

EXAMINING PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GREEK ECONOMIC CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

In a 'fluid' world, of increasing austerity measures in various European economies, Greece is in the epicenter of all economic debates concerning its own future as well as the impact on the European Union. In order for Greece to overcome its debt crisis, the Euro-zone countries, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have agreed – during April 2010 on a loan-scheme for Greece, conditional on the implementation of austerity measures – 'Memorandum of Understanding' (from now on called MoU). The application of the MoU, along with its implications, is the major content of the public discourse and of the news bulletins in Greece.

Drawing on the rich theoretical background of propaganda, this research investigates the way the MoU and its policies have been communicated by politicians, through the Greek media (TV news broadcasts of private and public TV channels, online editions of newspapers and news websites). The research aim is to detect the ways in which propaganda, as a method, constitutes a fundamental characteristic of the public political discourse.

Keywords: Greek economic crisis, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), media representation, political discourse, media monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

The political, economic and social life of Greece has been focused on the tremendous economic crisis that penetrates the country. As a consequence, since 2010, public discourse has been primarily preoccupied with the ramifications of the severe economic policies and measures. This research investigates the way the

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MoU¹ and its policies have been communicated by Greek politicians through the media. The selected media are television, which is the sovereign medium in the Greek media environment (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), the online versions of popular Greek newspapers and news websites. Internet is a powerful player in the field of information in Greece. The research aim is to detect the ways in which propaganda, as a method, constitutes a fundamental characteristic of the public political discourse. Upon a closer inspection, we seek to examine, not just the fragmentary influence of public opinion on a concrete issue, but the continuous effort by politicians to create a ‘reality’ in which the targeted subjects are placed. In any case, it is not the intention of the current research to evaluate, in any possible way, either the MoU or its application in the Greek economy.

INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

The management and presentation of information constitute a basic axis of our theoretical framework. According to the Weberian thought, modern society – from modernity and afterwards – constitutes a bureaucratic form of organization. The bureaucratic control and the administration of modern society presuppose the continuous collection and renewal of information (Poster 1990, 36-7; Roth and Wittich 1978, 274-276). Bureaucracy itself constitutes a specific way of production and distribution of information within a more or less hierarchical structure. As Poster (1990, 7) argues, information is the key of modern society. It constitutes a meaningful entity that deals with an issue, forming intelligence or instruction for something or somebody and, as such, constitutes a *de facto* socialization apparatus in the societies of (late) modernity (Giddens 1987, 27; Castells 1998, 338). Privileged creators and distributors of information are the Mass Media (Webster 2006, 186).

Among the most distinctive features of the 20th century are media penetration and the intensification of persuasion techniques. The so-called ‘information management’ constitutes a fundamental element of the liberal capitalist societies (Webster 2006, 190). Information management complements any strategy/method that the modern political mechanisms employ in order to strengthen their cohesion and reproduce their dominant structures. The massive

¹ The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU, or known as Memorandum in Greece) is the bailout treaty signed between the Greek government on the one hand, and the ‘troika’ (E.U., I.M.F., E.C.B.) on the other, at the end of April 2010. This treaty ‘offered’ guaranteed loans to Greece, but in return Greece should implement certain financial policies, among which there were significant austerity measures, so as to diminish its fiscal debt. This first Memorandum with its updated versions are still the regulators of the economic activity in Greece. A full version of this first Memorandum in English can be found on the web site of the Greek Ministry of Finance: <http://www.minfin.gr/contentapi/f/binaryChannel/minfin/datastore/a8/52/57/a85257bc11624aa0a2f89a6bebea2219687ce5f0/application/pdf/EU%2BBundle2.pdf>.

transmission of information by the media, which has undergone special treatment in order to influence public opinion, ultimately leads to propaganda (Edelstein 1997; Jackall 1995; Lippmann 1927). Various studies (Simpson 1996; Jowett and O'Donnell 2014; Welch 2013) have designated the relation between propaganda and mass communication. As Meyer and Hinchmann (2008, 24, 53) argue, media produce and present ideas that contain values and ideology which, in turn, mould the public sphere. They are not just the words, symbols or codes that are being used. Media make a selective presentation of issues using a plethora of expressive means, contributing in the preservation (or the overthrow) of the social system's *status quo* (Luhmann 2000, 76-88). Members of modern societies depend heavily on the media in regard to their knowledge for what's going on in the world (McQuail and Vidal 1991, 118-121). This leads to an increasing and acute control of the flow of information by those who manage it (Thussu Kishan and Freedman 2003, 64).

PROPAGANDA IN TIMES OF CRISIS

A basic characteristic of propagandistic discourse is the continuous effort to generalize on the facts.² Pretending to produce a real representation of the facts, the propagandist uses emotional methods in order to persuade the public. Propaganda does not exclusively aim to change somebody's opinion on a specific issue. It may also aspire to maintain the status quo, to prompt people towards an action or to deter people from one. Consequently, propaganda constitutes a deliberate-basically political- communication process (Auerbach and Castronovo 2013) via the distribution of information by the mass media (Fraser 1957) aiming at creating particular social, political and economic 'realities' and at influencing opinions and behaviors of the subjects that exist in these 'realities' in a unilateral way (Poulakidakos 2014).

According to Snow (2002, 40), two basic characteristics of propaganda are 'its deliberate communication process that has been designed in order to influence the behavior of the targeted audience and its one-sided information'. Propaganda typology is based on the methods that are applied to achieve its goals (Hiotis 1986, 46-136). Propaganda tactics include: the selective publication of data and information, the partial presentation of events, a focus on threats or dangers, the presentation of a limited number of experts that are supposed to give a detailed and in – depth information of the subject matter, the demonization of the 'enemy', a 'narrow' framing of information, and an extensive argumentation that appeals to both reason and sentiment (Theodorakopoulos 2006).

Among the great variety of propagandistic communication strategies, the following are some of the most determining:

² While the fact might be described as an isolated incident, it is presented in such a way as to be conceived as a general and representative sample of a category of such facts, cases and persons.

1. Lies, deliberate construction and distribution of information.
2. The concealment and the unilateral presentation of information.
3. The use of exaggeration that includes a twisted presentation of either positive or negative information depending on the aims of propaganda.
4. Direct or covert invocation to fear or wish (invocation to sentiment), exercising persuasion over the use of reasonable arguments.
5. Use of rhetorical forms so as to manage the meaning of the messages, in ways over the reasonable content of communication (Corner 2007, 674-675).

According to various studies, propaganda is expressed with increased intensity in periods of crisis. This crisis can be either martial (Lehmann 2003, 63-68; Kishan and Freedman 2003, 235) – as for example the two World Wars (Allan and Zelizer 2004), and more recently the wars in Iraq or the war against terrorism- or it can be a political, economic or social crisis like the one occurring in Greece (Taylor 2004). In such periods, there is an extensive use of different methods of propaganda (control of sources of information, media influence, unilateral presentation of facts, expression of opinions based both on reasonable and sentimental argumentation, generalizations), in order to influence the targeted audience. This happens because citizens are primarily viewers of the crisis by following the news. On the other hand, the political elites, who shape the developments in periods of crises, need propaganda more than ever in order to legitimize their decisions and practices in the eyes of the citizens.

The proliferation of mass media, along with their predominance in the public sphere as privileged information transmitters, has contributed to the generalization of propaganda, as well as to its dominance in modern reality. As a consequence, politics – the privileged field of propaganda – is, in many cases, presented and being perceived as a happening and as a fragmentary, personified process that abounds with emotional argumentation and recriminations (Stoker 2009, 22-25).

In that sense, the political propagandistic strategy does not constitute the sole former of the messages that will reach the public. This message ‘suffers’ the influence of the media culture and rationale in the presentation and dissemination of information to the wider publics as well. Hence, propaganda is the combination of political communication strategy, along with the influence of the media, which will broadcast a certain piece of (propagandistic) information.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on the rationale of media monitoring, using a coding protocol (or coding frame) for the content analysis of the TV news bulletins and the web articles. The main research question explores whether the political discourse presenting the MoU through the Greek TV and Web media can be characterized as propagandistic. If so, we also look into its particular characteristics. With the term ‘propaganda’ we refer to the politicians’ attempt to influence public opinion in a unilateral way, in favor of or against the MoU, via the

use of different verbal oratories and propaganda discourse methods traced in their discourse. The politicians under scrutiny represent the at that time parliamentary parties in Greece as they had emerged by the 2009 general elections: The at that time governing sociodemocrats party of PASOK (PanHellenic Socialist Party), the major opposition party of New Democracy (center-right/ right), the Greek Communist party (KKE), the Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA) and the populist-right/far-right party of LAOS (People's Orthodox Alarm). According to our theoretical stand, propaganda is an innate component of public discourse in late modernity.

The research was conducted in the central TV news broadcasts of two private (ALTER, MEGA) and one public (NET) TV channels, the online editions of mainstream center (TA NEA), center-left (ELEFTHEROTIPIA) and center-right (KATHIMERINI) newspapers, and the news web pages www.newsit.gr and www.news247.gr. The selection of these media is based on the fact that, concerning the TV context of Greece, the selected private channels stood at the top of audience ratings for their news bulletins for the period of our research, whereas NET was the public channel with the highest audience rating.

The internet, being a hyper-medium, is a bit more complicated. One could distinguish between at least two different categories of news web sites: the 'traditional' incumbents of information, namely the news site created by traditional news corporations pre-existing the internet, and the web insurgents, namely news sites created within the internet context. The choice of the web pages acknowledges this division and includes the traditional ideological division of existing newspapers, by including one center-right, one center and one center-left newspaper.

The research covers the period from February 1st 2010 (first references on a special loan scheme for Greece) till the 30th of June 2010 (almost two months of the MoU implementation). The specific period is chosen due to the fact that it covers a significant period of time both before and after the political decision for the implementation of the MoU (decision taken on April 23rd 2010, voted as a law of the Greek state on May 6th of 2010). Two days per week have been selected: Wednesday and Friday, or Thursday and Saturday, which were rotated each week. The selection of two out of the seven weekdays gives us a representative sample of about 30% in relation to the population of the days that we wished to examine (43 out of the 135 days in total). Our unit of analysis is the integral -and meaningful- interview bite regarding the MoU of politicians, as our research aim is to examine the politicians' position on the MoU. The total number of politicians' statements that were researched is 1156 (N = 1156/ NET = 157, MEGA = 174, ALTER = 155, kathimerini.gr = 82, tanea.gr = 116, enet.gr = 286, news247.g = 88, newsit.gr = 101) and they were processed with SPSS 20. For the statistic elaboration of the results, so as to demonstrate probable differences between politicians of opposing parties, we used two different statistical tests: the chi-square test and the ANOVA. The chi-square test is used to examine the correlation between two categorical or interval-ratio variables. Chi- square informs the researcher about the intensity of the

correlation between two variables, but it does not demonstrate the direction of this correlation (Siomkos and Vasilakopoulou 2005, 173-8; Gnardelis 2003, 353-60).

Additionally, as far as the creation of three different propaganda scales is concerned, we used the Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA), which examines whether the differences in the means of these scales compared to certain independent variables are statistically significant, using the F-test. In order to implement the ANOVA, we need to have a categorical or interval ratio independent variable and a continuous dependent variable (Siomkos and Vasilakopoulou 2005, 229-238; Rutherford 2001).

The measurements for the existence of propaganda in the political discourse will be based on specific characteristics, such as generalities and lack of detailed information about the MoU, responsibilities shifting to political rivals, unilateral presentation of the possible consequences of the MoU, the attempt to provoke either negative or positive sentiments to the receivers of the messages, by either talking about a handful of positive perspectives, or by describing a definitely dystopic future.

Apart from our main research question, there are also a number of research hypotheses:

H1. Among the dominant propagandistic practices is the one-sided presentation of the subject matter by the propagandist usually focusing on generalities. Consequently, we expect an insufficient and partial presentation of the MoU content on behalf of the politicians, in order to influence public opinion either in favor or against the text.

H2. Another popular propagandistic practice is that of shifting the responsibilities on others. We, therefore, expect to find frequent use of this practice by politicians.

H3. With the same logic, there is also the one sided presentation of the possible consequences of the MoU. We expect that its supporters, i.e. parties that supported its adoption and voted for its application, will focus on its positive aspects, while the MoU opponents will focus on its negative repercussions.

H4. According to the propaganda theory, we expect that the presentation of the logical and sentimental arguments in favor or against the MoU will also be one sided. It is expected that the political supporters of the MoU will have a favorable logical and sentimental argumentation towards the MoU, while its opponents will have a negative logical and sentimental argumentation concerning the MoU.

H5. The propagandistic discourse, that is used either to promote the MoU as an essential solution, or to disdain it as an inadequate solution to the fiscal crisis, will aim – according to the approaches of propaganda in crisis situations –to create fear, insecurity and the feeling of ‘dead-end’, meaning that people should either adopt it or totally reject it.

Finally, we state an additional research question: Could we possibly create a ‘scale’ of the logical and sentimental argumentation for the MoU as expressed by the politicians through the TV and web media, which will demonstrate which category of arguments prevails in the words of the politicians regarding the MoU and its implications?

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A first glance on the generality rate of the references on the MoU measures demonstrates that the vast majority (nine out of 10) of the politicians chooses to talk about the MoU in a general and vague way, rather than to analyse its proposed actions in detail (Figure 1). To become more analytic, the 1156 politicians mention only 262 times several MoU categories, and only 10 out of the 17 total different MoU categories, as shown in Figure 2.

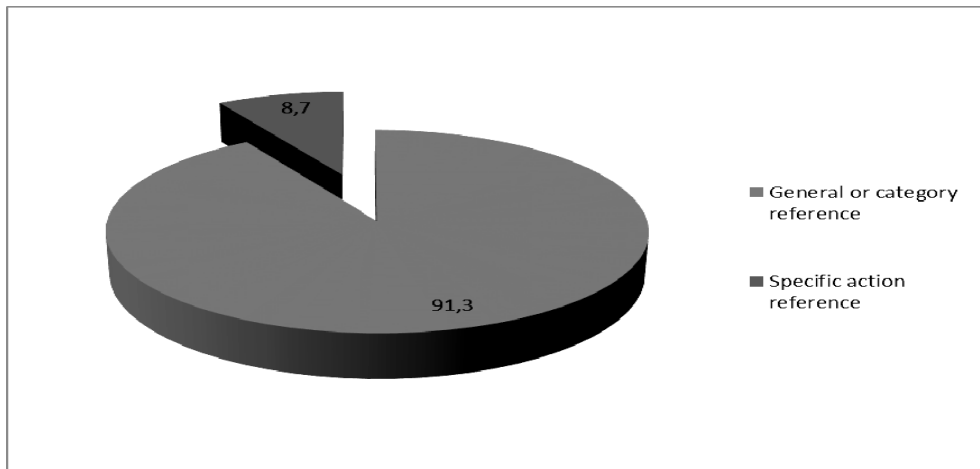


Figure 1: General or specific references of MoU measures.

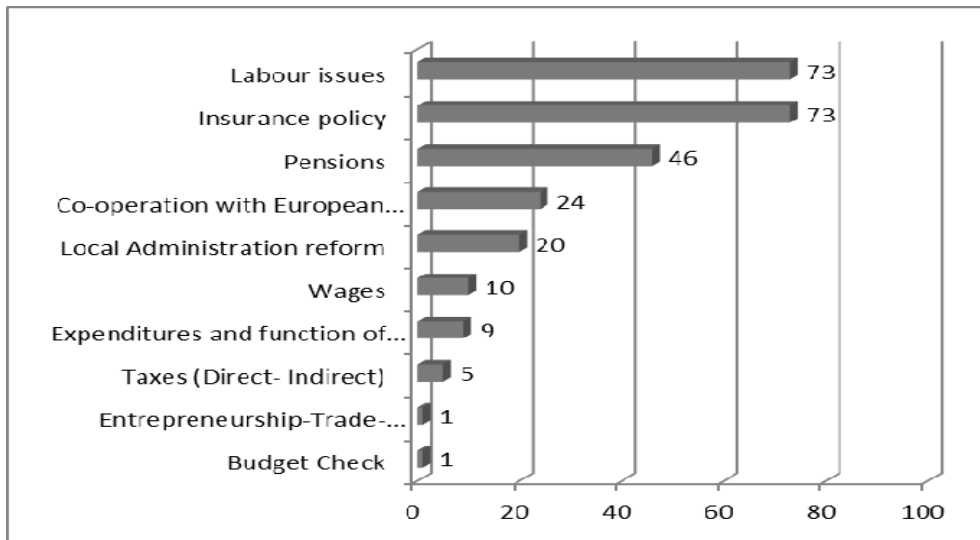


Figure 2: Referred MoU categories.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 3, among the 1156 politicians' statements about the MoU, there are only 119 references to specific actions of the MoU, even less than the references to the categories. Additionally, from a total number of 97 actions included in the MoU, only 20 of them are mentioned, and only three of the 20 mentioned ones are presented in public more than 10 times.

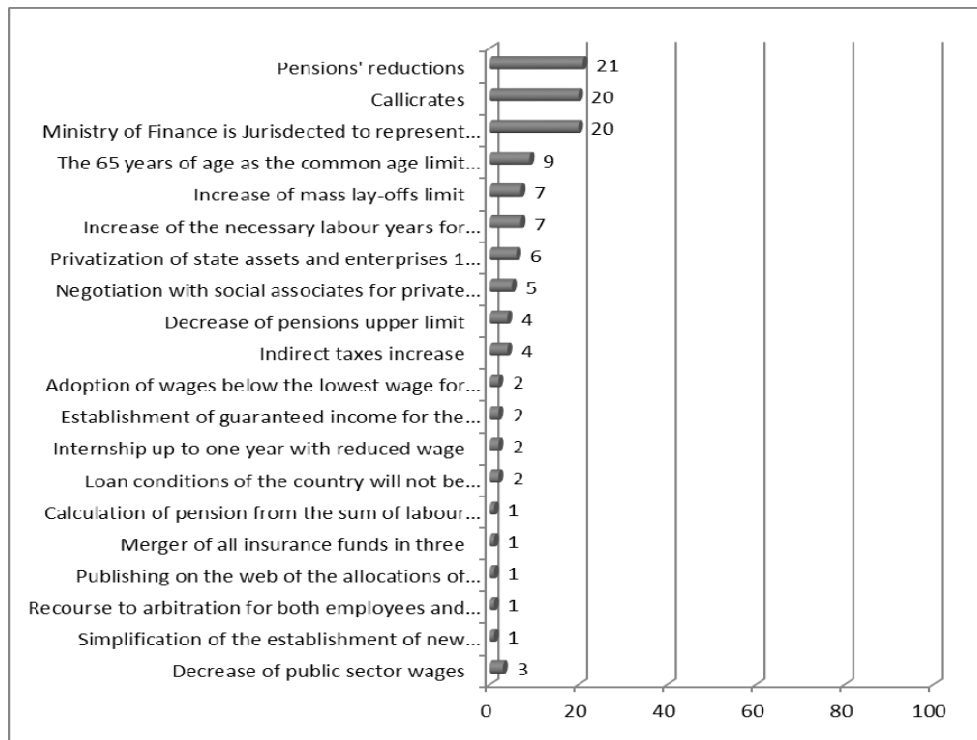
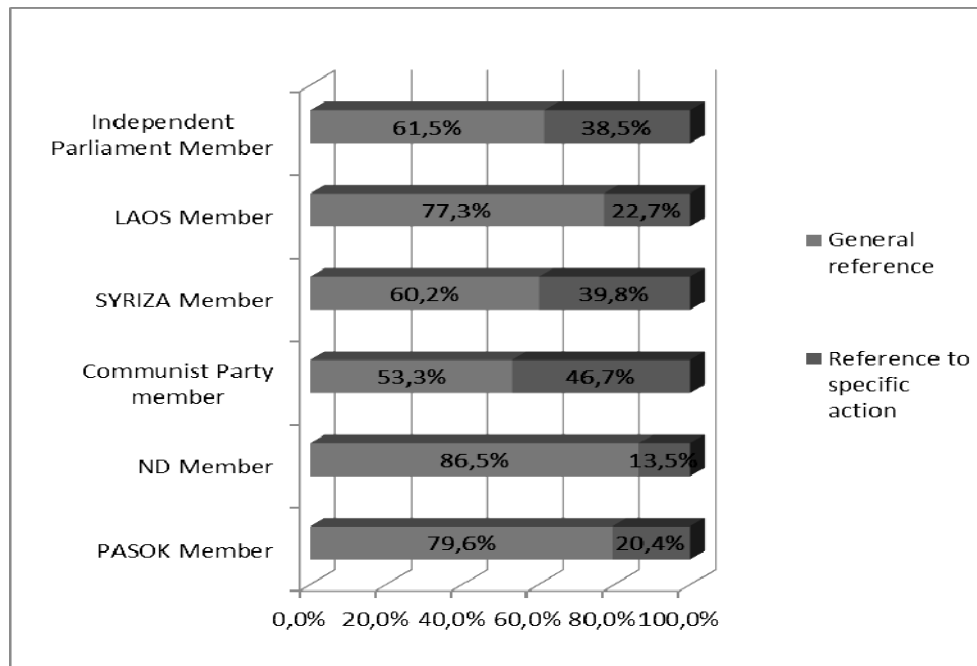


Figure 3: Referred MoU actions.

To end with the generality of reference rate, the per party generality shows that leftist parties (Greek Communist Party-KKE with 46.7% and SYRIZA with 39.8%) appear to present the MoU through their discourse in a more specific way than the central PASOK (20.4%) and the right wing parties ND (13.5%) and LAOS (22.7%). The two – at that time – biggest parties, PASOK and ND, appear to have a protagonist role in the lack of detailed references concerning the MoU, each one for different reasons. The ND party, because throughout the whole discussion about the MoU does not adopt a specific opinion for or against it, changing its mind in several cases, whereas PASOK tries to diminish the negative impressions created by the ‘painful’, for the wide masses, measures included in the MoU (Figure 4). All of the abovementioned results lead us to the acceptance of our first research hypothesis.

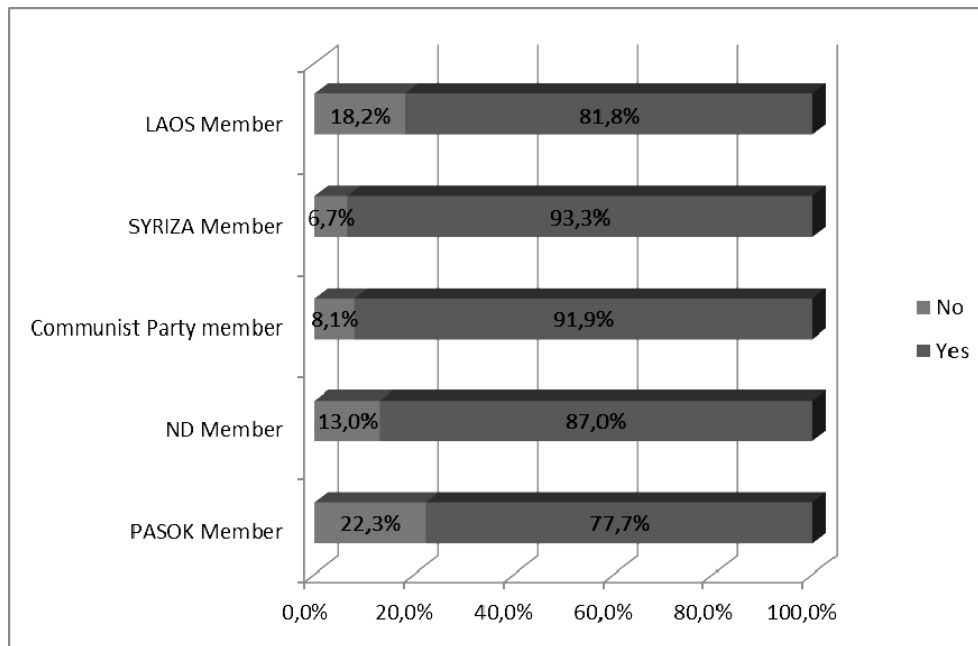


The chi- square test revealed a statistically significant relationship of the generality of reference to the MoU between the different parties (sig. = .000).

Figure 4: Generality of reference to MoU per party.

Mentionworthy is the fact that almost every focus on the categories or actions included in the MoU has to do with the unpleasant measures it includes so as a special bailout loan to Greece would be allowed. Such measures include – among others – decreases in pensions and salaries, increase in pension age limits, changes in labour relations, taxation, etc. In this way, the public discussion presented in the Media was conquered by the unpleasant policies the Greek government would have to implement so as to avoid the fiscal deadend. Under this scope, the whole discussion about the MoU was inherently against the MoU and its policies, based on an agenda created by the Media themselves, through the choice of specific aspects of the MoU, which were evaluated as the most important ones. This constitutes a first sign of the Media influence in the public debate concerning the MoU.

Another rather widely used propagandistic method, according to our theory, is the transfer of responsibility. The notion of responsibility is closely bound to the political elites, in the sense that they institutionally undertake the decision making roles within each political system.



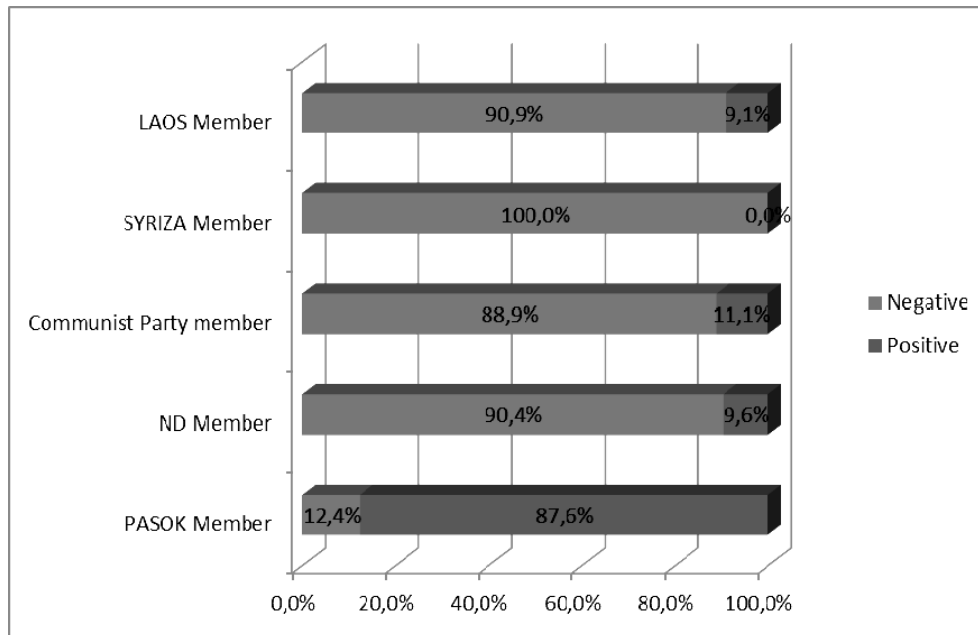
The chi-square test revealed a statistically insignificant relationship of the shifting of responsibility between the different parties (sig.= .132).

Figure 5: Shifting of responsibility.

As shown in Figure 5, all different parliamentary political parties make significant use – all percentages are above 75% – of the shifting of responsibility method so as to influence the public opinion in favor of their opinion on the MoU. Among the most imminent users of responsibility transfer are the leftist parties (SYRIZA, Communist Party – KKE), because they are the ones with the fewer participations in the government of the Greek state since the restoration of the democracy, after the coup d' etat of 1967-1974. On the other side, though with high use of responsibility thereafter, stands PASOK – the at that time governing party – and LAOS, which make the less use of this method, possibly because they are the ones that support mainly the implementation of the MoU, and finally voted for it in the Greek Parliament during the ballot of 6 May 2010. The results regarding the shifting of responsibility allow us to accept our second research hypothesis.

As far as the estimated consequences of the MoU are concerned, Figure 6 demonstrates the polarization of the Greek political scene during the discussion of the MoU. There is a clear divide between the governing party of PASOK, the members of which focus on the positive consequences of the MoU, and the opposing parties of ND, SYRIZA and the Communists (KKE), which stress out the possible negative consequences of the MoU, and finally voted against it. LAOS is a rather peculiar case, because its members refer in rather few cases to the possible

consequences of the MoU, focusing mainly on the negative ones, even though they finally voted for it, considering it as ‘harmful, but necessary nonetheless’, so as to tackle with the serious fiscal problems of the Greek economy. The differences in the estimation of the MoU consequences make us accept our third research hypothesis.



The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant relationship of the presentation of consequences between the different parties representatives (sig. = .000).

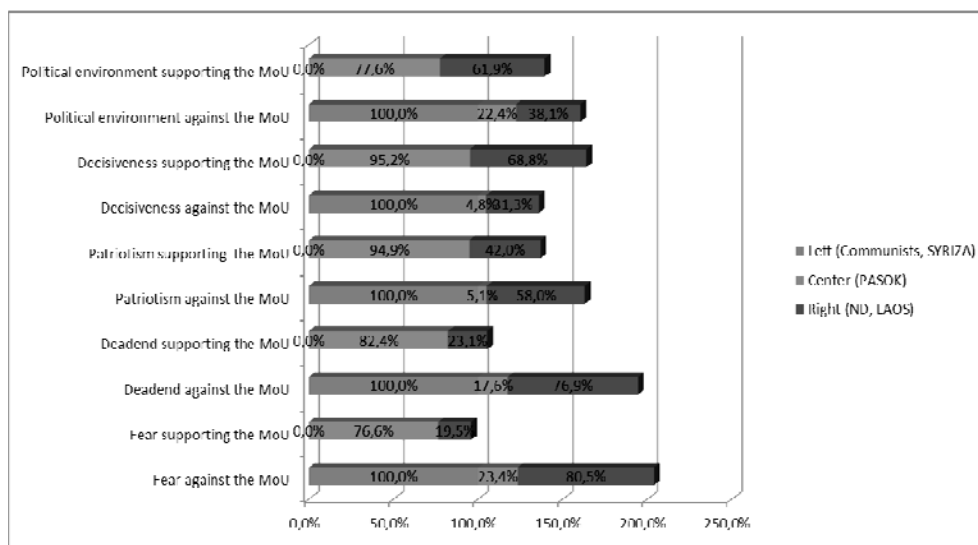
Figure 6: Estimation of MoU consequences.

The onesidedness of the use of the propagandistic sentimental and logical methods can be verified by Figure 7, where it becomes obvious that politicians especially of center and left wing parties manipulate sentiments and logical argumentation³ so as to support their own totally different views on the MoU.

³ Sentimental methods (positive and negative ones): fear, dead-end, uncertainty, derogation, attack on opponents, dilemma, hope, patriotism, decisiveness, plainfolks, euphemism, altruism. Logical methods: numerical data regarding the MoU, reference to political conditions, reference to structural problems, reference to specific consequences of the MoU with evidence, acceptance of mistakes of the past, emphasis on specific aspects of the MoU, honesty with evidence, reference to alternative solutions with evidence. Both sentimental and logical methods are based on specific meanings conveyed by the political statements. E.g. the fear/dead-end sentiment emerges from a statement supporting that ‘the implementation (or not, depending on the political side) will be the conviction of the Greek economy, it will kneel down the small enterprises, it will suppress the personal income and will create the conditions for an explosive recession’. Both the sentimental and rational propagandistic methods are quantified on the basis of their existence or not in the examined statements.

Our findings make us assume that ideologically different communicators use quite similar techniques, so as to support totally different evaluations of the MoU, evaluations which agree with each communicator's ideological orientation. This observation confirms the unilateral use of specific methods, aiming to influence the public opinion in a unilateral way in favor of the propagandist.

This rationale stands in the very essence of propaganda, as it has been defined in our theory. In our case the unilateral use of specific sentimental and logical propagandistic methods- characterized as such depended on if they aim at the sentiments or the logic of the propagandee- supplements the already shown generalities and unilateral presentation of the MoU causes and consequences.

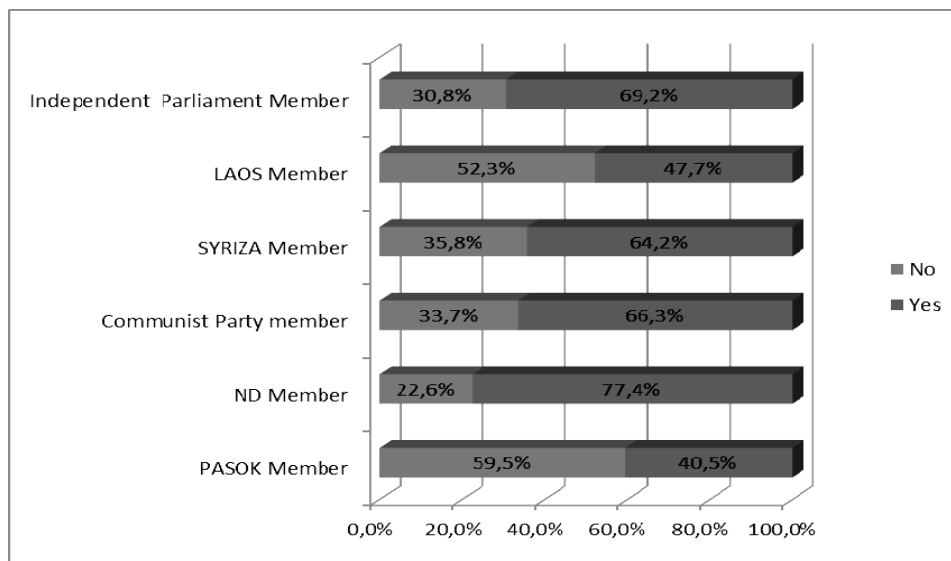


For the in the Graph presented propagandistic methods, the chi-square test we conducted revealed a statistically significant relationship between the use of different methods for or against the MoU among different ideologies (sig. = .000).

Figure 7: Propagandistic use of sentimental and logical arguments.

The rather 'unclear' position of the right-conservative politicians towards the MoU has to do with the dichotomy within the ND, whether to support or not the MoU. We have to mention at this point that the 'leaks' of PASOK and ND during the ballot for the MoU in the Parliament, were rather limited after an intensive effort on behalf of the parties' leaderships. Additionally, LAOS- the other conservative pole of the Greek parliament during 2010- finally voted for the implementation of the MoU, even though its rhetoric was rather negative towards the treaty. The onesidedness of the use of sentimental and logical propagandistic techniques leads us to the acceptance of our fourth research hypothesis.

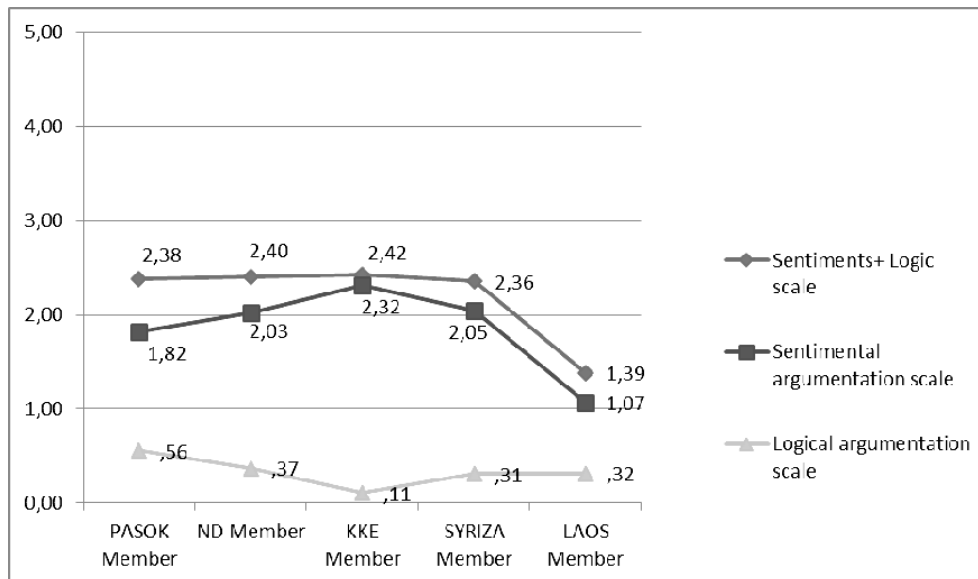
Another propagandistic method is the cultivation of a fear/dead-end environment. Almost all parliamentary parties, with the exceptions of PASOK (40.5%) and LAOS (47.7%), make use of this method in percentages above 60%. These percentages demonstrate the purpose of the opposition to underline the dangers of the MoU, whereas the voters of the MoU (PASOK, LAOS) try not to rely that much on negative sentiments to promote their argumentation. The significant diversification of the percentages of the fear/ dead-end argumentation stands as one more proof of the propagandistic manipulation of the negative sentiments on behalf of the different political parties.



The chi- square test revealed a statistically significant relationship of the uses of fear/ dead-end between the different parties (sig. = .000).

Figure 8: Cultivation of fear/dead-end environment.

To end with the results, we have tried to research which propagandistic methods, either sentimental or logical ones, prevail, as far as their use is concerned in the political discourse. Two are the main observations we come up with from Figure 9: The first one is the beyond any doubt prevalence of sentimental propaganda methods as far as the political discourse is concerned. The second observation is, that in one hand the parties which oppose the MoU (ND, KKE-Communist Party, SYRIZA) use more sentimental propaganda methods to support their evaluation of the MoU, than the parties supporting the MoU. On the other hand, PASOK appears to rely a bit more on logic- compared to other parties- so as to assess the MoU. We have to note, at this point, that the decline in the number of propagandistic methods used by LAOS's members is related to the limited statements both in terms of number and extent.



The ANOVA sig. for the sentimental propagandistic methods showed a statistically significant difference between the use of sentiments among different party members (sig. = .000), whereas the same test for logical methods showed a non-significant difference between the parties members (sig. = .052) at the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 9: Propaganda scales per party.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our results, we can distinguish some important propagandistic methods in the political discourse concerning the MoU. To begin with, the discourse appears to be intensely vague and plain of generalities. The use of this method appears to be more imminent in the statements of right wing politicians. It is characteristic that among 1156 politicians' statements there are only 262 references to categories of the MoU and 119 references to specific actions imposed by the MoU. In addition, there is a high rate of responsibility 'transfer' among political rivals, especially on behalf of left wing parties, and a subsequent division between government and opposition as far as the consequences are concerned.

Additionally, one can observe a clearly propagandistic use of sentimental and logical arguments through the political discourse concerning the MoU. To be more precise, the same methods (sentimental and logical) appear to be used in a totally different way by the political opponents as far as the implementation of the MoU is concerned. Of utmost importance for the current research is the restricted use of logical propagandistic methods, demonstrating that the propaganda around the

MoU is mainly based on the provocation of certain feelings on behalf of the propagandees.

The use of sentiments though, does not appear to be linear among all politicians who expressed their opinions for or against the MoU. The opposition, the leftist parties of SYRIZA and Communists-KKE, appear to prefer the use of fear and dead-end in their propagandistic approach of the MoU, whereas PASOK, the at that time governing party, seems to prefer the use of positive sentiments like hope and patriotism in order to underline the better days that the signing of the MoU will bring to the Greek economy.

Apart from the role of the political discourse in the dissemination of propagandistic information concerning the MoU, we have to stress out the role of the Media too. In our results, this role is being demonstrated mainly in a qualitative rationale. Hence, the Media, through the publication of specific political statements, promote the discussion concerning the more 'difficult' austerity measures of the MoU (e.g. reduction of wages and pensions in public and private sector, higher pension age limits), whereas they do not shed light on other less strict- for the people- aspects of the MoU (e.g. reduction of tax evasion, simplification of the procedures for the creation of new busines, monthly control of the government budget). In that way, they promote an inherently negative perception of the MoU on behalf of the public.

The use of primarily sentimental propaganda is characteristic of crisis situations, while at the same time, the use (and abuse) of feelings 'takes us back' to the first mass propaganda campaigns of the two World Wars and wartime propaganda in general as it was implemented during the crises that took place in early and late modernity. The case of the presentation of the Greek Memorandum underlines the management of the information in order to serve communication and ideological purposes.

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