

FRAGMEX – Fragmentation & Exclusion.
Understanding & Over-coming the multiple Impacts of the European Crisis

The crisis discourse in the European Parliament (EP)
A discourse analysis of plenary protocols (2009-2012)

Deliverable 1

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July 2014

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Introduction

Taking its bearings from the belief that empirical discourse research need be grounded in the sociology of knowledge, especially in the German-based variety thereof, the Hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie, this qualitative analytical work focusses on debates in the EP, thereby aiming at delivering a reconstruction of the crisis discourse as observed in one of the key institutions of the European community of states. Giving this political discourse pride of place rests on the conviction that understanding the (impacts of the) European crisis necessarily involves fathoming the question of how the crisis phenomena themselves emerge in the field of political consciousness, whereby this emergence can as well be rendered in terms of construction. If according to the sociology of knowledge (reasonably) taking/perceiving something to be the case makes up a great part of its social facticity, then the empirical discourse analysis carried out in this context purports to lay bare this ‘constructive’ nature of the crisis by means of reconstructing the argumentative and discursive ways that make up the ‘social (political) constitution’ of the phenomenon under examination.

Taking the political-discursive construction of the crisis, as this can be observed in the parliamentary debates, as a multi-layered phenomenon the interpretative-reconstructive work is structured in the following way: the first unit focusses on the actors’ explanatory efforts to deal with origins and causes of the crisis, including those knowledge resources they mobilise to this effect; in the second unit attention is paid to discursive moves related to a kind of inter-institutional contest revolving around issues of responsibilities and competences related to how problem-solving should at best be institutionally approached; the third unit deals with understandings of problem solutions and crisis management effects as such; in the fourth unit the question is dealt with of political-discursive self-understandings (‘We’-formations) and perceptions patterns of the other that correlate with crisis explanations, responsibility attributions and problem-solving proposals; the last unit works out value-based discursive elements paying special attention to argumentations centring on solidarity beliefs as much needed motivational resources in the face of acute problems justifying strategies of cost distribution. The examination of the documents follows the method of qualitative content analysis. The reconstruction of the political-discursive construction of the crisis is based on working out semantic structures, argumentation patterns, and explanatory schemes, whereby discursive utterances are grouped together in discursive patterns.

1. Situational understandings

Because the situational perceptions of the political actors depend on the understanding of the extent to which the world economic and finance crisis impacts upon the attained level of European cohesion, discourse analysis turns at first upon those discourse elements that pertain to reasonings, argumentations and explanatory attempts to define its origins, causes and effects. The analysis focusses especially on the following topics: *a)* On the basis of what discursive means and knowledge beliefs the members of the parliamentary discourse community articulate various understandings of crisis? *b)* To the extent that in the course of descriptively coming to terms with the impacts of crisis certain explanatory shifts can be observed the assumption is well founded that we have to do with indicators of a collective learn process of which one of the most outstanding traits consists in reconceptualising the priorities concerning political and financial, economic integration; *c)* A discourse analytic method of bringing in an expository manner *a)* and *b)* together is to work out those argumentation patterns deployed by the discourse participants that sustain casual explanations, concepts of feasible problem solutions, attaching responsibilities for both crisis causation and crisis management, etc.

1. 1. Understandings of the crisis

In the face of the grave, deep-going consequences of the economic and finance crisis the parliamentary actors see themselves confronted with the task of gasping the essential nature of the determinant causes behind the multifarious forms of crisis phenomena. The most far reaching understanding of casual determination among the MPs upholds that the structural interdependency of economic and financial crisis effects should be seen as located in the capitalist modus of production itself, driven as it is by competition effectiveness and profit maximisation. Although supplying this diagnosis of crisis is meant to discursively support the belief about a systemic failure, it is however not put forward as argument in favour of a thorough-going critique of capitalism per se, but functions at its most as call for a certain paradigm change. For the great part of the discourse participants the necessity of such a change can only make sense, if instead of postulating mono-casual explanations such as the all-encompassing coercion of the economic system to expand the logic of capital to all spheres of social life, the focus of critical understanding is laid on certain imbalances between the function systems of the market-based regulation regime of western type economy. According to the mainstream attitude in the discursive community these imbalances and disparities refer to *a)* those between the regulatory framework

setting of politics on the one hand, and economic action on the other, and *b*) those between the “real” economy of commodity production on the one hand, the disproportionate development dynamics of the financial sphere on the other. As regards the latter there can be observed two argumentation lines surrounding the question of circulation of industrial and financial capital: Along the lines of the first the imbalances are perceived to have reached a level at which financial capital has definitely gained the upper hand imposing its logic upon commodity production. The knowledge resources upon which the discourse participants rest this diagnosis refer mainly to widespread perceptions of certain modifications in business culture with the share-holder value dictating output strategies and profit optimisation. The goal of attaining ever higher levels of market capitalisation drives companies to attune business to the dictates of short-term returns of capital thus increasingly paying tribute to the efficiency criteria of financial markets.

The second strain of argumentation seems to follow current notions of perceiving the circulation of financial capital as totally out of accordance with what normally is considered sound and reasonable for national scale economies. Where this argumentation pattern differs from that of perceiving the financial sector as imposing its functional logic upon the whole economy is on the issue of whether instead of subsumption the relation between ‘real’ and finance economy should not rather be cast in terms of asymmetries or (socio-politically) unacceptable discrepancies that largely can be accounted for by pointing to the advantageous structure of financial profit being achieved in extremely reduced time scale. The guiding intuition behind this argumentation seems to consist in the belief that the reason finance capital has come to exercise such a dominating influence upon the economy as a whole lies in the logic of capital accumulation itself, i. e. the tendency to reduce the turnover period of capital to a minimum.

The arguments attributing the causes of the world economic and finance crisis to imbalances between the main sectors of economic action resurface in the context of discussing the sovereign debt crisis in Europe albeit in the form of disparities between the levels of competitive capacities observed across the European economic space. The imbalances owing to diverging macroeconomic performances of the EU member states are perceived to aggravate the impacts of crisis on the already existing inequalities regarding competitive capacities thus putting European cohesion to a hard test. In order to illustrate the extent to which competition imbalances drive the European national economies apart mention is made in this discursive context of the blatant performance inequalities that govern the relations say between Germany and Greece, although it is also obvious that the related argumentations sometimes display ambivalences such as the following: On the one hand the higher productivity and competitiveness of the German economy, but also the concomitant current account surplus are held to belong to those

coercive forces that have driven national economies such as the Greek one to over-indebtedness; on the other hand and contra the assumption that this predicament could be alleviated through raising the competitiveness of the south-European economies lagging behind it is pointed out that the competitiveness argument lacks logical rigor for the inequalities complained about lie in the antagonistic nature of competitive markets not all of them being capable at one and the same time of attaining the desired levels of economic performance. All in all the discursive reasoning on the problematic of raising competitiveness as means of effectively coming to grips with the effects of the economic crisis displays that characteristic ambivalence pertaining to the process of European integration as a whole, that is the concurrent tensions between mutual interdependencies und unequal convergence, progressive unification and increasing divergence, market integration and discrepant economic policies.

1. 2 Crisis perception patterns

From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge it is crucial to examine schemes and patterns of those perceptions that give expression to the discursive actors' understandings of the extent to which the effects of the crisis endanger the European cohesion and the institutional set of coordinated policies. Of overriding significance is also to work out those discursive means und knowledge beliefs that sustain the actors' attempts to explanatory come to terms with the various facets of crisis. Crisis perceptions and problem awareness of the far-reaching consequences of the crisis express themselves in argumentation patterns, inferential reasonings, rhetorical strategies, value judgements and symbolic features.

1. 2. 1 Crisis as chance

If one surveys the relevant discursive contexts one can group clusters of arguments, belief attitudes and demonstrations of certainty together to form a pattern of understanding the crisis as chance. This is beyond doubt obvious in those argumentations in which the crisis is perceived as opportunity to move forward with strengthening the European institutional architecture. This belief relies on the discursive commitment to view the various crisis phenomena as so many different challenges posed to the sustainability of the motivational resources to be drawn upon to strengthen the formation of will and decision-making process, but also to reinforce the institutional vigour of European coherence. Notwithstanding the sometimes diffuse overall picture of the dimensions and consequences of the crisis, one should insist on the fact of the EU being

capable of proving itself guarantor of rational problem solving and instance of firm value orientations. This belief in practical reasoning rests in turn on the certainty-bestowing power of past experiences which substantiate the claim that the history of the European Union consists in a succession of overcoming of and productively learning from various crisis constellations.

Below the level of these admittedly general avowals perceptions of crisis as proving grounds for the cohesional capacities of the Union can be twofold differentiated according to the action reference frame to which they are related to. On the one hand the crisis is perceived as alarm signal, milestone or historical conjuncture all pointing to the necessity of making good for past omissions, that is, primarily implementing measures aimed at correcting the deficiencies of the monetary integration structures. Although this argumentation does not seem to rejoice in approval of the whole discourse community, some of its participants seeing the crisis as point-of-no-return for the course the Union has taken so far, for the overwhelming majority on the contrary it goes beyond doubt that the Union will pass the crisis proof test and come out invigorated – under the premise of course that the chance crisis offers for thoroughgoing reforms will not be misused in the way of a technocratic-centralistic crisis management. On the contrary, the crisis induced reform steps to be undertaken should be seen as part of an organic development of political unification that necessarily results from the coordinated efforts at institutionally coping with the disintegration and fragmentation tendencies attending the crisis. This kind of organic logic of political unification cannot of course but be challenged from all those political stances which surmise that behind putting the crisis to serve legitimacy purposes for imposing a kind of political centralism hovers the perspective of curtailing the sovereign powers of national states.

1. 2. 2 Crisis as regulation opportunity

Perceiving the crisis as chance for the EU to put its strengths to test often includes the intentional content of the believing that the Union should at last assume specific responsibilities regarding the regulatory role it must play in curbing the enormously expansive tendencies of financial markets. The consciousness of a specific European task in fighting dangerous outgrowths of financial speculation derives from two sources: One the one hand the truth certainty of the observation that the crisis has necessitated a turn against the neoliberal orientations cum deregulation imperatives of the last decades; on the other the belief that this reorientation must hold all the more so in the case of Europe and especially the negative integration model

(i. e. relying primarily on the principles of market integration) it has hitherto followed. In principle this awareness can be claimed to testify to experiencing the crisis as part of a learn process particularly applicable to the realm of the anti-crisis strategy as corrective of past mistakes and inductive to allow for a more regulatory coordination of the crisis management in the areas of harmonisation of tax systems, control over financial markets, economic und finance policies governed by the principle of solidarity, but also the attainment of social and ecological goals.

1. 2. 3 Financial crisis as war

If the pattern of understanding the crisis as chance articulates the awareness of coping with the challenges it poses for the integrity of the EU by deploying institutional action and mobilising resources of collective and resolute decision-making, the way to perceive the crisis as war waged against the European monetary union puts forth the picture of a collective unity under threat and in the defensive position: It is like war-time and a kind of economic war is mounted against the EU. However emphatic the collective perception of being under enemy attack may be, it is sometimes difficult though to discern in the relevant argumentations of the discourse participants some clear contours of this war-like confrontation. Prevalent seems to be rather the intuition that Europe has to come to grips with an asymmetric warfare waged by certain segments of financial industries, the designations of which vary from casino capitalism to rating agencies. In default of an exact delineation of the inimical-aggressive agent one regularly deploys the concept of ‘markets’ in general – a notion that seems to serve quite well heterogeneous discursive objectives. For one it can bundle together the most multivariate transactions in the finance and capital markets thus conferring upon the capital circulation flows the character of actions emanating from the will of an acting quasi-subject, to which in turn can be attributed intentional action dispositions and rational behaviour.

As to the nature of this supposedly observable rationality two are the argumentations brought forward: One the one hand action rationality can be attributed to capital and exchange markets to the extent as they are perceived to exercise a kind of control or sanction function in cases in which the fiscal policies of national economies are not considered to be meeting certain efficiency requirements. This line of argumentation earns critique from the side of those discursive stances that point to the fact that the strategic rationality imputed to the behaviour of capital markets must be held responsible for the destructive effects it brings about – for the national economies, and the world economy too. For those belief attitudes that are not disposed to ac-

quiesce to the thesis that this destructive tendency inheres in the system of deregulated financialisation, the line of argumentative fence is then drawn by assessing this destructiveness to be the result not of structural causes, but the reckless speculation of subjective greed.

1. 3. Sovereign-debt crisis – Crisis understandings using the example of Greece

Owing to the systemic risk potential perceived to be entailed in issue of the Greek sovereign-debt the economic crisis hitting the country from 2009 onward occupies a central place in the European parliamentary discourse. Thereby the prevailing perception pattern observed consists in the Greek crisis being considered hot spot and symptom of structural shortcomings in the makeup of the monetary architecture of the Union, for in a certain sense the predicament of the country comes for the majority of the discursive community to signify in a *pars-pro-toto* manner those institutional deficits the world economic and financial crisis has laid bare. The danger potential posed to the euro-zone by the possibility of a Greek default is understood as highlighting certain erroneous developments regarding both the Euro membership of Greece, and the unfinished project of crowning the monetary with a political union. The crisis experiences are in this case also considered to be part and parcel of a learning process the decision-making instances of the Union must undergo, lest one is willing to risk foregoing the chance presented through the crisis situation to push the European coordination of fiscal and budgetary policies forward, but also to put an end to the often opportunistic practice of observing the stability and convergence criteria selectively. The *pars-pro-toto* scheme in European perceptions of the Greek crisis is also manifest in those argumentations that by focussing on financial speculation underscore the significance of the Greek case as highly indicative of concentrated attempts to destabilise the common currency space. The metaphorical picture most often used of how this destabilisation operates is that of contagion not only spreading across the economies of South Europe, but also potentially making its way to the heartlands of the Union.

However, this is not the only way the *pars-pro-toto* scheme is deployed in order to make sense of how such a small scale economy like the Greek one has come to claim such an overriding significance for the course of the European trajectory. If the Greek case can stand for those deficiencies in constructing the monetary union that owing to the financial crisis have come to a peak, it can, at least for a considerable part of the parliamentary discourse community, also be considered as a kind of exemplary showpiece of how meeting the demands of crisis management means painful measures that impose on the countries of South Europe hitherto

unknown austerity regimes. Moreover, the austerity policy to be implemented by the over-indebted country is sometimes viewed as catalyst for securing the structural and institutional coherence of the Euro zone, albeit the effective functioning of this catalyst is far from certain, because according to some critical stances this kind of European crisis management shows all the traits of a radical experiment the results of which are far from secure – means and ends display such a discrepancy, that is it hard not *a)* to claim that the ‘sacrifices’ demanded are not at all worth the effort of re-establishing the framework of community harmonisation and consequently and *b)* to surmise that the part is ‘sacrificed’ for the preservation of the whole.

1. 4. Euro Crisis?

Coming discursively to grips with the multifarious aspects of the crisis entails understanding its impacts on the common European currency that in this way comes to occupy a prominent place in the parliamentary crisis discourse. Surveying the relevant argumentation contexts a kind of ambivalence can be observed concerning the assessment of the euro trajectory and the role the currency has come to play as the crisis unfolds. Characteristic of this ambivalence is the judgement that the euro has become the victim of its own success meaning that the monetary union has to be sure to be seen as cornerstone of developing the European integration, however this way of building up the community formation in the continent has in a certain way proved counterproductive, because the monetary unification has covered up those grave divergences between the national economies that result from the different levels of competition capacity. Given this ambivalent understanding of the integration role the euro is thought to play it is not surprising to observe that the currency as such is not perceived by the majority of the discourse participants as threatened by an essential danger, because not matter how destabilising the effects of short-term turbulences may be, the weaknesses of the monetary union are to be accounted for by exogenous factors such as the liberalisation/deregulation of the capital markets, unfettered financial speculation and asymmetries regarding competition and economic performance regardless of the nominal convergence required by the stability criteria.

While the critical attitudes that deem the entire process of implementing the structures of the common currency a failure operate largely with metonymic displacements, rendering the euro to be lying at the source for all sorts of crisis phenomena, it is for those defending the belief that the common currency has proved quite resilient during the course of the crisis no difficult task to mobilise persuasive argumentations in favour of the irreversible nature of the euro project. Not the currency itself is to be held responsible for the desolate state of European financial

affairs, but mainly the defective course of crisis management consisting of ad hoc alliances and hasty attempts to find a common denominator for the conglomerate of diverging national interests. To be sure, it goes beyond saying that the monetary architecture of the Union deserves critique, albeit this should be mounted on the grounds that the European leading authorities have so far fallen short of their responsibility to complement monetary unification with structures of a genuinely collective political will-formation. Regarding the latter and especially the perceptions of the relation between the processes of political and monetary integration one observes a certain equivocation in the discursive community, for on the one hand it seems unreasonable to believe that a monetary unification can be sustainable without at the same time being supplemented by an economic, social and political integration, though on the other this must but mean that the two integration courses run parallel to each other, something that in turn invites the criticism from the side of Eurosceptical attitudes arguing that it has been wrong from the start to politically initiate financial experiments such as the euro, because politics essentially lacks sound economic reason. In order to rebut this kind of objections the argument is put forward that from the very beginning inherent to the euro project has been a surplus potential rendering the on-going integration process irrevocable and the European Union a community of fate.

2. Responsibilities/Competencies

To the complex of crisis assessments and proposed solutions belong also those discursive elements that centre on such controversial issues as (self-) ascription of responsibility and assignment of competency. In reference to the question of how in the discursive consciousness of crisis the problem of attributing responsibility and competency for tackling the collective task of crisis management is accounted for there are two topics to focus on: For one thing attention deserves those argumentations in which critique is articulated against the political strategy of coping with the effects of the crisis by resting solely upon intergovernmental agreements as the supposedly most effective way to come by the exigencies of reacting quickly. Of particular importance are in this discursive context the objections put forward to *a)* counter the claim of the European Council to be the most effective decision-making body and *b)* reject the self-ascription of crisis-management competency of the summit diplomacy. The criticism of intergovernmental adjustments of national-economic strategies takes especially issue with the attempted replacement of the community through the union method, notwithstanding the undisputable fact that in part the approaches of meeting the exigencies of action share the presuppo-

sition of a fragmented European community space. In this discursive context must then be situated all those argumentations that buttress the competency claims of the European Parliament (EP).

2. 1 Intergovernmentalism

The interstate cooperation of governments in the framework of the European Council moves into the critical focus of parliamentary discourse to the extent that the political actors increasingly discern therein the spirit of nation-state self-interested policies coming back to the arena in a way detrimental to the perceived necessity of crisis management assuming a more collective and community oriented character. Reproaching intergovernmental cooperation of renationalising European affairs rests upon certain premises worth spelling out: For one thing the dominance of nation-state based strategies, never absent from the realm of steering European matters, is perceived to follow from the crisis induced paradigm change away from neoliberal deregulation and re-approaching classical Keynesian state-backed economic policies. In the course of the sovereign-debt crisis the return of interventionist state comes to assume another critical dimension as the question of how and from what sources sharing the costs and burdens of the financial debt crisis should proceed incites the rise of interstate tensions and antagonisms as ‘confrontative’ situations resurface between debtors and creditors countries. Last but not least the intergovernmental approach is seen to be resulting from the legal framework of the Union itself since the relevant articles of the Treaty of the EU dealing with emergency situations foresee the enhanced role of the European Council being empowered to grant Union financial assistance.

Against this background it comes as no surprise that the critique of renationalising European politics levelled at the intergovernmental crisis management targets especially the “Franco-German axis” that in the eyes of a considerable part of discourse participants has come to operate like a new Directory dictating its will on the course of the strategy to embark upon in order to overcome the crisis. The main thrust of the critique at intergovernmentalism targets the power-political concentration of decision prerogatives that: *a)* indirectly ushers in parallel policy-making structures that delegitimize the European Council, this latter being otherwise itself target of harsh rebuke owing to the fact of its anti-crisis measure thought of as sidestepping Commission and Parliament; *b)* helps reactivate antidemocratic stances and weakens control and transparency mechanisms crucial for the legitimation level of EU-institutions; *c)* fosters the

ever increasing fragmentation tendencies and nationalist animosities spreading across the continent; and *d*) in a way reinstalls the time old honoured tradition of the early 19th century restoration and the cabinet diplomacy à la Vienna Congress.

2. 2 Community method (CM), Union Method (UM)

Given these critical objections to what the vast majority of the discourse participants perceive as a dangerous power concentration manifesting itself in intergovernmental masters' agreements they take particular pains to lay emphasis on the CM (i. e. initiative right on the part of the Commission, qualified majority voting in Council and co-legislative role of the EP) as the approach towards providing sustainable solution that enjoys the highest public legitimation and democratic coverage. In the face of this the appel to deploy the cohesive forces of the CM as collective resources of responsibility and competence required for a successful crisis management can but imply perceptions of and beliefs about antagonist tensions between EP/Commission on the one hand, and Council on the other – tensions that at times assume the form of a dichotomy perceived as almost inescapable: Either Intergovernmentalism or CM. Cast in terms of a method dispute the CM is pitted against what after Chancellor Merkel delivered a lecture in Brügge has come to be called the new “Union Method” (UM), which questions the claim of CM to alone represent the political-legal implementation of the European decision-making will on the following grounds: To begin with the Council is involved in the consultations framing the law-making processes of the Union and as a pillar in the EU institutional architecture it reflects the political will formation developments in the member states which in this sense are not antagonistic poles to the EU. The political weight of the member states as represented through the institution of the Council takes account of the fact that the problem solution capacities are not per se lying by the Commission, for if the subsidiarity principle is also supposed to be a cornerstone of problem-solving policies, then the crisis should also be combated where it rages most, i.e. in those countries suffering under the ‘unbearable’ sovereign-debt: in principle these countries should first help themselves, before the EU steps in. Finally, competencies can be transferred to the Union level only on the condition that the member states, as ‘Lords of the Treaties’, have agreed upon after conceding to the Commission more effective crisis management powers. Given all this and notwithstanding the widely shared mistrust of the European MPs against intergovernmentalism gaining the upper hand one can reasonably argue that the controversy over the appropriate method to meet the demands of the crisis situation revolves in truth around a complementarity of approaches. However, this does not mean in concreto that

the claims of the UM, i. e. *a)* to dispose of a better reaction and decision-making capacity and *b)* to be in a better position to comply with the demands of legitimation, go undisputed by the defenders of the CM. As regards the first point, far from disqualifying beyond doubt the critique according to which the Councils action modus is nothing more than at best a harmonisation of dominant national interests, the allegedly quick reaction capacity almost equals state emergency legislation that aggravates the democratic deficits of the Union. Nor can the claim of the UM have much substance that intergovernmentalism brings about an operational balance between national interests, for, on the contrary, it cements the tendency towards a two- or three-speed Europe. Things are no better regarding the question of legitimate action: The argument brought forward that on the basis of securing parliamentary accountability the UM is in a position to better legitimate itself to the national public sphere is seen by the supporters of the CM as essentially flawed, for more often than not national parliaments have in the course of the crisis management been reduced to the role of merely blessing decisions already made elsewhere.

2. 3 European Parliament

Given this critique at the intergovernmentalist crisis management and the not quite unexpected defence of the CM which is perceived to function as bulwark against the Council becoming over-powerful it is no wonder that the vast majority of European MPs would like to back up the perspective of the crisis turning into a chance to valorise the institutional role of the EP, thereby reversing the trend of together with the Commission finding themselves in an inferior decision-making position in such a crucial conjecture for the European trajectory. This holds all the more so for accomplishing the task of collectively coming to grips with the economic, financial and social dislocations caused by the crisis. Especially regarding the legitimation issue the arguments the discourse participants bring to bear against the UM consist basically in pointing out that far from being solely a deliberative instance, the EP by figuring as the only thoroughly democratic representation of the European people proves the most appropriate instance to shoulder part of an European anti-crisis strategy for it here decision-making goes beyond short-sighted policies of power relations and state-national particularisms. That bringing the projects of financial stability and raising competitiveness successfully forward can only be realised by means of enhancing the values of legitimacy, transparency and accountability through conferring upon the EP more decision-making powers is something that is brought to expression in different disguises: The contribution of the EU to securing enhanced transparency in European political matters is at the same time one to promoting Union citizens' engagement; this all the

more so as in the self-understanding of the discourse participants, or at least a great part of it, the EP is perceived as institutional guarantee that Europe will not drift in a kind of democracy subservient to the imperatives of profit maximisation and servient to the capitalist market. If these aspects of the EP contribution refer to the output legitimation European institutions should in principle be able deliver, not the least is the value also attributed to input legitimation, that is, that feedback from the body politic of the Unions electorate that in terms of legitimacy counts as the ‘lender of last resort’ supplying the anti-crisis strategy of sharing costs and burdens with democratic support.

3. Problem-solving and critique

The discursive deliberation over the question of how the present state of affairs challenges the reactive capacities of the Union focusses of course with particular intensity on issues of strategies, measures and institutional reforms called for if the structural causes of the economic and financial crisis are to be dealt with head on, whereby the diversity of understandings and explanations of causal chains are reflected into divergent and sometimes highly contested solution proposals. Leaving aside political aspects related to the perspective of bringing the integration process to an end by implementing structures of a political Union four are the main areas in which deliberative arguments concentrate on: *a)* Regulation of capital markets and the bank sector, *b)* European debt mutualisation, *c)* Coordination of the economic and fiscal policies and public budget consolidation, and *d)* austerity policies.

A. Finance regulation. The argumentations in favour of bringing at least some of the excesses of unbridled financialised capitalism under politico-economic control and European supervision range from calling for a thorough finance system reform to more moderate demands closer to the needs of tackling the specific continental dimensions of the crisis, for example the establishment of a European bank union. As regards the latter this integrative move to render the landscape of finance more accountable through raising transparency should according to the mainstream stance include deposit guarantee schemes and a bank resolution fund. However consensual the felt necessity of politically initiated control interventions may be, the issue of state-backed redemption funds for the alleviation of the calamities that have afflicted the bank sector raises considerable objections as to whether the finance stability measures are but a socialisation of private debt, which in turn can be spelled out in various ways: *a)* as an indirect resource transfer from taxpayers’ funds to recapitalisation pools to be disposed of by influential bank interests, *b)* as risk assumption on the part of the state or a kind of state guaranteed assurance policy for risky bank transactions, and *c)* in terms of democratic legitimacy as a highly

questionable instrument to absorb the shock of the finance debacle. As regards the centralised bank supervision the ECB shall be entrusted with the plan obtains a relative unanimity among the discourse participants, although sceptical attitudes are not missing either: So, it is argued, that conferring supervisory functions upon this institution, which though part of the European architecture is not subject to public (i. e. parliamentary) control, should be supplemented by accountability provisions. The demand for such a safeguard does not of course suffice to quite the fears of all those Eurosceptic stances that believe to discern behind this empowerment of the ECB but a new strategy to further push centralisation of the European decision-making processes thus ultimately endangering the independency of the national bank sectors.

Turning now to those other finance fields in need of regulatory action one observes that the points drawn attention to depend in each case on the relative weight conferred on what is considered as major factor in causing crisis phenomena. Most of the European MPs call for a financial transaction tax, but strong is also the demand for a reform of the remunerations system in the bank sector, as well as mechanisms to curb capital flight by fighting offshore banking. In relation to such grey zones of international finance it is argued for a resolute legislative practice to curb shadow banking setting strict limits to the activities of hedgefunds, high risk funds and the secondary and exchange markets. As far as the banks themselves is concerned it is also argued for raising the capital ratio, introducing a bank levy and a common bond market.

B. *European debt mutualisation.* If in general it is quite reasonable to speak of the parliamentary discourse as a learn process, then the discussion evolving round the issue of projecting the plan of a European bond market proves in particular that this is surely the case. The perspective of introducing Eurobonds is perceived as part and parcel not only of the collective efforts to wage a blow to finance speculation but also of intensifying the dynamic of European integration. Together with other possible reform steps like setting up a European Monetary Fund, a debt repayment fund and introducing the finance transaction tax, Eurobonds could under conditions be considered an instrument of solidarity and as such of a certain unavoidability. However, it is exactly such notions of the supposedly inescapable course of debt mutualisation that give rise to vehement objections as to whether this is emphatically not what should be learned from the crisis, because for some Eurosceptical stances thus trying to come out of the sovereign-debt misery must but mean to take the road to an ominous transfer union leaving the good old European traditions of sound economic behaviour and reasonably moderate public expenditure policies behind. To be sure, it goes beyond doubt that the commandment of the hour is to draw from the crisis experience some integrative lessons strengthening and intensi-

fyng the coordination of economic and fiscal policies, this should however not be misunderstood as willingness to acquiesce by *a*) a debt union consisting of over indebted national budgets or *b*) a kind of centrally controlled European budget gathering the pieces of the sovereign-debt crisis, because both would amount to just another form of bailing the banks out at the expense of taxpayers and governments practising sound budget policies.

C. *Economic and fiscal coordination.* This is the area of discursive deliberation imbued with the least controversy. Partly overlapping with the argumentations that target regulation measures the debates on this issue focus on three fields of crisis-overcoming strategies: *a*) general coordination of economic policy, *b*) fiscal coordination and *c*) macroeconomic control. As regards the first issue of primary concern are the preventive dimension of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and the corrective component of the deficit procedure. Although not controversial in relation to its purposefulness the SGP comes under criticism because *a*) the implementation made of it up to the present has been very selective oriented as it was at the scale and relative weight of the national economy, *b*) its effectivity record is not quite promising for the further course of developing an economic union, and *c*) it lacks sanction mechanisms, its indicators being far from clear. Criticism is also mounted against undervaluing the component of employment policy set by SGP as indispensable instrument for growth, which in turn cannot be promoted by one-sidedly insisting on restrictive budgeting, because in times of significantly growing recessive tendencies what counts at most is providing for counter-cyclical stimulus measures – to cut a long story short, after decades of neoliberal supply-side economic policies to bring Keynes back to Europe. As regards the aspect of monitoring the European coordination of economic policies the debate revolves around the issue of how strong or centralised supervising functions should be, given the acknowledgement of the necessity of controlling national fiscal policies in advance. Critical objections are expressed as to whether this does not run counter to the principle of subsidiarity, violating budgetary sovereignty as a key principle of national integrity. On this point it is not only the Eurosceptics that give expression to fears about the Eurocrats seizing the opportunity offered by the exigencies of crisis management to take control over and transform EU member states into protectorates states at the mercy of the Brussels bureaucracy.

D. *Austerity.* Much more worthy of harsh criticism are for a relative majority of the discourse participants those components of the fiscal consolidation scheme that make the effectiveness of budget discipline enforced by the SGP depend on policies of radical austerity to be resolutely carried through in all countries afflicted by the debt-sovereign crisis. If one wants to group the various argumentation threads in this context together, then one observes five mainly points: 1.

Counter-productive. Reducing public spending in order to meet at all costs the requirements of fiscal contraction brings about a massive reduction of purchasing power and consequently an under-consumption crisis thus aggravating the already severe recessive tendencies that in turn let the tax income of the state collapse, which in turn makes things much worse, the economy plummets further, and so on and so forth. 2. *One-sidedness.* Criticising austerity as counter-productive measured against its own macroeconomic recovery objectives draws upon the tacit knowledge that deficit reduction programmes are inimical to promoting growth, because by focussing attention exclusively to improving performance in terms of account balances, financial stability and inflation control almost no room is left for productive investments, capital expansion and job creation. 3. *Dismantling the social state.* Contrary to historical experiences testifying to the negative correlation between financial bottlenecks and cutting public expenditure the austerity regime imposed on the economies of the South is ideologically biased for it follows the script of neoliberal deregulation imperatives that let social welfare fall prey to the unbridled privatisation. 4. *Social upheavals.* Although not every critical attitude presupposes a necessary correlation between austerity policies and neoliberal agenda remarkable consensus obtains over the social consequences budget consolidation through ruthless cuts in public spending has resulted in. Though it would be exaggerated to uphold that the socio-political and socio-cultural aspects of collapse characterising the societies of southern Europe in the course of the crisis are all to be attributed to imposed austerity, it true though that austerity is to be blamed for major disintegration and fragmentation phenomena that accompany the rapid increase of poverty, previously unheard of unemployment rates, especially among young people, expansion of the low-pay sector, curtailment of social, employment and welfare rights, social decline as well as marginalisation fostering racism and right-extremism – all in all, an explosive social facticity, especially if one considers that poverty for the wide masses and government-backed bailouts for banks seem to coincide. 5. The *'Breakup' of Europe.* In one sense the social destabilising effects of the austerity regime do not confine themselves to the national arenas, but reverberate across the European continent igniting processes of fragmentation of the Union space, divisions and cracks that go well beyond what one is accustomed to perceive as the North-South split in terms of competition capacities, economic performances and budget deficits. For a considerable part of the discourse community it seems these 'traditional' polarities have in the course of the crisis been overdetermined by a new kind of schism, namely the one between policy-makers and crisis managers on the one side, underlings, patient endurers or sufferers subjected to coercions of externally imposed structural adjustments on the other. In

this discursive context not few are those perceptions according to which this divisive development has already assumed traits of colonialist paternalism with the Troika playing the role of the executive organ of the neo-colonial administration – with Greece again as case example: Like in the context of perceptions of vulnerabilities owing to and causes aggravating the European crisis here again the land occupies an exemplary status, this time regarding solutions and remedies.

4. Self-understanding / Other-perception

To the patterns of understanding cause and course of the crisis, as well as (self-) attributions of responsibility, role competency and problem solution schemes correspond certain constellation of patterns of self-understanding and other-perception. According to the methodological tenets of the sociology of knowledge discourse analysis must also address the question of how to interpret those aspects of the parliamentary debate in which the participants by means of ascribing themselves pragmatic action competence and normative correctness regarding decision-finding come to occupy determinate positions in the discourse field and in mirror-inverted manner to form perception patterns of the other, which in this context means fault-finding and blame-giving regarding crisis causation. Of primary importance is to focus attention on that discursive distribution of positions that crystallises as polarity between the European steering action in the fields of economic and fiscal policies on the one hand, and the global financial markets on the other. In reference to the discursive construction of kind of a collective subject (i.e. the ‘markets’ as the other) that exerts pressure upon the European decision-making processes while thereby also anticipating its action plans, what at first deserves examination is how the self-understanding of European actors articulates itself through this antagonism to the ‘markets’-other. On the basis of the perception patterns observed in this field the interpretation can then move on to address to question of what form the political understanding of the discursive actors assumes regarding *a)* the relation between markets, European governance and national public spheres, and *b)* the varieties of ‘We’-formations.

4. 1. Politics and ‘markets’

Against the background of the crisis not unusually being perceived as a kind of war waged against the EU it is not difficult to take this scheme of martial antagonism as point of departure in order to explore certain ramifications discernible in the discursive polarity which have primarily to do with the fact that notwithstanding the confrontative vocabulary deployed by the

discourse participants the understanding of the ‘markets’ as the inimical ‘other’ is displaying a remarkable ambivalence between utterances meant as declaration of war of politics against financial capital on the one hand, and others that express dispositions of ‘convincing’, ‘gaining the trust of’, or re-establishing a communicative exchange relation with the ‘markets’ on the other. Tracing this ambivalence back to possible tacit presuppositions governing the actors’ perceptions means at first giving an account of those underlying understandings of the relation between politics and market that in course of the crisis have assumed clear contours, first and foremost those that revolve round a time/space relation scheme. As regards the first not few are those argumentations that make the necessity of a coordinated economic policy at European level dependent on raising the reaction capacity of decision-finding procedures, so that the urgent goal of synchronising economic governance with financial market movements can be attained. However, another kind of ambivalence is entailed in the notion of time coordination as can be clearly seen in those attitudes for which the desirability or attainability of such a “catching up with the markets” is put into question: On the one hand and in relation to the objections against the intergovernmental approach a great part of the discourse community levels strong criticism at the form crisis management has displayed on the grounds that the latter has shown more eagerness to follow slavishly what rating agencies and stock markets deem necessary than the will to put forward an self-determined policy observing the primacy of politics over economics. Apart from being questionable in terms of political self-esteem this actionism has by no means dispelled anxieties about politics left far behind by the unpredictable markets, because in the first place political action should have not entered a race it could not but lose: the political time of democratic decision-making is incompatible with the volatile market movements.

According to the second scheme, that of a quasi-spatial relation between politics and markets, the arguments put forward point unmistakably to an understanding of politics as dominating over the field of economic action in the sense of being able to set regulatory frameworks, an ability apparently lost in the course of deregulatory neo-liberalism and to be regained on the basis of drawing the right lessons from the European crisis. For a relative majority of the participants in the crisis discourse this seems however not to be the case, the rationality of political action having in their eyes on the contrary hopelessly surrendered itself to the imperatives of the financial markets, thereby letting the volatile logic of financial wishfulness dictate its will on government policies. Perceptions of such submissiveness rest on the assumption of a kind of diffusion of the market logic in the realms of political decision processes, the understanding of which notion of diffusion in turn articulates itself through two argumentation types according

to how the actors conceive of the market logic crossing the boundaries of the financial transaction sphere and spreading into political fields: In line with the first diffusion argument the submissiveness of politics to the (capitalist) market grow out of certain aspects of political governance and budget policy the most important of which in this context is the sovereign-debt problem: By becoming over-indebted states lose their autonomy and fall prey to the whims of financial markets. The second line of argumentation refers to the ‘communicative’, ‘trust-building’ relation states over the years have been accustomed to observe towards the world of finance and this by means of trying to meet the demands and expectations of stock and exchange markets. Therefore it comes as no surprise to see in the relevant discursive contexts often argumentations deploying the vocabulary of understanding what the ‘markets’ want, desire, look forward to, demand from politics, or alternatively how politics feels observed by, under control to confirm to, exposed to the relentless judgement of the ‘markets’, etc.

Given this perceptual background of the communicative-like interaction and in light of the diffusion premise the process of information exchange between politics and finance can but assume forms of signalling or a language of signals that are transmitted and sent from all possible sources to the address of a supposedly individual-like acting agency called ‘markets’. This inflationary use of signals sent (politics) and (hopefully) received (‘markets’) in the discursive context of the parliamentary debates could in a way supply additional evidence for the truth-value of the diffusion premise, for the logic of signals, the language tokens of finance communication par excellence, seems to have ineditably permeated political semantics and discursive deliberation.

4. 2 Between markets, state and people

The discursive efforts to articulate understandings appropriate to mount political action able to meet the exigencies of the problem constellation posed by the variety of crisis phenomena find expression in argumentation contexts in which the discourse participants take up the challenge of determining the position European political governance should occupy between markets, nation-states and the European public spheres. After all this is a matter of highest priority, for nothing less than regaining the confidence or re-establishing trustworthy relations between (European) politics and markets, markets and people, and politics and people, can provide sustainable foundations for overcoming the crisis, which if nothing else has essentially been also a crisis of confidence – no easy task, if one considers that conflictual interests must be reconciled,

divergent demands coordinated, consensual problem-solving schemes offered and trust relations restored. Although almost unanimous consent governs the acknowledgement of the fact that the latter should be given pride of place in any anti-crisis management worthy of the name, it is remarkably unclear what the efforts to accommodate the disparity of interest orientations in a common European strategy should consist in. What this unclarity has to do with, is beyond doubt the graveness of the problem posed to European actors, for regardless of whether the crisis is considered systemic or not it remains undisputable that it has again set on the agenda the cardinal question of that to which the crisis of trust in last instance amounts to, namely the relation between capitalism and democracy, or more concretely between state and market, democratic nation-state politics and disembedded international capital markets, politics as subset of economics or the other way round.

Caught between these millstones the stances of the discourse participants waver between two poles: On the one hand the anti-crisis efforts to regain control over the financialised capitalism is considered to be going well beyond just rule-setting, supervisory regulations and fiscal coordination, for what the severity of the crisis has made inescapable is the necessity of a new start of the Union, a new founding act, which can but mean the turning point of a collective democratic self-determination of the European nation-states and a resolute self-assertion against disembedded markets. On closer view, however, standing up to the international dominance of finance capital is not *eo ipso* coextensive with democratic political presuppositions, because a globally acting Europe strong enough to stand its ground in terms of international competitiveness need not be conterminous with a supranational democratic governance, and this out of the obvious reasons that *a*) the struggle for global competitiveness need not be carried out deploying the fundamental European ethico-political values and normative principles, but could as well *b*) be carried out on the basis of a technocratic governmentality, which is anyway *c*) not very far apart from what the ruling European elites are currently practising, as they undermine people's trust in the European institutions and indirectly fuel the uprising of chauvinism, populism and right-extremism across the continent. Therefore, from the premise of strengthening the international action capacities to draw the conclusion of thereby securing those trust and legitimation resources European governance so urgently needs to get from the national public spheres is not at all convincing, for regaining international economic strength in terms of economic recovery and increase in competitiveness in order to 'reassure' the markets of the trustworthiness and credibility of Europe, on the one hand, and the trust people (should again) put into European leadership or its national representatives on the other, follow different rationalities. To make things worse, so goes the argumentation, it is far from plausible how a

technocratic oriented crisis management at European level can at the same time convince markets and people alike of the problem solution capacity it disposes of in the face of *a)* the widespread public distrust accompanying the various redemption funds for the banking sector, and *b)* the deep delegitimation of the political system in various European countries attending the implementation of austerity measures. Obviously the demands of the European populace for working places, safety of social status, social justice, welfare mechanisms against poverty and unemployment, integration and participation chances, etc. are not automatically compatible with restoring the trust of the financial markets through re-establishing ‘credible’ levels of returns of capital.

4. 3 Discursive ‘We’-formations

In the course of bringing knowledge claims to bear about appropriate ways to understand and consequently meet the action challenges the crisis poses to the European collectivity the discourse actors partly confirm well-known party political preferences regarding European affairs, partly enter into new constellations, discursive coalitions and argumentation positions. If one wants to group the attitudes of the discourse participants towards the course of the Union around two axes, i. e. *a)* of various understandings of the nexus between political steering action and market mechanisms, and *b)* of stances towards issues relative to the significance to be attributed to nation-states in the frame of transnational institution formation processes and globalised regulatory regimes, then one gets the following picture:

1. On the one hand there are those attitudes that in principle ardently defend state sovereign action and therefore tend to occupy EU-critical positions regarding the question of a possible, or in the name of securing sustainable crisis overcoming structures perhaps unavoidable ‘federalisation’ of the European state community. This sceptical-critical stance expresses itself also in assessing (the effectivity of) the European Stability mechanism (ESM), which accordingly is perceived of *a)* as additional evidence of the EU-executive elites instrumentalising the crisis situation to push their ‘unification’ plan of centralistic governmentality further, and *b)* as one more piece testifying to nation-state politics becoming increasingly devalued. However, the motives behind this critique should be looked at more carefully: On the one side what we have to do with are typical Eurosceptical stances taking every opportunity – and the crisis is a beautiful one for that! – to decry the undemocratic propensities of Brussels to subjugate the member states to its centralistic Eurocentrism, bureaucratic federalism or even dictatorship depriving them of fundamental sovereignty rights and transforming them into protectorate states. This

type of right-wing nationalist attitude is seconded by another stance inimical to ‘centralisation’ tendencies, albeit this time EU-coordinated harmonising of national budget policies is not so much criticised because it purports to annul the independence of the nation-state, but rather for conferring upon the mechanisms of European economic governance control rights and intervention prerogatives that in the end will make of the EU what nationalist Euroscepticism claim it already is, namely an authoritarian power machine. This discursive coalition is remarkable, because the latter criticism comes from rather liberal economic beliefs that perceive the anti-crisis measures intending to booster economic and financial stability going far beyond what sound economic policy is entitled to do thus ushering in structures of a planned economy of a European scale. To make things even more interesting this coalition of nationalists and liberals is joined by attitudes coming from the left-wing spectrum in the European Parliament which also criticise the interventionist dispositions of the EU leadership, albeit in another vein: the economic and fiscal coordination regulations and consolidation measures are from this side perceived to be but a continuation of the neoliberal agenda of imposing austerity regimes to national economies, allegedly since long ago living beyond their means, in order to bring them into line.

2. On the opposite side of the discursive front one observes positive stances towards the perspective of developing the integration process of the Union via the consequent implementation of all those coordination and control mechanisms made necessary in the course of combating the effects of the world-wide crisis, although here again motives, argumentation premises and discursive goals vary according to the underlying political affiliations. To begin with *a)* the supporters of the European supranational integration argue the case for transferring sovereignty to the EU in matters of economic policy not only on grounds of the monetary Union and the interdependence of the member states, but also by virtue of that evolutionary course the European community has since many decades embarked upon and which should be considered irreversible, despite the setbacks experienced owing the world-wide crisis – Europe as vision must be kept alive. *b)* The second discursive group standing behind the project of carrying on with and deepening the European integration process seems to be motivated by more profane objectives, driven as it is by a managerial mindset the characteristic methodology of which is instrumental rationality, on the one hand, and in firm belief in the normative force of the factual, i.e. compliance rules for the SWP, supervisory mechanisms for the control of economic and fiscal policies, budget discipline, incentives and sanctions, on the other. For the discursive supporters of the technocratic elite the next integration step to be achieved through the coordinated Euro-

pean Economic Governance may not display visionary traits, however it is all the more indispensable in order to stave off the danger of a gradual disintegration of over half a century of European integration. *c)* The third group consists of all those beliefs and attitudes that take heed of the principles of economic liberalism attuned to the priorities of raising competitiveness. Accordingly the integration course of the Union should unwaveringly be carried on with, because only by means of the Economic Governance can the Union stand its grounds in global competition and unfold the potentials of the common market.

Besides these attitudinal clusters one observes another ‘We’-formation among the discourse participants transcending in a way the usual confines of conflicting anti-crisis strategies and political-ideological positions, thereby reaffirming the collective consciousness of a commonly shared predicament. What we have to do with here is forging a discursive coalition on a cross-party basis in the face of what the political actors perceive to be a common threat to European cohesion, namely certain disintegration phenomena like those manifested in re-nationalisation tendencies spreading over the continent and held responsible for what a great part of the EU parliamentarians objects to in the intergovernmental crisis management practised by leading European nations. The fragmentation dangers this community consciousness sees itself confronted with arise from two interconnected sources: One the one hand and in relation to what is perceived as nationally biased approach towards the issue of coming to grips with the sovereign-debt crisis the eminent potentiality of an antagonistic asymmetry between North and South Europe becoming permanent, pitting macro-economically ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’ countries against one another, and so reassuring everybody that the will to create a ‘two-speed’ Europe is as firm as ever.

This juxtaposition brings on the other hand a situation of general mistrust about which nourishes all kinds of resentments, anxieties, animosities and national isolationisms that all in turn prove fertile grounds for populist and nationalist Euroscepticism. However, this type of European ‘We’-consciousness is also sensitive enough as not to dismiss out of hand the possibility that the increasing political significance stances inimical to Europe have come to enjoy in the course of the present crisis may go well beyond the usual national protectionist reflexes attending every European stress situation so far. On the contrary, a lot of things seem to testify to the EU hostility living off the same resources as those that also feed that form of discontent, which has very little to do with right-wing nationalism, but all the more with that (discursive) critique levelled at the chosen course of crisis management on the grounds of undisputable legitimisation gaps and democratic deficits. This at first sight quite perplexing situation can be untangled once one takes into account the (quasi-)dialectic manifest during the course of the crisis between

integration and disintegration, unification and fragmentation: The more pressingly urgent the coercive constraints of implementing steering mechanisms of economic and fiscal coordination, as well as budget consolidation, are felt to be, the more wide-spread become in the European national public spheres perceptions of powerlessness and expropriation.

What on this side of the dividing line appears as the unification as integration work of consolidation strategies, stability schemes, economic and fiscal regulation policies, budget discipline measures and sanctions, etc., shows up on the other side as (national) identity loss, sovereignty sacrifice, socio-cultural expropriation, neo-colonial paternalism – in the name of deepening European integration and successfully overcoming the crisis transfer of sovereignty rights to the EU and disempowerment of nation-state are thus perceived as but two sides of the same coin. In the face of this seemingly desolate state of affairs it comes as a surprise to observe that the discourse participants do not fathom the question of argumentatively supplying possible mediations to this kind of dialectical movement. The only testimony that this could be the case, consists in the actors reassuring themselves that challenging populist anti-EU attitudes and party-political stances means the European Parliament working with the member states in the direction of establishing a democratic federation of countries or a federation of citizens. This in turn can but only mean that reducing national self-determinations in favour of deepening the integration of the EU will have a chance of being accepted only on the condition of its being reasonably legitimated, that is, decided upon by deploying democratic will-formation procedures and so permitting European citizens to directly participate in determining the course of the on-going integration processes.

5. Value-based argumentations

That projecting solutions for the way out should not confine itself to consolidation, coordination, control and supervision measures is something obvious for all those political stances which set out from the belief that coping with effects and consequences of the crisis entails essentially a dimension of justificatory reasoning in the sense of assessing the crisis-induced reforms to be implemented in the regulatory rule system of the Union's institutional architecture also in the light of and in compliance with normative rules and values. However, although being aware of the necessity of supplying the measures to be taken with value credentials and normative underpinnings is remarkably intense, discursively embedding anti-crisis regulations in a normative framework proves to be no easy task, caught as justificatory discursive work is between two orders of reasoning, that is, on the one hand the normative work proper of attuning facts/plans (i. e. regulatory reforms) to values, demonstrating at the same time policy decisions

to be compatible with and compliant to the rules of economic efficiency, performance and effective crisis management. This twofold register of reason-giving, i. e. value-oriented and/or instrumental rationality, proves of course to entail considerable tensions being aggravated by the fact that besides the contestations around such issues as questionable competence transfers, not always legitimate-transparent decision procedures, phenomena of power concentration attending fiscal supervision measures that undermine nation-state sovereignty, etc. discursive deliberation must also reflect upon a European reform process encumbered by huge costs, weighty burdens, asymmetrical contributions and performances in view of anticipated redistribution necessities. What the latter ultimately means is the unavoidability of confounding the question of who is going to 'pay the bill' with reflective reasoning on the question of how to argue for, justify and ground the 'payment'-decision on collective motivations, mutually shared beliefs and commonly held values: How can the cost distribution be justifiably accounted for, or, with other words, on what normative grounds and by appealing to what kind of shared consciousness shall the European national public spheres be called upon to shoulder collectively the costs of the crisis?

No easy justificatory task, if one considers that until today forming a collectively shared European identity remains unaccomplished, and therefore the efforts to legitimate costs, burdens and 'sacrifices' cannot take recourse on common resources of normative grounding in the first place. So if one wants to track the way the discourse participants copy with the issue of how sharing the costs can on normative grounds be made legitimate, one should start with how they draw upon and appeal to what they believe and perceive to be the community ethos justifying asymmetrical reciprocity relations such as those observed in the course of overcoming the crisis as European citizens are summoned to offer 'sacrifices' for other Europeans. The key notion in this context is of course that of interdependence (and solidarity), then it is against the background of sharing the consciousness of mutual dependence that the actors see themselves entitled to make justified claims about ways of reconciling unequal socio-economic risks and interests. Particular attention should also be paid to the following points: *a)* to what extent can be claimed that in perceptions of collectively taking the responsibility for the cost distribution are expressed beliefs of justice? This would for example mean that solidarity perceptions ground on the actors' beliefs in Europe as community governed by rules of distributive justice; *b)* if this holds, then taking the other way round in the order of justification it could also be asked whether a kind of financial adjustment à la transfer union is what the discourse actors take recourse on in order to reason for a new modus vivendi regarding financial (re-)distribu-

tions in the European common economic and monetary space; *c*) if these distributive compensations are thus perceived as means of effective practice to secure the stability of this space, then it is worth looking at to what extent they are also perceived as a necessary and sufficient condition for securing the value-based stability of the Union as well (“If the euro fails, then Europe fails”); *d*) last but not least, special attention deserves the question how the political actors come discursively by the tensions inherent in the relation between the asymmetric reciprocity of solidarity-oriented action on the one hand, and the (radical individualist) competitive logic of capital growth on the other.

5. 1 Solidarity: perception patterns

That in face of the debacle that has hit Europe solidarity is no option may by no means reflect the mainstream attitude in the discursive community, it is however of considerable significance as to what problem deliberation on the legitimation question of motivational forces to be mobilised for the collective tasks ahead is confronted with. If to these tasks belong taking integrative steps to reduce inequalities of competitiveness, as well as to even out divergencies between economic and fiscal regimes in the Euro space, then it is no surprise to see justificatory reasoning revolving around such questions as *a*) state guarantees for the redemption funds accompanied by substantial liabilities of the taxpayers, *b*) drastic cuts in public expenditures provoking social-political grievances, and *c*) (fearful anticipations of) a gradual drift into what is mostly pejoratively called ‘transfer union’. Focussing on solidarity as, in a sense, the common denominator and value reference in the argumentations surrounding the aforementioned topics one sees already the vagueness of the notion by looking closely at those discursive contexts in which the legal and constitutional provisions codified in the European treaties are referred to in order to confer to the extraordinary financial assistance granted to countries deep in a sovereign-debt crisis indisputable backing.

The diffuse use of solidarity appellations can also be observed in other argumentative contexts as well, the notion more often than not oscillating between social-political justice orientation and duty-based loyalty to the demands of the community, between commonplace and emphatic normative goal, between expressing general willingness and formulating concrete objectives. In order to bring some coherence into the notion as deployed in the parliamentary discourse one must bundle together contexts of use, as well as semantic aspects in three groups: *1.* at a general normative level the discursive use of solidarity is unmistakably embedded in the semantic sphere of normative principles and guiding value orientations. Its validity claim taken

for granted the concept is then deployed as premise from which other practical conclusions can be drawn; 2. The second group includes deployments of the value concept closely attached to the field of economic and fiscal coordination measures thus being brought into semantic vicinity to such concepts as co-operation, institutional interplay or functional coordination, interdependence and consensus. In these argumentative contexts solidarity is perceived of partly as precondition of action coordination, partly as belonging to those mobilisable resources and deployable means to be used in managing the effects of the crisis, but also as demonstration of stability, reaction capacity, consciousness of responsibility and common destiny; 3. The third group comprises ways of concept use characterised by higher concreteness, for here solidarity perceptions relate to such (practical) questions as: Under what conditions is the Union (or for that matter the member states) obliged to provide solidarity to states in need? Conversely: To what extent are these over-indebted member states entitled to claim that being receivers of assistance is but an expression of the right they have on the solidarity of the community? What forms should this mutuality of rights and obligations take in order to satisfy the demands of justice and community spirit based on responsibility? All of these questions bare of course (primarily) on the Greek case.

Turning at first to those argumentation in which solidarity is taken recourse to as founding value of the European state community one observes the following aspects: *a)* in the face of a crisis that fosters disintegration and fragmentation tendencies thus putting the cohesion capacities of the Union to a hard test parliamentary consciousness sees itself confronted with the task of embarking on a new course the presuppositions of which include affirming the spirit of solidarity and commonality; *b)* reactivating the commonality ethos in order to raise the resilience of the Union against the crisis is also perceived as part of the efforts to mobilise normative resources to meet the challenges at international level, that is to regain action competencies for the Union as bastion of universalist values such as freedom, rule of law and solidarity; *c)* However, the objection is put forward that it is doubtful whether the action-oriented recollection of commonly shared fundamental values can provide for sufficient resources for overcoming the crisis afflicting the community, because the crisis has not only undermined basic structures of the monetary union, but also the common bonds between the member states themselves, and moreover it can reasonably be doubted whether the chances of observing solidarity in the future will be better than they have been in the past at all.

Beneath this normative level the binding quality in the semantics of solidarity is drawn upon in argumentations referring to action contexts that are related to functional challenges of economic and financial nature emerging out of the exigencies of managing the effects of the crisis.

In this way it is demanded, for example, that such concepts as solidarity and economic policy coordination should immediately be implemented in problem-solving instruments and regulations, although explicating the practical significance of these notions can also take the other way round: Instead of rendering solidarity conterminous with coordination of economic policy action, thus making them both serve overcoming the crisis, one can reverse the order of explanation and claim that improving and developing economic cooperation structures provides the preconditions for setting the solidarity dynamic in motion. According to still another understanding of the matter the relation between solidarity and economic coordination should be conceived of not in terms of conditioning antecedents (in both ways), but rather as implication as containment relation: it is not a kind of optimised coordination of economic policies that will infuse solidarity in the institutional life of the Union, but rather the existing European solidarity potentials will not be able to unfold until the diverging social, economic and fiscal systems of the member states have been made commensurate. Relative free from strong normative connotations is also that argumentative deployment of the notion observed in the context of arguing about the crisis resilience of the common currency. Given the perception pattern of discerning behind the crisis a kind of war waged against the Union summoning solidarity among European states can help demonstrate their willingness not to let themselves be divided by the ‘markets’, but also make explicit that solidarity is also capable of being perceived of as solidity, thus translatable in terms of economic and monetary unity, firmness and coherence – or stability for that matter. Like the semantic correlation between solidarity and solidity and/or coordination perceiving solidarity as part of a relation of implication to (economic/fiscal) stability can be read two ways, or, to put it better, as a reciprocal relation: Not only can stability and the concomitant fiscal policies and supervisory mechanisms be conceived of as instrumental approaches for achieving a higher level of solidarity between debtors and creditors countries in the EU, but solidarity can conversely be also perceived as founding stone for every stability mechanism aspiring to success. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* for the semantic-discursive relations between solidarity and discipline, the latter deployed following the scheme of performance and counter-performance, that is, solidarity assistance on the one hand, and justifiable claim on receiving it, on the other. The scheme of reciprocity of performances is in turn backed discursively up by appeals to the multi-valenced notion of responsibility: Duty awareness regarding solidarity displays accordingly two sides, the receiving party proving worthy of it through certain deeds, for example compliance with austerity measures, on the one hand, the giving party demonstrating the firm will to practically secure the common values and principles

of the community, on the other. These are then the two poles around which discursive deliberation on the question of justifying the distribution of costs resulting from the crisis revolves.

5. 1. 1 Solidarity community as ‘transfer union’?

That Europe runs danger of splitting up in two parts, that is, debtors and creditors countries so painstakingly eager to draw the best advantages they can from the crisis situation that in consequence all kinds of resentments, animosities and hostilities arise between the member states, is an observation almost everyone in the discursive community of the European Parliament agrees upon, without consenting on what this perceptual certainty means regarding normative values though. Certain is at any rate the fact that perceptions of reciprocal solidarity among the discursive participants display an element of tension or even conflict, and this to the extent that the European state community may be a form of “with-one-another”, but this by no means suffices to ground a community type of “for-one-another”, be that the various national public spheres, or the European policies of the governments of the member states. At the latest since the outbreak of the sovereign-debt crisis it goes beyond doubt that in certain situations the community type of reciprocal “with-one-another” turns into an asymmetrical “for-one-another” especially as regards contributions to, performances for and services directed at the common good. If one therefore wants to look at how in the crisis discourse of the EU-Parliament the relation between reciprocal solidarity and the willingness to stand for one another is conceived of, then one must pay attention to those argumentative contexts in which belief patterns regarding the entitlement to claims on receiving solidarity assistance, on the one hand, and the duty of providing such assistance, on the other, are explicitly expressed. To cut a long story short: Who deserves solidarity and why, and how much solidarity deserves the receiving party?

Argumentations in support of the duty of solidarity the Union must observe towards those in need contain reasons both of practical purposefulness and of normative justification as well.

- 1. The self-interest argument.** Although paradoxical at first sight, the rationale behind the argumentations bringing solidarity and self-interest together consists in pointing out that the EU emergency credits are also governed by a kind of strategic, self-interest oriented rationality to the extent that the form assistance in this case takes is of banking financial nature since the credits must be paid back and the interest rates are far from negligible. Moreover, the benefit calculation behind granting this kind of ‘solidarity’ assistance can be unmistakably shown by indicating the fact of the assistance being granted for the sake of the integrity and prestige of the euro zone, if not to say in the interest of a realising a strategy to gain fiscal control over the

countries of the South by imposing on them austerity regimes. **2.** The interdependence argument. Against the background of exchange relations and economic interconnections of high density, but also of synergy effects resulting from the integration into the common monetary space, policies of distributing the costs and burdens of the crisis serve the well-understood interest of the European commonwealth, since asymmetrical reciprocities as those of granting financial assistance lie in the interest of the net contributors carefully attentive to what they perceive as ‘contagion’ dangers and ‘domino’ effects. **3.** The argument of correcting (past) mistakes. Reasoning on the dutifulness of solidarity assistance derives normative force additionally from the recourse to beliefs widely held in the discursive community of the crisis being a stepping stone for promoting the cause of integration as developed regulation. **4.** The argument for deepening solidarity bonds between European nation-states. In the context of justificatory reasonings on the issue of a crisis management backed-up by solidarity not few are those argumentations in which conceiving of how solidarity attitudes should practically be implemented draws upon knowledge resources the discursive actors dispose of as citizens of modern welfare states equipped as these are with extensive (compensatory) mechanisms of social security and benefits. Moreover, the solidarity community, which the social state undoubtedly is, rests upon bonds of commonly shared traditions, cultural histories and collective identities, may well serve according to these argumentations as a model for building up integration structures at EU level capable of providing the citizens of the Union with solidarity values to identify with.

If die solidarity duty regarding compensatory cost distributions must reasonably be justified, then the claims on the right to justifiably be recipient of solidarity assistance too – if not necessarily in legal-juridical terms, in any case in political-normative. So surveying the argumentations revolving around entitlement reasoning the argument to begin with that displays immediate intelligibility consists in pointing out that countries like Greece can justly demand solidarity inputs from the community on account of being members of an association of states, parts of the monetary union, or even comrades in a community of fate. Because obviously this formal membership does not in itself suffice to ground solidarity claims justificatory reasoning must focus on arguments testifying to the fact the recipients being also worthy of deserving assistance. The most convincing strategy in this respect is of course to argue that the countries in question got into trouble through no fault of their own, falling rather prey to ruthless and unbridled speculation. This discursive strategy is flanked by arguing against sceptical objections as to the trustworthiness of the over-indebted member states that the latter are of course ready to embark on the adventures of budget consolidation, deficit reduction, austerity measures. As expected such assurances cannot quiet the anxieties of all those political stances though that

turn in mirror-inverted manner the support in favour of justifiably receiving solidarity into arguments against what they pejoratively call ‘transfer union’, the most important of which being the scarcely doubtful observation that there is no collective European consciousness functioning as court of appeal for solidarity claims, no European identity of commonly shared beliefs of belonging to something that would make the pooling of resources and support perfectly justifiable, no kind of a collective subject to which attributions of duty, obligation, or even responsibility could be made. When therefore no such instance of appeal can be made of the European community, it is hardly possible to see why the Germans should work hard to pay for others, for example, the Greeks.

For the opponents of any kind of ‘transfer union’ the arguments put forward by the supporters of the (allegedly) legitimate claims on solidarity stand on shaky grounds for the latter seem to be entangled in contradictions as they *a)* on the one hand praise the culture of stability, but on the other reward with solidarity credits those countries that all these years have been quite unsuccessful in managing economic affairs in a responsible manner, and *b)* on the one hand laud all efforts in the direction of raising competitiveness, while on the other they ignore the fact of social and finance policies having in a number of countries led to considerable lags and deficits in economic performance, productivity, and related matters. In this respect the opponents of the ‘transfer union’ can in a way mobilise considerable argumentative resources in order to weaken all those positions that share the confidence that by appealing to the well-understood common good of the Union they can justify compensatory or redistributive performances in the spirit of solidarity and *eo ipso* contribute to promoting European integration by strengthening bonds of reciprocity, however asymmetrical, between the member states.

Discursively weakening such positions does not seem to quite a difficult task, because to persuasively argue against such solidarity beliefs it suffices to point out that the whole solidarity discourse is riven by an apparently insoluble contradiction: On the one hand, in the after wake of the crisis it apparently belongs to the fundamental tenets of European consciousness to praise raising competitiveness as sustainable solution to structural European problems the crisis has brought to the fore. On the other hand the Union is summoned to shoulder the costs and burdens of a possible debt mutualisation that hardly holds the promise to achieve what by means of raising competitiveness is supposed to be attained, namely a convergence of national economic performances – let alone an end to ‘transfer performances’. If thus the suspicion is well-founded that *a)* holding on to reaching the goal of making the economies of the member states more competitive has rather negative feedback effects on those solidarity resources which beyond doubt are of paramount important for legitimating both the distribution of crisis costs and the

radical social cuts associated with austerity policies as well, and as consequence that *b*) the reciprocity of solidarity-based action is hardly compatible with radical individualistic logic der economic competition, then – then the decisive question of what sustains the European project must be posed again.

6. List of Documents

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