right spectrum and their internal working, selection of the personnel and political experience of the leaderships all reflect ‘old’ parties models.

SYRIZA reasserted the centrality of the party in Greek democratic representation thanks to its capability to provide an organised political outlet to the contestation. SYRIZA success as well as its primacy among the other anti-Memorandum parties is grounded in its pursuit of linkages in the Greek civil society and political activism operated before and during the crisis. As highlighted by Tsakatika and Eleftheriou, during the 2000s SYRIZA opened up to the involvement of the younger cohorts and

consequently of the new social movements and activism that emerged in those years. Besides, the weaker position in unionism, in comparison with the other parties of the left and centre-left, urged SYRIZA to take an open stance towards the world of the associations and movements, trying more to support than to guide them. This strategy paid off during the debt crisis and can be accounted for the party's outstanding electoral rise. SYRIZA did not try – and actually had not the power – to vertically organise and assume control of the street protests. However, it fully supported the actions of the ADEDY and GSEE, thus providing a new political ally to the trade unionism disaffected with the PASOK, and stood as an informal advocate of street movements like the indignants, embedding them in a political narrative that explained and justified their emergence (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013, p.15).

SYRIZA's political origins, the composition of its constituent groups and ideology well represent the history of the Greek left, the plurality of its ideological stances and their changes. SYRIZA was formed as a coalition of left and radical left parties between 2001 and 2004, with the Coalition of Left, of Movements and Ecology (*Συνασπισμός της Αριστεράς των Κινήμάτων και της Οικολογίας* – SYN) as its largest member, providing at least 80 per cent of its cadres, activists and voters. SYN was founded at the end of the 1980s as an electoral alliance between the pro-Soviet and orthodox marxist KKE and the eurocommunist Greek Left, born from the splitting of the KKE-Interior. Finally, after the KKE left the coalition, SYN was constituted as a party in 1992. SYN defined itself as a pluralist left party of democratic socialism, neither orthodox communist nor social democratic, supporting a mixed economy and committed on “new issues” like feminism, democratic rights and the environment. Thus, SYN displayed a post-modern political outlook and pluralist ambitions, though strictly rooted in a leftist discourse, appealing to “the men and women of work and culture, the young and the excluded” (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou 2013).

SYRIZA formed as a unitary party after the electoral exploit of 2012. The founding congress of SYRIZA was held in July 2013, with fifteen other constituent members alongside SYN, ranging from orthodox marxist positions to social-democracy and ecologism. On the left of SYN we find the trotskyst of the Internationalist Workers Left, the Anti-capitalist Political Group, the libertarian communist Roza and the maoist of the KOE (Communist Organisation of Greece), supporting the country exit from the Eurozone and whose members participated in the “I won't pay” (*Δεν Πληρώνω*⁵) movement. Ecologist constituents are the Radical Ecologists, Ecosocialist Greece and Kokkino (“Red”), particularly active in migrants issues. The democratic socialist constituents comprise Democratic Society Movement (DIKKI) and New Fighter (*Νέος Αγωνιστής*), the latter formed in 2006

and hosting former members of the PASOK. Closer to the SYN positions are the eurocommunist of the Renewed Communist Ecological Left (AKOA - Ανανεωτική Κομμουνιστική και Οικολογική Αριστερά). Finally, in the congress of Athens we also find the patriotic left of the Citizen Association Rigas, the Movement for the Unity of Action of the Left (KEDA - Κίνηση για την Ενότητα Δράσης της Αριστεράς), the Union of the Democratic Centre, the Unitarian Movement and the Movement of the Active Citizens, led by the prominent figure of Manolis Glezos.

With the formation of a single party the constituent members agreed on dissolve their organisations. SYRIZA has been structured with at its base the local sections, whose representatives elect each two years the prefectural committees (art. 11.1 of the founding charter). SYRIZA highest political organ is the Central Commission which is responsible to implement the decisions taken during the congresses, assuming the political direction of the party. The Central Commission elect the Political Secretariat and his/her secretary (art. 13.1). A general congress is held each three years (art. 13.1) and it elects the Central Commission and the party's organ responsible for the economic auditing (art. 13.2). The regional steering committees coordinate the activities between the national and local organs. They are composed by two members of each prefecture of the region, the coordinators of the prefectural committees, the members of parliament elected in the region, the members of the Central Commission affiliated to the regional local sections and the party members holding an elective charge in the regional administration (art. 12.1).

According to the preamble of SYRIZA founding charter “Socialism is a form of organization of the society based on social ownership and management of the means of production”. As a consequence, the main goal set by SYRIZA is “the overthrow of the domination of the forces of the neoliberalism and of the memoranda, the forces of social destruction, and the emergence of a government of the united Left, embedded in a broad social alliance”. However, the ideological pluralism inside SYRIZA poses major dilemmas concerning the future orientations of the party. After the electoral breakthrough SYRIZA was no more a radical left coalition gravitating around 5% of preferences. It suddenly became a political force attracting a massive inflows of votes not only from the left but also from large constituencies of the centre, well beyond its previous militant base and the social strata it aspires to defend against the interests of the capital. The responsibility to take office as a majority party requires a clear and unambiguous government programme, synthesising the internal dialectics and overcoming the different position of its constituent members. This task exposes the tensions between a realist approach, promoted by the party leadership dominated by the former members of SYN, and the

defence of a radical stance true to the socialist idea and its realisation without compromise. As other western European left and centre-left parties, SYRIZA critics of the capitalist system will be challenged by its majoritarian ambitions and, eventually, by the budgetary constraints imposed by the exercise of government. In his case study on Sweden and the United States, Blyth (2005) points out the crucial role of domestic institutions in the production of social democratic policies and notably the state control of monetary authority and credit creation. In this sense, the credentials of SYRIZA leftist alternative depends on the party's position on the EMU, and, inexorably, on a change in the economic policy orientations on the European institutional level.

A eurosceptic and populist threat to *Europe* ?

The national elections held in the Eurozone member states during the debt crisis highlighted the politicisation of the European public sphere, along with the increasing Europeanisation of the national political space. *Europe* constantly stood as the main topic in national public debates, following a process of increasing politicisation. It did not constitute simply a relevant event, but the top issue on the political agenda of the Eurozone member states. Furthermore, Europeans leaders and government officials from other Eurozone countries became familiar presences in the national debates and media. *Europe* stood as a cleavage shaping the national political arena and cross-cutting the left-right divide. Nonetheless, the discourse over *Europe* is not simply articulated in terms of support or opposition, along a unidimensional “Europeism - Euroscepticism” line. In effect, the contestation against the European governance can target the Euro or the (current) policies - notably the management of the debt crisis - but not the institutions or the European construction as such (Kopecky & Mudde 2002).

Krouwel and Abts (2007) propose a framework where political support for / discontent with *Europe* is articulated according to the targets of political support and the degree of reflexivity. The targets of political support include European authorities, the European regime (including institutions, performance and regime principles) and the European community. Reflexivity refers to *the extent to which individuals are able to differentiate evaluations between different actors and institutions in a political system*, generating five types of attitudes: confidence, distrust, scepticism, cynicism and alienation. Following this typology, the attitudes towards the EU of the M5S and SYRIZA can be both qualified of sceptic, in the sense of a responsible and open-minded criticism, as they *allow for the possibility that the political system will act on their behalf and take their values and interests into account, although they never assume this happens as a rule* (Krouwel & Abts 2007, p.42).

Coming to the narratives shaping the European debate during the sovereign debt crisis, we can resume them as follow: a) the “battle” in defence of the EU and (the permanence in) the Euro b) the struggle between a social Europe versus a dominating neo-liberal Europe c) the anti-austerity struggle d) anti-Euro positions and e) another Europe outside the EU institutions or nationalist stances (Eurocynicism / Euro-alienation). It should be highlighted how the call for a major role for Europe in actively sustaining growth and policies of major solidarity does not always couple with the anti-austerity protest. In fact, the anti-austerity struggle is also endorsed by those movements and parties denouncing the limits imposed by the EMU, and thus claiming the return to the national currency, as well as by parties displaying anti-EU positions. Furthermore, while the neo-liberal vs social Europe cleavage is mainly reproduced in the discourse of the lefts, the equation between neo-liberal discourse and centre-right can be misleading. The Italian centre-right hostility to the European economic and fiscal constraints, that ultimately led to the fall of Berlusconi government, and Nea Demokratia uncompromising opposition to the Memorandum before assuming office are good case in point. The revision of the Stability and Growth Pact and the necessity of policies of growth and of a demand-led recovery were claimed equally by the left as by the right. Rather, the “neo-liberal vs social Europe” discourse seems more to follow the European divide between northern and southern European member states. Finally, in the political debate the lines among the crisis different narratives can be easily blurred, the tones and the arguments more or less sharp, according to a party being in power or at the opposition. In the first case, the party has to shore up the social legitimacy of yet weak institutions called to manage the crisis. In the other case, the opposition parties search to articulate a convincing discourse over the “change” and maximise their popular support.

The discourse associated with the defence of the EU and the Euro, whatever the price and the sacrifices, is mainly presented in the narratives of the national and European actors usually in charge of institutional posts. Since they are called to manage, bargain or implement the policies in a difficult political and economic environment these actors highlight the “necessity” of the economic sacrifices in order to defend the European process, warning that any step back could unleash the ghosts of the European past. In these narratives, the Euro is more than a currency, the tangible symbol of the European promise of peace and prosperity. As a consequence, *Europe* is one with the EU and the Eurozone, their critics and opponents being negatively identified as eurosceptic, anti-european or nationalist, their arguments denounced as populist. When SYRIZA secretary Alexis Tsipras was designed as the European Left candidate for the post of President of the European Commission, the spokeswoman of Nea Demokratia Anna Asimakopoulou characterised the parties supporting the candidacy “as extremist parties fanatically committed against the

Euro and the Eurozone”.⁶ Besides the negative characterisation of the opponent's allies, we see how their European credentials are dismissed in reason of their negative stance toward the Euro and the Eurozone. The EU is here defined by what is considered its most far reaching achievement in terms of integration. For its part, SYRIZA's leadership managed with caution the issue of the country permanence in the EMU, despite the rejection of the Euro by a significant internal minority of the party's left. In any case, an open anti-Euro stance has been so far carefully avoided. Be it economic or electoral pragmatism, this further highlights the symbolic value of the Euro: the Euro makes Europe real and reifies it as a political order (Risse 2003). A similar attitude towards the Euro is kept by the M5S. Nevertheless, the M5S confides to a referendum the question of remaining or exiting the EMU.

Missing of an ideological world-view the M5S official program does not embrace a specific vision of *Europe* accordingly. The approach of the M5S to Europe is tactical and often based on the impromptu declarations of its leader and on the prevailing mood of its basis. As in the case of national policies, the M5S fixes its positions in immediate issues and proposals rather than providing a comprehensive policy. Furthermore, despite the blasts against the economic “strong powers” and their intertwined interests (*poteri forti*), the Europe of the lobbies and the banking system, the discourse of the M5S cannot be placed in the neo-liberal vs social Europe divide. In fact, the construction of this narrative is grafted on the traditional ideational resources of the left-right dialectic that the M5S carefully avoid, in order to be not associated with the “old” politics and their ideologies. The orientations of the M5S concerning the European policies have been translated in seven points for the 2014 European elections: i) a referendum over the permanence of the country in the Euro; ii) the abolition of the Fiscal Compact; iii) the adoption of the “eurobond” iv) an alliance among the Mediterranean countries for a common policy; v) the exclusion of investments in innovation and new productive activities from the 3% annual deficit threshold; vi) the funding for the agricultural and farming activities intended for domestic consumption; v) the abolition of the budget balance. These proposals make clear the collocation of the M5S in the anti-austerity camp.

On the contrary, SYRIZA's anti-austerity discourse and its anti-Memorandum fight are framed in the social Europe paradigm. During the first general strike against the austerity measures, on 5 May 2010, the Party of the European Left (EL), of which SYRIZA is member, stated its support *to the Greek people in their struggle for the Disengagement from the EU-IMF mechanism and from its neoliberal “know-how”* and the commitment of its member parties *together with trade-unions and social movements for a social Europe*. The challenge of SYRIZA to the European governance cannot be qualified of euroscepticism as the participation of Greece in the European institutions is not questioned. Instead,

SYRIZA calls for “another” Europe, built on solidarity and a major democratic accountability. These political lines were established by the EL in its first congress held in Athens in 2005 and were inspired by those social movements that campaigned against the international economic and financial institutions during the 2000s. The ideological affiliation of SYRIZA defined also his role on the European level while the M5S entered the European political arena as a mysterious object. SYRIZA's electoral exploit in 2012 made the Greek radical left party the most important exponent of the European Left in the EU. Thus, not only fellow parties, social movements and personalities from all around Europe supported SYRIZA and its battle against austerity, but SYRIZA became a protagonist in the European public sphere.

A final comparative assessment of the M5S and SYRIZA, can be made through another characterisation that their opponents, at home as well as at the European level, often address to them or to their discourse: populism. Tarchi (2003) defines populism both as a specific set of political and cultural trends ingrained in a society, finding representation in specific mass movements, and as a style and conception of politics that can be adopted from ideologically different political parties. Its central tenet is *the belief in the innate virtues of the people, whose primacy is the sole source of legitimisation*. The main features of populism can be detected in the style of the political leadership, in its rhetoric and in the type of political representation defended. Populist parties show a strict dependence on their (charismatic) leader, whose influence is not accountable to instruments of internal democracy or to other party organs. Usually, the leader present him/herself as not a professional politician, coming from civil society and with no connection with other parties. The populist rhetoric needs a *context of extraordinary dramatization*, its aim being the refounding of democracy from its roots and to give back power and political representation to the people. Thus, the traditional enemies of populism are parties and politicians, bureaucracy and technocrats, the finance and intellectuals and media. These make up a corrupted and colluded system detaining the political, economic and cultural power (Tarchi 2003).

The sovereign debt crisis offered a context of extraordinary dramatization. The radical critics of the political and economic system and its conflict of interests (“*conflitti di interesse*”) or interconnected interests (“*διαπλεκόμενα συμφέροντα*”) frequently where charged with a populist rhetoric and argumentations. However, in the case of SYRIZA we can speak mainly of a style of politics – to which, inter alia, almost all the political forces involved in the Memorandum – anti-Memorandum manichaeon struggle have more or less resorted. But the party's structured organisational model, its lively internal debate and, as a consequence, the limitations to which its leadership is subdued do not match the characteristics of an authentic populist movement. The structured system of representation between central

organs and regional and local representations prevented the appearance of a leadership without formal checks and balance as in the case of the M5S. In effect, Grillo's style of leadership and rhetoric are not the only features that allow to qualify the M5S as a populist party. Grillo's leadership (and ownership) of the movement, not limited by formal mechanisms of control and accountability, contradicts the real emancipation and self-organisation of the movement's base and thus that same model of direct democracy advocated by his founder.

Conclusion and final considerations

SYRIZA and the M5S are the parties that better expressed the protest during the sovereign debt crisis. Both could aspire to a majoritarian role in their respective political systems, by expanding their constituencies beyond their militant bases and groups of society more sensitive to their message. The message of the M5S, refraining from any ideological stance, appeals to all citizens to take back politics from the hands of the corrupted politicians and realize a real democracy through the help of the Internet. On the contrary, SYRIZA affirmed its hegemony on the left after the 2012 elections and it is from the left that it pointed towards the swinging electorate of the centre. The objective of Grillo to conquer “100%” of the Parliament seats, “the citizens becoming the state”, and to clean politics from the partitocracy state by themselves the populist mission of the M5S. However, this ambition cannot federate alone the diverse electorate of the movement in a stable catch all party. This is, in any case, a development vehemently rejected by Grillo: the M5S is first of all a citizen movement whose existence is finalised to the dissolution of partitocracy.

The path of SYRIZA to become a government party seems to have more solid foundation, due to its clear ideological stance and policy preferences that can fix the anti-Memorandum protest in a long term political project, supported by different sectors of society. However, this majoritarian drive could exact the moderation of its original radical discourse. As for other socialist parties in western Europe in the past, the eventuality of taking office poses a dilemma in pursuing the struggle against the forces of neo-liberism. On one hand SYRIZA would finally accept the diagnosis of the problems and, above all, the constraint set by the dominant discourse and claim that it has better solutions. On the other hand, it can continue the effort to persuade voters and European partners that the solution lies in a radical change of policy paradigm, redefining both diagnosis and constraints (Przeworsky 2001). The sovereign debt crisis and the anti-Memorandum struggle in Greece offered a unique occasion for a change of paradigm backed by a large popular support. Nevertheless, conquering the trust of voters,

European and international partners and economic players could require an unambiguous departure from the most radical and uncompromising stances.

A final remark should be made on the politicisation of Europe and the role played by the M5S and SYRIZA in the context of the Eurozone crisis. The success of the M5S and SYRIZA posed a major political challenge to actors and institutions that managed the European political and economic crisis so far. However, both parties cannot be labelled of anti-europeism, even taking in account the discontent against the EU and the Euro in a not marginal part of their electoral base. SYRIZA and the M5S stand out in the anti-austerity camp demanding major solidarity at the European level, in the form of specific demands or, as in the case of SYRIZA, by upholding a change of policy paradigm. Both the M5S and SYRIZA canalized the protest from the streets to the national Parliament and more than any other contestation movements or party during the sovereign debt crisis contributed to give a voice and representation to a malaise otherwise lost in the abstentionism or, worse, compounding xenophobic or authoritarian movements. During the 2012 Greek elections the abstention rates reached a record 34,90% in May and 37,53% in June, while around 7% of the votes went to the xenophobic extreme right of Golden Dawn. Finally, the politicisation, even through policy contestation, *of Europe* is the only alternative to the alienation *from Europe*. A major involvement of the citizens in the European political debates and a major democratic accountability of the decisional process are the only way to counteract the crisis of social legitimacy suffered by the EU and overcome its economic and political impasse.

References

- Akkerman, T. (2003). "Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology ?". *Acta Politica*, 38, 147 – 159.
- Blyth, M. (2005). "Domestic Institutions and the Possibility of Social Democracy". *Comparative European Politics*, 3, pp. 379 – 407.
- Bordignon F. and Ceccarini C. (2013). "Five Stars and a Cricket. Beppe Grillo Shakes Italian Politics". *South European Society and Politics*, 18 : 4, 427-449.
- Chalari, A. (2012). The Causal Power of Social Change: the case of Modern Greek Society. *Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe*, No.64. London: The London School of Economics and Political Science.
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/hellenicObservatory/CMS%20pdf/Publications/GreeSE/GreeSE-No64.pdf>
- Conti, N. (2007). "Domestic parties and European integration: the problem of party attitude to the EU, and the Europeanisation of parties". *European Political Science*, 6, pp. 192 – 207.
- Geremis, K. and Dinas, E. (2010). "Confrontation still ? Examining parties' policy positions in Greece". *Comparative European Politics*, 8 : 2, pp. 179 – 201.
- Faris, S., Italy's Beppe Grillo: Meet the Rogue Comedian Turned Kingmaker, *Time*, 07/03/2013.
<http://world.time.com/2013/03/07/italys-beppe-grillo-meet-the-rogue-comedian-turned-kingmaker/>
- Glyn, A. (Ed.) (2003). *Socialdemocracy in Neoliberal Times: the Left and Economic Policy since 1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gunther, R. P., Diamandouros N. and Sotiropoulos, D. A. (Eds.) (2006). *Democracy and the state in the New Southern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hellenic Parliament. Electoral Results
<http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Ekloges/Eklogika-apotelesmata-New/#IE>
- Inglehart R. (1997). *Modernization and Post-Modernization*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kopecky, P. and Mudde, C. (2002). "The two sides of Euroscepticism. Party positions on European Integration in East Central Europe". *European Union Politics*, 3 : 3, 297–326.
- Krouwel, A. and Abts, K. (2007). "Varieties of Euroscepticism and Populist Mobilization: Transforming Attitudes from Mild Euroscepticism to Harsh Eurocynicism". *Acta Politica*, 42, pp. 252 – 270.
- Lazar, M. (2013). "Testing Italian democracy". *Comparative European Politics*, 11, pp. 317 – 336.

- March L. and Mudde C. (2005). “What's Left of the Radical Left ? The European Radical Left after 1989: Decline and Mutation”. *Comparative European Politics*, 3, pp. 23 – 49.
- Merler, S. and Pisani-Ferry, J.P. (2012). “Sudden Stops in the Euro Area”. *Bruegel Policy Contribution*, 6. Brussels: Bruegel.
<http://www.bruegel.org/publications/publication-detail/publication/718-sudden-stops-in-the-euro-area/>
- Ministry of Interior (Italy). Archivio Storico delle Elezioni <http://elezionistorico.interno.it/index.php>
- Ministry of Interior (Greece). Parliamentary Elections 2012
<http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/v2012a/public/index.html?lang=en>
- Morlino, L. (2013). “The impossible transition and the instable new mix: Italy 1992-2012”. *Comparative European Politics*, 11, pp. 337 – 359.
- MoVimento 5 Stelle (2009). non statuto. Available on line at:
<https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/materiali-bg/Regolamento-Movimento-5-Stelle.pdf>
- MoVimento 5 Stelle. programma. Available on line at:
<http://www.beppegrillo.it/iniziative/movimentocinquestelle/Programma-Movimento-5-Stelle.pdf>
- MoVimento 5 Stelle (2014). Sette Punti per l'Europa. Available on line at:
<https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/materiali-bg/7punti.pdf>
- Mouzelis, N. and Pagoulatos G. (2002). “Κοινωνία πολιτών και ιδιότητα του πολίτη στη μεταπολεμική Ελλάδα”. *Ελληνική Επιθεώρηση Πολιτικής Επιστήμης*, N.22, pp. 5-29.
- Dimitrakopoulos, D. G. (Ed.) (2005). *Social Democracy and European Integration, The Politics of Preference Formation*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- European Left (2005). Athens Declaration of the 1st Congress of the European Left Party in Athens
<http://fr.european-left.org/positions/news/athens-declaration-1st-congress-european-left-party-athens-2005>
- European Left, “Support the General Strike in Greece on the 5th of May!”, 05/05/2010
<http://www.european-left.org/de/node/1254>
- Przeworsky (2001). “How many ways can be third ?”. In Glyn, A. (Ed.). *Socialdemocracy in Neoliberal Times: the Left and Economic Policy since 1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Risse, T. (2010). *A Community of Europeans ? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Risse, T. (2003). “The Euro between national and European identity”. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 10 : 4, pp. 487 – 505.
- Schmidt V. and Gualmini E. (2013). “The political sources of Italy's economic problems: Between

opportunistic leadership and pragmatic, technocratic leadership”. *Comparative European Politics*, 11, pp. 360 – 382.

SYRIZA (2013). Καταστατικό. Available on line at:
http://www.syriza.gr/page/katastatiko.html#.UypMeo_dnQq

Tarchi, M. (2003). *L'Italia Populista*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Tsakatika, M. and Eleftheriou, C. (2013). “The Radical Left's Turn toward Civil Society in Greece. One Strategy, Two Paths”. *South European Society and Politics*, 18 : 1, pp. 81 – 99.

- ¹ The total percentage of preferences given to the parties which did not succeed in securing at least a seat in the Parliament amounted to 19,03% of the preferences in May and 5,98% in June. Among these parties were the conservative right of the Popular Orthodox Rally (from 2,90% in May to 1,58% in June), that collapsed electorally after its contradictory participation into the Papademos government, the Green Ecologists (From 2,93% to 0,88%) and the liberals of Dimiourgia, Xana! / Recreate Greece (from 2,15% to 1,59%).
- ² Born after the split of a reformist wing of SYRIZA (the Renewal Wing platform) in 2010, *Demokratiki Aristera* (DIMAR) was at its first electoral experience. Led by the mild mannered Fotis Kouvelis, whose figure contrasted with that of Tsipras both in reason of its age and of its political style, DIMAR campaigned against the Memorandum policies, but proposing a gradual phasing out from the Memorandum programmes or a revision concerted with the international partners and institutions, in order to save the country's permanence in the EMU. Given these preconditions, DIMAR was open to cooperate in a government of national unity unlike SYRIZA which excluded any government of national unity whose objectives were not the prompt cancellation of the Memorandum. Thus, the MPs elected by DIMAR (19 in May, 17 in June, with the electoral preferences slightly above 350,000 in both electoral rounds) became crucial in the formation of a coalition government. This would not happen in the elections of May. However, after the electoral round of June DIMAR supported the ND-PASOK parliamentary majority already numbering a total of 162 MPs.
- ³ The “V” stands for *vaffanculo*, the Italian interjection (“get off!”) many time addressed by Grillo to the Italian political and economic establishment during the event. The letter, capital and in red in the movement logo, take also the shape of the sign affixed to the specific objectives and proposals realised thanks to the action of the movement. Finally, in the case of the V-Day, the “V” winked also to the popular dystopian movie *V for Vendetta*. The mask of Guy Fawkes worn by the protagonist, struggling against a future totalitarian regime, has become an icon of the late 2000s social movements and protests and the symbol of the hacktivist group Anonymous.
- ⁴ <http://beppegrillo.meetup.com/>
- ⁵ Δεν Πληρώνω claims free of charge education, health, public transport, water, electricity and all natural goods. The movement supports worker's strikes and forms of civil disobedience, including the non payments of public utilities bills. It also competed in the national elections in the spring 2012, collecting 55,646 votes (0,88%) in May and 23,734 (0,39%) in June. <http://denplirono.wordpress.com/>
- ⁶ “κόμματα του περιθωρίου, μαρξιστικά, τροτσκιστικά και φανατικά ταγμένα εναντίον του ευρώ και της ευρωζώνης”. ΣΚΑΪ.gr / ΑΜΠΕ, *Επίθεση ΝΔ για υποψηφιότητα Τσίπρα στην προεδρία της Κομισιόν - Απάντηση του ΣΥΡΙΖΑ*, 21/10/2013. <http://www.skai.gr/news/politics/article/244321/nd-gia-upopsifiotita-tsipra-stin-proedria-tis-komision-ton-stirizoun-komata-tou-perithoriou-d/>