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Campaigning for Europe ‘after’ the Economic ‘Crisis’: The Cases of Greece and Portugal

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Introduction

On May 26, 2019, Portuguese and Greek citizens elected 21 members of their national delegations to the European Parliament, from 17 (Portuguese) and 40 (Greek) party/coalition lists. The governing Socialist Party (PS) ended up winning the 2019 Portuguese EP Elections, with a 33.4 percent share, one percent more than the 2014 results and almost 12 percent more than the results obtained by the Social Democratic Party (PSD). In Greece, the governing radical left-wing Syriza Party lost the EP Elections with 23.8 percent of the vote, almost three percent less than the 2014 results and around nine percent less than the centre-right New Democracy (ND) Party (Mylonas 2020: 162; Serra-Silva *et al.* 2019: 29).

European Parliament elections are generally considered second-order elections, implying less relevance than polls defining the exercise of power at a national level. As such, voters tend to strategically use EP elections to express discontent over their national government’s performance (Weber 2007: 510). Nevertheless, the issues addressed in the EP electoral campaigns both in Portugal and Greece were essentially related to first-order elections, due to proximity of the European and national elections, as well as the fact that, in the Greek case, the Euro-elections took place alongside local elections (Poulakidakos 2019: 126)¹.

As shown in Figure 15.1, most of the pre-electoral material in both countries has either a national focus, or a mixed national and European focus, usually placing domestic issues under a European perspective. We should draw attention to the fact that these quantitative results derive from a broad content analysis of campaign materials that cover social media, TV commercials, posters and press. As such, from a perspective encompassing a wider array of campaign materials, Greece is distinguished by more of a mixed national and European focus and Portugal draws towards more intense dissemination of political propaganda of a national nature. Nevertheless, from a

¹ The quantitative results are derived from the “European Elections Monitoring Center” research program, funded by the European Parliament (electionsmonitoringcenter.eu). The units of analysis for this research include print advertisements (posters, Press), political commercials (commercials broadcasted on public or private TV, and in public spaces as train stations, subways, etc.) and Facebook posts on the official accounts of major political parties that participated in the last European elections (2019) in all 28 EU countries.

narrower perspective focusing only commercials, as we shall see in our qualitative valence frame analysis, Portuguese parties frame domestic issues within a ‘Europeanised’ narrative to a greater extent than their Greek counterparts.

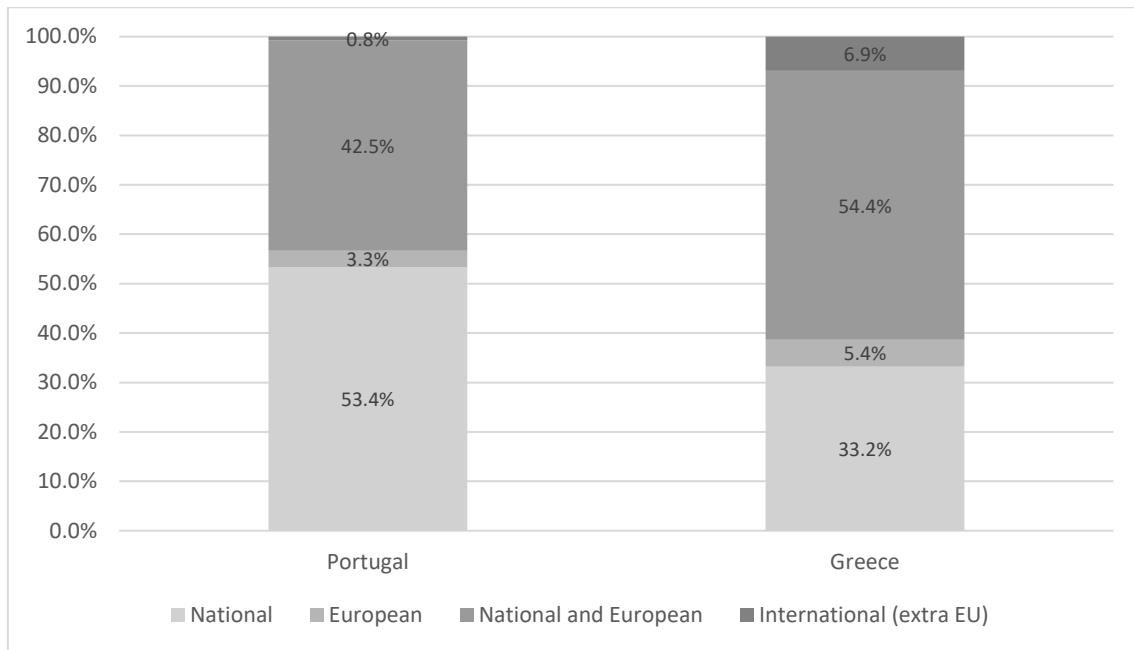


Figure 15.1: Focus of pre-electoral material per country (percent)

Note: the chi-square p value for this crosstabulation is .000.

Source: EEMC dataset 2019.

As regards the emotions conveyed in the pre-electoral material in Portugal and Greece, Figure 15.2 shows that “positive” emotions, like enthusiasm and ambition appear in most occasions, while at the same time “negative” emotions like anger or fear are rather limited. Indeed, the qualitative analysis that follows reveals a general tendency towards positive narratives constructed around pride in national identity, confidence in national benefits resulting from EU membership, and a general optimism as regards a future of prosperity, marking a distancing from past austerity politics. Such positive narratives are, however, often constructed against certain ‘outgroups’, taking recourse in perceived threats to elicit fear in the electorate.

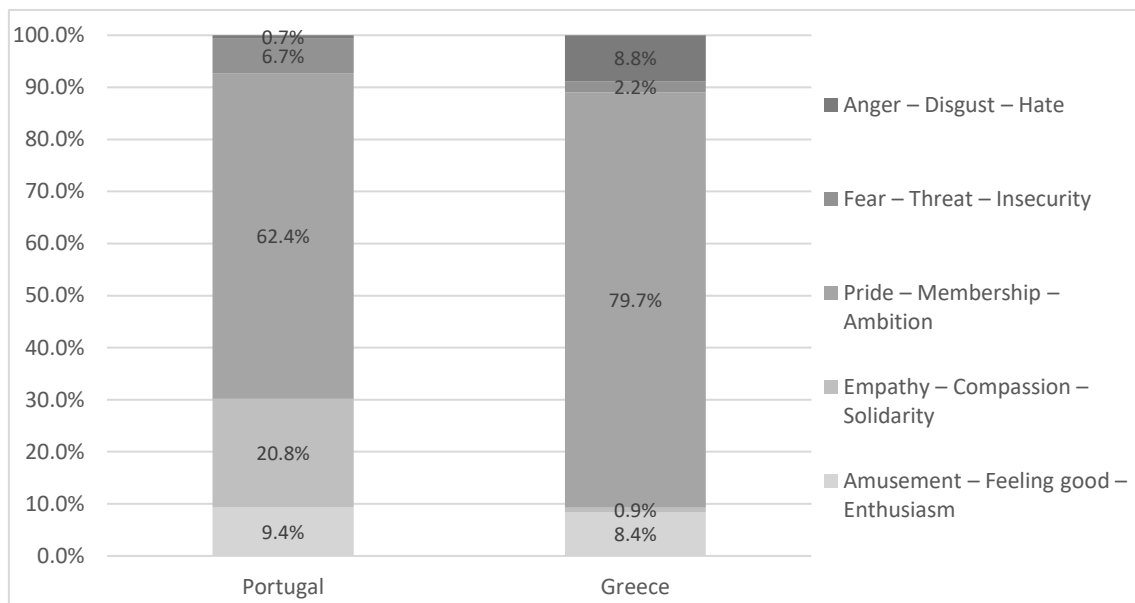


Figure 15.2: Emotions conveyed in the pre-electoral material per country (percent)

Note: the chi-square p value for this crosstabulation is .000.

Source: EEMC dataset 2019.

Campaigns in both countries tended to optimistically adhere to a post-crisis narrative and take distance from the pessimistic tone of the previous EP Elections. The difference between the Troika intervention period and the current situation was foregrounded, with themes such as the economy, employment and social prosperity, framed within a domestic/national, more than European, context, figuring prominently on the agenda. This chapter attempts to scrutinise the most important 2019 campaign narratives in both countries, through their political commercials (broadcasted mainly on TV), so as to understand the degree of intertwining of domestic politics and the European public sphere.

The Greek Context

The severe Greek crisis starting from 2009 began as a financial crisis, which progressed to an economic, then a political and eventually a social and cultural crisis (Karatzogianni and Veneti 2020:1; Papathanassopoulos 2020). In late 2009 Greece's debt was labelled as 'unsustainable' (Mylonas 2020:209) and the Greek government resorted to a massive bailout from its Eurozone partners along with the IMF, in exchange for austerity policies and structural reforms (Poulakidakos 2014; Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos 2019) that will continue to regulate Greece's financial and social life in the years to come.

The context of the economic crisis and austerity dominated social and political agendas and influenced political and economic life in Greece. Consequently, it led to the formation of a rather pessimist and critical political discourse during the 2014 European election pre-electoral period. Most political messages concentrated on the crisis and the related austerity measures, with two different narratives being evident in the political advertisement strategies. First, the right-wing New Democracy (ND) and the social democrats of PASOK (the latter represented through the 'Olive, Democratic Coalition') sought to emphasise positives for Greece's economy and society in the EU. This positivism was more than evident in the main slogan of ND- 'Steady steps ahead' (Poulakidakos and Veneti 2016; Novelli et al. 2017). The positive stance of these two

parties was influenced by their pro-European political ideology and also the fact that they were members of the incumbent government coalition at the time of the 2014 elections, responsible for implementing several austerity policies dictated by the bailout agreements between Greece and the EU, IMF and ECB.

The crisis and the subsequent harsh economic policies brought about significant transformation in the Greek political sphere (Triandafyllidou et al. 2013; Novelli et al. 2017). Within this political communication environment, Greek voters preferred the anti-austerity, pro-European political discourse in the 2014 elections (and in subsequent national elections in 2015), mainly represented by SYRIZA, and followed by Independent Greeks (AN. ELL.). Due to their associations with austerity policies, New Democracy (conservative party) and PASOK (social democratic party) lost heavily. In this new environment, SYRIZA (radical left-wing) dramatically increased its support: though it won a mere 4.6 percent in the 2009 general elections, it gained 26.6 percent in the 2014 European elections and in January 2015, SYRIZA became the first left-wing party to win a general election in Greece (Novelli et al. 2017; Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos 2019).

Headed by Alexis Tsipras, the new Greek government tried to renegotiate its bailout deal and if possible, also extract favourable conditions, such as a steep debt reduction. However, a debt haircut was extremely unpopular among creditor Eurozone countries. Faced with this reality, Tsipras called a referendum in the summer of 2015, advocating the rejection of the bailout agreement's austerity policies (Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos 2019).

Despite the result of referendum indicating strong opposition to the bailout agreement, the Eurozone did not retreat; in fact, Germany proposed that Greece exit the Eurozone (Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos 2019). Thus, faced with the risk of economic implosion, Tsipras not only accepted the conditions and further austerity policies of the 3rd bailout agreement in 2015, but also began rebranding SYRIZA and presenting it as a social democratic, center-left party (Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos 2019). At the same time, he made a concerted effort to shift the national conversation away from 'Grexit', presenting the – typical – end of the bailout programme in August 2018 (Karadimitriou 2020) as good for the development of the economy, business and entrepreneurship, seeking to revert the – up to then – prevalence of the negative public discourse regarding the financial perspectives of Greece. In Greece this led to a convergence of interests between the Greek government, the European Commission and Eurozone Member States on a 'clean' exit from the Third Economic Adjustment Programme in August 2018 (Poulakidakos and Frangonikolopoulos 2019).

In August 2018, when Greece exited the third Memorandum, Tsipras proclaimed the end of the Memoranda: "we fought to get the country out of the vicious circle of austerity and recession and we made it" and presented his new plan of government as 'Fair Growth'. In September of the same year he claimed that, 'our vision is to make Greece a land of prosperity, equity and progress, to ensure decent working and pay conditions for all citizens' (Koliastasis 2020: 249, 252-255). On his behalf, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, after being elected leader of New Democracy in 2016, started building up a liberal agenda focusing on the urgent need for economic growth, leaving behind the economic crisis. His prescription for recovery included tax cuts for entrepreneurs and investment incentives to foreigners (Triantafyllidou, Yannas and Kani 2020: 319).

The Portuguese Context

The 2008 global financial crisis was aggravated, in the Portuguese context, by low levels of productivity, competitiveness, growth, as well as high levels of debt and unemployment that have characterized the economy since 2000 (Reis 2013). A sovereign debt crisis followed the global crisis of 2008, leaving Portugal unable to comply with its financial commitments, while international ratings agencies downgraded its debt, making repayment difficult. Pressured by the EU, the centre-left Socialist (PS) government tried to implement austerity packages, which were approved in Parliament. However, in the beginning of 2011, Portugal could no longer withstand the financing conditions that markets were placing, with the average interest rate on government debt going beyond 7 percent (Treanor 07.01.2011; Tremlett 07.04.2011).

A fourth austerity package negotiated with the EU was presented by the PS government to the Portuguese Parliament, accompanied by a warning, to the Social Democratic Party (PSD), that its refusal would imply a request for international financial assistance. However, this time, the PSD pulled the rug out from under the Government's feet, leading to anticipated legislative elections in June 2011 (Costa Pinto and Pequito Teixeira 2019: 4), which paved the way for Troika intervention.

As such, approximately a year after the Greek bailout and five months after the Irish bailout, Portugal became the third EU member to request financial aid under the temporary crisis prevention mechanisms, amounting to €78 billion (Lourtie 2011: 1; NAIC 2018). In exchange for the bailout programme, Portugal committed itself to reducing budget deficit from 9.1 percent to 5.9 percent the first year, followed by a reduction to 3 percent by 2013 (Tremlett 07.04.2011). The austerity policies that the PSD and CDS-People's Party (CDS-PP) government coalition put in force included 'internal devaluation' mechanisms, through the slashing of wages and pensions, increase in taxes and reduction in social rights stemming from the 25 April 1974 Revolution (Costa Pinto and Pequito Teixeira 2019: 10).

The 2014 EP elections occurred one week after the end of the Troika bailout programme in Portugal. That the Portugal Alliance coalition was not strongly chastised by voters, despite being responsible for severe austerity measures agreed upon with the Troika – coupled with the deterioration caused by three years in government –, came as a surprise. Regardless of having reduced EP seats from 10 to 7, the share of votes situated itself at 27.7 percent, amounting to only 4 percent less than the results obtained by the PS (Comissão Nacional de Eleições 2014).

The campaigns of these EP elections were dominated by the economic crisis, with the Portugal Alliance coalition on the one hand and the PS on the other hand accusing each other of responsibility for economic uncertainty. Indeed, while the governing PSD and CDS- criticised the main opposition party, the PS, for forming governments, since 2005, that led Portugal to economic ruin, the latter accused the then ruling right-wing coalition of going beyond the austerity measures imposed by the Troika.

This same right-wing coalition, which had governed since 2011, won the legislative elections of October 4, 2015, with a 38.5 percent share of the vote. Nevertheless, these elections resulted in a PS government, based on an informal ruling agreement among the PS and more extremist left-wing parties – the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), Left Bloc (BE) and the Green Party (PEV). This union aimed at reverting austerity measures while maintaining fiscal consolidation objectives and budget execution controls. After winning the 2019 legislative elections, the PS put an end to these political agreements to the left (Lourinho & Almeida 11.05.2019).

In Portugal, the 2015 legislative elections had taken place against a background of economic and political stability (Fernandes et al., 2018), perhaps for the first time since

the PS government of José Sócrates asked for international financial assistance in 2011. This route towards economic stability reflected itself in the choice of then Portuguese finance minister, Mário Centeno, as president of the Eurogroup in 2017 (Serra-Silva et al. 2019: 30).

Research Questions-Research Hypotheses

The main research question that follows from our theoretical background is as follows: Which are the most important 2019 electoral campaign narratives of the twelve parties which elected MEPs to the European Parliament in both Greece (six parties) and Portugal (six parties) as evident in their commercials?

In line with the theoretical background previously presented, we formed several research hypotheses in relation to the pre-electoral material analysed in both countries:

1. Due to the previous financial crisis and the consideration of the Euro-elections as second order elections, we expect a focus on domestic issues.
2. Among the issues presented by the candidate parties, economy and related issues (e.g. employment) will be the primary campaign focus.
3. Due to the – at least in theory – end of the Memoranda in both countries, we expect an optimistic narrative revolving around a prosperous future.

The Research Method: Valence Frame Analysis

The scope of the current research will be defined through the implementation of valence frame analysis. This research method presupposes that narrative frames promote interpretation of events through a particular lens, by defining the boundaries within which the decoding of messages is supposed to occur. These boundaries correspond to preferred meanings (Hall 1984: 136) that seek to reproduce the worldview shared by the members of any particular ‘ingroup’ (Alvares 2017: 43). Hence, valence frames cannot be dissociated from value judgements, indicating that the same information may be disseminated under a positive or negative light, depending on the selected frame (de Vreese & Boomgaarden 2003). Value-judgements that are commonly held by a particular group are visible in topoi, defined as ‘reservoirs of generalized key ideas from which specific statements or arguments can be generated’ (Richardson in Wodak 2010: 42). Topoi are thus used to articulate preferred meanings that are encoded into messages with the objective of mobilising through emotive forms of interpellation that cannot be separated from value judgements.

In the research that follows, we analyse the identity frames that prevail in 2019 electoral campaign narratives, as evident in the commercials of the twelve parties which elected MEPs to the European Parliament in both Greece and Portugal, while seeking to understand the degree of intertwining or separation of domestic politics and the European public sphere. Our analytic corpus is constituted by pre-electoral political commercials of the Greek and Portuguese parties that elected at least one MEP in the 2019 European elections. The Greek parties under scrutiny are New Democracy (ND-10 commercials), Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA - 23 commercials), Movement for Change (Kin.Af. - eight commercials), Greek Communist Party (KKE - four commercials), Golden Dawn (G.D - two commercials) and the Greek Solution (G.S. - three commercials) for a total number of fifty (50) commercials on behalf of the Greek parties. The Portuguese parties whose pre-electoral material has been researched are the Socialist Party (PS - six commercials), Social Democratic Party (PSD - four commercials), Left Bloc (BE - six commercials), Democratic Unitary Coalition (CDU -

seven commercials), CDS-People's Party (CDS-PP- one commercial) and People-Animals-Nature Party (PAN - one commercial), totalising twenty-five (25) political advertisements.

We chose to focus on political commercials due to the 'density' of the meanings conveyed, constituting one of the most important ways in which candidates seek to reach wide and heterogeneous audiences diachronically, since - especially recently - they can be distributed both on TV and online. For example, in the case of both Greece and Portugal, the political commercials under scrutiny were aired on TV and at the same time were published on the YouTube and Facebook accounts of the political parties.

Results

Greek Valence Frames

Almost all the Greek European Election political advertisements under scrutiny for the scopes of this analysis, disseminated on social media, were distinguished by the domestication frame. It wouldn't be an overstatement to claim that the vast majority of these commercials (with the exception of those of the Greek Communist Party-KKE), could have been part of an electoral campaign for Greek general elections as well, which - due to the result of the European elections - took place in early July 2019. Under the rationale of domestication, most political advertisements focus on issues like unemployment, social justice, financial development, social welfare, and immigration, presented according to the ideological orientation of each political party.

The far-right parties Golden Dawn and Greek Solution both use nationalistic discourse in order to characterise immigrants as "threats" to Greece, a frame taking advantage of the commonplace - among far-right thought - topoi of immigrants constituting a multilevel threat to national identity. According to the Greek Solution, immigrants/refugees are "illegal intruders" and the most important issues that need to be addressed, most of which stemming from immigration, are the "giving away" of (the name of) Macedonia through the Prespes treaty, the opening of a Mosque in Athens (mentioned twice in the same commercial), "anti-Greek" politics, privileges given to immigrants, unemployment, poverty, criminality, a cohabitation agreement for homosexuals, and emigration. Reference to all those different issues seeks to evoke - at least initially - negative emotions, predominantly against immigrant populations.

In a similar vein, through the use of nationalistic discourse and symbols (Greek flags, ancient monuments), Golden Dawn promotes its nation-centric rationale, opting for "a Europe of the nations, a Europe of the homelands" and, of course, seeking "revenge" for the Prespes treaty and Macedonia. The party's final moto was "we vote for Golden Dawn to keep Greece Greek". All in all, under the mega-frame of domestication, the other prevalent frames in the political commercials of G.S. and G.D. are anti-immigration and, consequently, nationalism.

The Greek Communist Party (KKE) stands as the exception to the prevalence of domestication, since it focuses on the European Union in a critical way. Asking for "a Europe of the people", KKE's negative valence frame is anti-Europeanism expressed through young people from various European countries, including Greece.

Domestication, along with a more optimistic rationale on the development perspectives of Greece, are evident in the spots of the sociodemocrat Movement for Change (KIN.AL.). This focus on the future perspectives of Greece is salient through the intense presence of young people in KIN.AL.'s political commercials, since the party's messages "aim" to reach the youngsters of Greece in order to motivate them to

vote in the election. Noteworthy is the fact that one of KIN.AL's commercials condemns fascism and Golden Dawn.

As for the then governing party, SYRIZA – one of the two largest, alongside ND, political parties in Greece –, it sought to promote its achievements by emphasising the policies implemented throughout its period in office. This is the main reason for the high number of political advertisements published by the party (23), each of which focusing on a different policy enacted by the SYRIZA administration. Once again, the domestication mega-frame appears to be the prevalent context, within which SYRIZA builds its predominantly positive narrative on issues like civil rights, access to public health, enhancement of the welfare state, labour rights, education, upgrade of the capacities of the national health system. At the same time, SYRIZA was eager to project a prosperous future for all, through financial development accompanied by social justice. This has been the key idea behind the party's main moto – “it is the time of the many” –, seeking to underline the distantiation of the party (and the country) from the unjust implementation of austerity policies, some of which have been applied by the SYRIZA government itself.

New Democracy's (ND) pre-electoral spots focused on the need for “political change”. Looking towards the future and with the main moto, “we deserve better”, ND presents its vision for the future of the country, simultaneously criticising the austerity policies implemented by the SYRIZA administration. Apart from its criticism of SYRIZA, ND, on a rather optimistic basis, lays out the main axes of the proposed policies, which – due to the right-wing ideological orientation of the party – are focused on financial growth and security from both internal and external “enemies” (there is reference to the need for better border control and the necessity to “bring back a feeling of security”). Again, domestication prevails, although not in such an intense way as in SYRIZA's campaign, since ND dedicates two of its spots to a brief presentation of its MEP candidates, underlining their diverse backgrounds (e.g. politicians, athletes, scientists, artists), and yet another to underlining the “European” past of the party, since it was under an ND government that Greece entered the EU as a full member back in 1979.

Portuguese Valence Frames

In the case of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the campaign slogans – ‘Making a Difference in Portugal and Europe’, ‘More Portugal, Better Europe’ or ‘Putting Portugal First’ – point to Portugal as a metonym for Europe, where Europe stands for the most advanced of nations. Nevertheless, a desirable Europe in PSD narratives is one which promotes anti-discrimination policies under the form of a ‘truly European civil protection force’ and a ‘true Economic and Monetary Union’. A ‘better’ Europe is then a Europe ‘united in diversity’, one that Portugal is willing to lead, invoking the common Portuguese topoi of the country as adept at dealing with diversity issues, due to its supposed tolerance, a trait allegedly visible in the historically bland streak of Portuguese colonialism that contrasts with other colonialisms.

The PSD campaign establishes a link with the legislative electoral agenda, by exploiting weak spots of the last years of Socialist (PS) Government. If the Economic and Monetary Union cannot demand compliance with EU budgetary objectives under penalty of putting ‘health, retirement and the safety of the Portuguese at risk’, simultaneously the creation of a European civil protection emerges as a necessity in the context of the serious failures that marked the PS response to the wildfires that ravaged the country both 17 June and 15 October 2017, leading to a total of 110 deaths (DN/Lusa 12.10.2018). A voice over alluding to ‘instability, uncertainty, anguish’,

against a background of orange flames, establishes a connection between the wildfires and the economy, the latter which the PSD points to as unstable, contrary to the indicators disseminated by the PS. The PSD also points to the rise in national tax, taking the cue to oppose any European tax system as well as the threat of 7 percent loss in the PT 2030 European Framework programme.

As for PS slogans, these are as follows: ‘We are Europe’, ‘Summing Up Right’ and ‘The Responsible Vote’. Portugal is portrayed as synonymous with Europe, according to a strategy that simultaneously places it centre-stage in relation to Europe. A constant comparison is drawn between ‘then’ (i.e. PSD/CDS-PP Government) and ‘now’, with emphasis on austerity measures as having led to emigration, due to lack of job opportunities. A common topoi that surfaces in PS spots is that of a ‘return’ of those who emigrated, evoking an image that particularly appeals to the young directly affected by austerity politics (Martins 30.12.2016). Portugal thus emerges as the ‘land of opportunities’ where there can be no turning back to the right-wing austerity politics of the past, with people being ‘given hope back’.

The CDS-PP, previously government coalition partner of the PSD from 2011 to 2015, ran independently in the 2019 EP Elections under the slogan ‘Europe is Here’, drawing attention to the direct impact that Europe has on peoples’ lives. Affirming itself as the only alternative to the right of the political spectrum, CDS-PP elects the PS as enemy, practically ignoring the centre-right PSD, but taking up its argument against the inadequate PS use of EU funds. CDS-PP threateningly warns that ‘we will always be poor’, if funds are not well used. A dichotomy between rich and poor is clearly delineated in this political rhetoric, in which the topoi of ‘richness’ corresponds to Europe, namely the funds it distributes to its members, and poverty is associated with the PS Government.

As regards the Democratic Unitary Coalition (CDU), composed of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Green Party, the slogans of the EP Elections campaign – ‘In Defence of People and Country’ and ‘More Strength to CDU’ – did not mention Europe, despite the whole gist of the campaign being less Eurosceptic than usual. The PCP’s attitude in the campaign is Janus-faced, for it simultaneously launches attacks against the PS Government it supposedly supports on a legislative level, while, at certain times, aligning itself with that very Government.

When mentioned, Europe is flagged up for requiring better justice mechanisms to increase social equality and combat precariousness. Portugal becomes ‘a country of a Europe of justice’ – a justice which emerges as topoi and is yet to be implemented – that refuses ‘inequalities’ and ‘defends the right to employment stability’. The reimbursement of huge Portuguese debt interest is represented as one such issue of injustice, corresponding to twice the amount of EU funds received. Another prominent issue is that of the high debt incurred by the Portuguese Government partly consisting in a bailout of various national banks that committed fraud. Reference to such frauds in the CDU ads occurs alongside a background image of the PS, PSD and CDS-PP logos, corresponding to Governments that did not monitor the Bank of Portugal adequately in its regulatory capacity and bank conduct supervision. Moreover, because the Bank of Portugal belongs to the European System of Central Banks, this accusation also emphasises the ineffective regulatory mechanisms of European institutions.

‘Side by side’ was the EP Electoral Campaign slogan of the Left Bloc (BE), omitting any explicit reference to Europe and foregrounding a campaign to be fought alongside the common citizen. Focus was placed on continued precarity, unjust work conditions and persistent unemployment, all of which subsumed under the banner of the topoi of ‘capitalism’ that awards ‘everything’ to ‘those who have more’ and ‘nothing’ to ‘those

who have little'. The 'privatisation of everything that belongs to everyone' is at the root of capitalism, with the problems that the country faces being attributable to the privatization of 'banking, big industries, telecommunications and electricity'. In some of the voice overs, the third person plural is used, consisting in a camouflaged accusation against PSD, CDS-PP and PS governments for perpetuating social inequities due to having followed the recommendations of Brussels.

One of the great surprises of the Portuguese European polls was the winning of a first seat in the European Parliament by the People-Animals-Nature (PAN) Party. With the slogan 'You are Europe', this anti-system party drew attention to personal responsibility in promoting a more sustainable way of life. Rather than pinpointing any party as enemy, the whole 'anthropocentric' system which deems itself superior to other forms of life is signalled as a culprit of systematic violation of the rights of the 'planet'. The topoi of rights thus takes the form of universal rights, contrary to speciesism (anti-discrimination) of any kind, allegedly going beyond left and right political paradigms.

Discussion

In the current chapter we sought to provide a coherent overview of the prevalent frames of the pre-electoral political advertisements of the parties that elected at least one MEP in the last EU elections in Portugal and Greece. As has become obvious, the financial crisis that hit both countries left its footprint on the campaigns of most political parties.

Both countries appear to have followed a 'domestic' rationale as regards the promotion of their basic political positions. However, from a narrower perspective centring on political commercials broadcast both on TV and social media, Portuguese parties adopt a more 'Europeanised' frame in comparison with their Greek counterparts in order to promote their national political agendas. Thus, the domestication theme mentioned in our first research hypothesis applies more strictly to Greece than Portugal.

Another notable characteristic is that Greece has witnessed the election of three MEPs coming from two different far-right parties (one of them the recently condemned – and at the time of the elections under trial – Nazi party Golden Dawn), hence adding an ultra-nationalist approach, critical of any supranational form of governance like the EU, to the narrative frame of domestication. In the Portuguese case, a nationalist stance was most visible in the narratives of the right-wing CDS-People's Party and the left-wing Unitary Democratic Coalition. If on the one hand the CDS-PP revealed a clearly utilitarian perspective as regards Europe, reducing the latter to an entity that distributes funds which should be fully exploited in the best national interest, the CDU criticises European institutions for discriminating against Portugal, on the basis of unjust measures and ineffective regulatory mechanisms.

Another prevalent theme is the intense focus of the political advertisements on economy and other related issues, such as (un)employment, wages, pensions, taxation etc. The major parties in both Greece and Portugal promoted financial issues with a "double" rationale: first, to "hit" their political rivals for the allegedly wrong policies implemented in the past, which led to serious recessions, and, second, to mark the need for a steady return and continuation of growth and prosperity, according to the ideological orientation of each party. Either in the form of fair and "socially inclusive" growth (for the leftist parties), or under the rationale of tax reductions and creation of motives for investments (for the more conservative parties), the economy appears to have occupied the pole position in the parties' political advertisements. The focus on any strategy for economic growth marks the prevalence of positive valence frames, seeking to instil positive emotions in the electorate.

Closely connected to the financial activity of nation-states worldwide, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic crisis has already posed new challenges to the fiscal consolidation and development of the EU countries. Only time and implemented policies will show whether the EU and its countries have learnt their lessons from the recent financial crisis, or whether they will succumb once again into a vortex of recession and austerity, despite the recent promises of growth and prosperity. The management of the financial, political and social repercussions of the pandemic will constitute one of the major stakes in the 2024 EU elections.

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