

Chapter 3

Looking Beyond the Greek Crisis: Media Discourse and Political Rhetoric on “European Solidarity”

Maria Kontochristou
Hellenic Open University, Greece

ABSTRACT

The Greek sovereign debt crisis has not only raised concerns about the deficiencies of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and the effects of the Eurozone crisis on member states' politics and administration, but also has challenged the establishment of the Eurozone itself. The crisis has revealed a lack of democratic legitimacy whereas has severely questioned 'Europeanness'. The chapter examines solidarity as one of the fundamental principles of the European Union (EU) and pylons of the European society and identity. In particular, the chapter discusses the concept of solidarity within the EU and examines the role of discourse at the EU level. Especially, it examines what type of discourse the EU political elites and the media have engendered regarding European solidarity in the case of Greece.

Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. -Robert Schuman. The Schuman Declaration, 9 May 1950

INTRODUCTION

A common expression after 1945 was ‘never again’, which denoted the willingness to avoid another catastrophic world war and to prevent such killing, tragedy and destruction ever happening again. The EU was created against this backdrop of the post - World War II and expressed, according to the words

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of Winston Churchill (Zurich 1946), the need to form a ‘European Family’ or a ‘United States of Europe’ to ensure peace and prosperity for Europe.¹ The determination to lay the foundations of an ‘ever closer union among people of Europe’ was clearly stated in the preamble of the 1957 Treaty of Rome (Commission of the European Communities-CEC, 1983, p. 109 & 113).

Since then Europe has been transformed remarkably. European integration helped to reconcile old enemies, provided an anchor and a strong reference point for new democracies as well as a vehicle for modernization, while achieved economic convergence between countries and the reduction of inequalities within countries (Tsoukalis, 2014a). Today, more than 50 years of common institutions and norms, values and principles, Europe seems to be divided between creditors and debtors, reliable and unreliable EU member states; whereas “trust is low, the economics flawed, and the politics toxic” (Tsoukalis, 2014b, p.3). The economic crisis has fundamentally transformed Europe’s economic and political landscape and challenged the initial goal of an ‘ever closer union among people of Europe’, and that of the EU which is based on ‘de facto solidarity’.

This chapter aims to provide an overview of European discourses on solidarity regarding the Greek crisis² by paying attention to media coverage³ and especially by investigating the evolution and the different instances of discourse, politicized and produced by senior EU officials (especially German and French) who played an important role in the EU politics and decision making regarding the case of Greece.⁴ Particularly, we focus on the period spanning Papandreou’s takeover at the helm of the Greek government in October 2009 until the formation of the Samaras coalition government in June 2012, that is, covering the first years of the country’s sovereign debt crisis.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 sets the historical and economic-political framework with reference to Greece’s sovereign debt crisis. Section 3 provides a brief account on the idea and history of solidarity, explores its concept and manifestations within the European context, and introduces the empirical part of the article. Section 4 give us an overview of media’s coverage and examines whether or not the dominant representations and portrayals of Greece, during the first years of the crisis, conveyed solidarity or facilitated a sense of solidarity. Section 5 explores and discusses the European discourse(s) prevailing in the rhetoric and actions of the EU senior officials regarding the Euro crisis and Greece. Consequently, it traces the adopted tone and substance of the discourse during the first years of the crisis, as well as examines whether or not a sense of solidarity was being conveyed and if so, what kind of solidarity. The last section offers the summary and conclusion.

GREECE COURSE IN THE EU. CHALLENGES, PERSPECTIVES AND THE EUROZONE CRISIS

Greece is a country, which has endeavored to become ‘European’ i.e. ‘modern and western’, ever since the foundation of the Modern Greek state in 1833 (Mouzelis, 1978; Clogg, 1979). Alliance with the West was considered as an important condition for Greece’s modernization and development. On 1 January 1981, after the intense diplomatic efforts of Constantine Karamanlis, Greece became a full member of the European Community (EC)/EU. Greek EC membership entitled stabilization and deepening of the newly established democracy, external security, economic progress, prosperity and integration in the international economic environment (Pagoulatos, 2002). On 1 January 2001, following a struggle to streamline its economy, Greece entered into the Eurozone, thus achieving a massive national goal. Greece’s admission to the Eurozone indicated that after a long process of democratisation and economic

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