

FRAGMEX – Fragmentation & Exclusion. Understanding & Overcoming the multiple Impacts of the European Crisis

Discursive constitutions. Constructing selves and others in the framework of parliamentary debates on crisis in Germany and Greece

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I. Some preliminary remarks

If the semantics of κρίνειν taken in the original (ancient) term use entails conceptual content which can best be articulated by such notions as separating/distinguishing and (categorical or experiential) differentiation, and if furthermore something of this discriminatory act accompanies every (perception of and judgement on a) crisis phenomenon, then crisis processes as those that afflicted European economics and finance in the last years are not quite such a thing someone would easily want to discard when it comes to questions of how political, institutional and social actors under crisis pressure are moved to demarcate what is still functioning from what is not, to differentiate between structural malfunctions and temporary blockades, to delineate action competences setting them apart from illegitimate practices – last but not least, to (re-) define stances, modify attitudes and adjust their self-understandings to the exigencies of the crisis constellation. Such has undoubtedly been the case with the finance and sovereign debt crisis that has triggered a host of critical-differentiatory discourses on such issues as the relations between finance economy and state regulation, European monetary union, Economic Governance and political integration, budgetary/fiscal surveillance and national sovereignty rights, community prerogatives and member states' competencies, consolidation courses and austerity policies, and the like.

Taking such intensely debated and more often than not hardly contested issues as more or less clearly distinguishable discursive fields should not however detract attention from the fundamental mediatory role the discursive actors in the aforementioned sense of political, institutional and social beliefs and stances come to play, distinguishing as they do between priority

* Setting the goal of a comparative analysis this paper draws on the research work done on German and Greek parliamentary crisis perceptions in the framework of FRAGMEX: See M. Zafiropoulou et al. (2015): Discourse analysis report of official and political documents for Greece: Public discourse analysis of the Greek crisis: the case of Greek politicians' perceptions of the Germans and Readers' online comments about Chancellor Merkel's visits to Athens. <http://www.gramex.eu/myfiles/d2-1-Discourse-analysis-report-of-official-and-political-documents-for-Greece-ver2.pdf> [last access: 03.01.2016]; see also K. Maras (2015): Der Krisendiskurs im Deutschen Bundestag. Eine Diskursanalyse anhand von Plenarsitzungsprotokollen. <http://www.gramex.eu/myfiles/d3-der-Krisendiskurs-im-Deutschen-Bundestag-Eine-Diskursanalyse-an-hand-von-Plenarsitzungsprotokollen-v3.pdf> [last access: 03.01.2016]. The examination of perception and argumentation patterns focusses on the period 2010-2012, the formative years of the crisis discourse. In brackets: B = Bundestag, the German Parliament, K = Greek Parliament.

causes from secondary effects, overriding goals from short-term impacts, ground-level reformatory work from merely repair measures, and guiding value orientations from conjectural expediencies. Doing all this, or better, communicating about and negotiating over such critical tasks means that actors forge discursive practices as ways of coping with what they perceive as exigencies and challenges certain (crisis) realities pose for their problem-solving capacities. Taking this argumentation a step further, one can see such discursive practises as producing and processing situation understandings and self-perceptions equally determining of what these realities consist in und what should consequently be reacted upon. Under this light, discursive practices generate interpretive patterns of constructing or constituting [social] realities (and selves), and the explanatory task of discourse analysis consists in providing reasonable accounts for answering such questions as to the kind

- a) of knowledge or understanding that governs the beliefs of the discourse participants,
- b) of objects, relations, properties, subject positions, etc. that thereby are asserted to ‘really’ be and obtain,
- c) of the means [i. e. explanatory schemes, story lines, normative arguments, rhetorical figures, etc.] deployed to supply reasons to support such assertive claims, and last but not least
- d) of rules that relate and coordinate the former three aspects of the discursive phenomenon.

Against this background of methodology reflexions it is not difficult to discern what deploying such notions as ‘discursive constitutions’ and ‘constructing selves and others’ amounts to: It denotes exploring the question of how in both countries the parliamentary debates accompanying the course of coping with the effects of the crisis constitute discursive fields, in which the ‘facts’ of the case, i. e. crisis explanations, responsibility attributions and problem-solving proposals, as well as ‘We’-formations, featuring as action collectivities and bearers of normative and practical claims, emerge – implicit in the discursive praxis, explicit in the work of reconstructive interpretation.

As far as the latter and especially the self-other relations involved in discursive identity construction are concerned, this paper shall take some pains not to succumb to the allures of drawing upon interpretative schemes derived from the vast field of social discourse theories, but to restrict itself to deploying the interpretative vocabulary of social-normative pragmatics¹ of commitments and responsibilities, entitlements and authorities.

¹ See R. B. Brandom, *Making it explicit. Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1998); R. B. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons. An introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2000).

II. German self-perceptions

Taking it that to crisis discourse as structured phenomenon belongs essentially the dimension circumscribed by practices of meaning production mediated by the discursive self-positioning of political actors, means also that causal explanations and problem-solving understandings depend on the positional roles discursive subjects occupy in the institutional or organisational setting²– in the present case parliamentary deliberation and legislation. Assuming further that discursive positionings, role complexes and ‘We’-formations instantiate, as it were, types of problem understandings, action competences and normative beliefs of legitimate conduct, there arises then the question of the distribution of self-positionings in the discursive field. Leaving aside such self-understandings of political actors pertaining to rather general issues of the relations between politics, markets and public spheres³, one can focus on the double reference that characterises the stances of German MPs, that is the fact, that problem consciousness and crisis management approaches take account of and relate to both the national and the European action and policy context as well.

Turning at first to the latter, it comes as no surprise to see that copying with the crisis political actors do not only try to make the best of the stock of knowledge, action resources and institutional capacities available in the national body politic, but also take recourse to what they believe as constitutive of the cohesion and integration capacity of the Union. In this sense, crisis consciousness necessarily entails a form of European self-assurance und this all the more so, as the economically mightiest and politically highly influential country sees itself, as it were, object of assessment by the other member states as to what extent its crisis management policies can be seen as attuned to a collective European anti-crisis strategy. Because the interest towards such a concerted European strategy can only be legitimated through value-based collective resources, the political actors deploy in their argumentations European normative tenets that in their view supply motivational means to meet the economic and finance crisis – existential dimensions as the latter now displays [B18]. Looking now at the forms Europe-related self-consciousness (‘We’, the ‘good’, i.e. responsibility-minded, Europeans) can assume and the justificatory role value-oriented argumentations can play in relation to crisis management, one discerns three varieties:

² See R. Keller, *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse. Grundlegung eines Forschungsprogramms* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag 2005).

³ Perceiving the crisis as the European chance to readjust these relations is also something one encounters in the Greek discursive context: see K4 and K9.

1. The strong version of the normative grounding of anti-crisis policies consists in arguing that these must essentially evolve from and demonstrate a resolute commitment to European normative foundations, determining as the latter do the character of the EU as a community of fate and peace project [B6; B8; B18; B21]. Furthermore, European communitisation can also be spelled out in terms of civilisation's trajectory and integration developmental process resting on such principles as rule of law, welfare state, human and individual rights, tolerant cultural traditions, etc. – taken together, all of them normative foundations and driving forces to be drawn upon in the attempt to enhance the narrative of Europe progressing through successfully managing political and economic crisis situations, institutional malfunctions and temporary drawbacks. Not the least of those elements that confer upon the European narrative convincing force and justificatory power is the primacy democratic will formation enjoys against the market function logic and the inscrutable decision making processes of the financialised economy [B8; B25].
2. Arguing in favour of normative oriented stances takes also the form of a conditioning relation appealing to and complying with the values of the community can come to stand in related to the next integration step. If the first line of reasoning displays logically a recursive-retrospective trait, value resources functioning as motivational self-assurances, this argumentation strategy looks rather forward, assigning, as it were, the envisaged value-guided anti-crisis strategy a conditioning role for being able to meet the challenge of pushing integration ahead. Obviously a consequential variation of the quite usual perception pattern 'crisis-as-chance', this line of discursive reasoning is however not equally shared by all parliamentary factions, its main proponents from the centre-left insisting vigorously that if crisis management is to function as 'chance' and stepping stone for strengthening the Union's structures, then this can only succeed on the grounds of setting the priority records right by paving the way for political unification policies.

Lest this sound untimely considering the urgencies of attempting to hold at first the monetary union together, thereby staving off the domino effects of the sovereign debt crisis, the supporters from the centre-left factions of the German Parliament hammer the point home that political integration is unavoidable out of two reasons:

- a) In the course of helping the European financial framework off the hook it has become plainly evident – at least for those who still cling to the notion of Europe tightening its political executive authority –, that merely imposing regulatory hedges on financial markets or even allowing the state to step in and backstop the losses of the banking sector will not suffice, if such measures are not concurringly supplemented by reinforcing the primacy of the Political,

even if only by these means to be able to reassure the national, political public spheres that Politics still retains some of formative powers [B8; B14].

b) The second argument put forward in support of stepping up European integration draws on the persuasive force of the appeal to what currently is seen as the main thrust of European economic policy, namely raising competitiveness. So it is argued that the need to force political unification ahead should be seen as collateral development to making out of the European economic space an internationally robust competitive player⁴, but also one that (against unbridled speculation and unfettered profit maximisation) testifies to the merits of social market economy as being the better regulation regime – the latter in turn considered by a considerable part of the discursive community to result from Europe being more than just an economic area in the globalised world economy [B10; B1].

Now, if these value-oriented argumentations and European self-understandings do not differ substantially from those observed in the crisis debates in the European Parliament, in the German discursive context one can sketch out interest-based self-perception patterns that expectedly set other accents. Apart from such argumentations that postulate a quasi-automatic consonance between European and German interests [B8; B7; B18], further upholding that owing to its European embeddedness the German nation avails of powers of exercising a greater influence in the international arena [B24], particular mention should be made of that discursive tension discernible in the way a lot of MPs argue that the Merkel government has in the course of crisis management laudably represented German national interests *along with* those of safeguarding the European economic and monetary space. That this congruence turns out to be a matter of considerable contention between the parties of the ruling coalitions of Christian Democrats and Liberals (2009-2013), and Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (2013-) on the one hand, Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left Party on the other, comes as no surprise – and still less unexpected is how the fact, that the dispute revolving around the question of how far – if at all – the claim of achieving the goal of interest-fulfilment on both accounts (European/German) is justified, can help reveal crucial dimensions of political self-perceptions.

Turning thus to what perception patterns underlie the problem consciousness of following policies that conform to national interests without losing sight of the European demands for a coherent and sustainable anti-crisis strategy, two are the most recurrent arguments: Germany a) is responsible for assuming a leading role in managing the impacts of the finance and sovereign debt crisis [B11; B28; B10], which means that b) this forerunner function should most importantly be exercised in enforcing a (fiscal) stability regime across the European monetary

⁴ An argument voiced also in the Greek parliament [K4].

union [B11; B23]. This self-understanding is in turn based on perceptions of righteously laying claim on taking a principal position in helping the Union out of the present predicament, for in the eyes of a great majority the country disposes of those cohesion capacities urgently needed in the face of centrifugal forces unleashed since the outbreak of the crisis. Tacit consensus – at least what concerns the ruling coalition parties – seems thereby to be the assumption that not only there is no alternative [B6] to the consolidation strategy determinedly put forward by the government, but also that the German decision makers are capable of re-establishing order in Europe [B7]. Not least of these ordering capacities are those derived from the German model of market economy, as well as the fiscal and monetary stability policies successfully implemented in the country since decades now [B15; B16; B17].

If one consequently draws together forerunner role and unwavering orientation to monetary stability, then there emerge the outlines of a self-perception centred on the constitutive belief of a ‘We’ committed to safeguarding the tenets of a stability culture [B22], persuaded as this collective self-identity is of its entitlement to exert its authority on making the European stability architecture [B23] crisis resilient – no wonder then, that for many MPs to the commonly used notions of Europe being a community of responsibility and fate [B12] should be added that of stability [B12]. Looking more closely at what the semantic import of the notion ‘stability culture’ contains, it is no surprise to come along firm principles [B16] that must unconditionally be observed, whereby the majority in the discursive community of the German parliament is willing to take the lead in demonstrating reliability in pursuing the goal of stable consolidation of the monetary space threatened to go apart [B9; B10].

Reliability and responsibility awareness are thereby perceived as being preconditions not only for diffusing the precepts of the stability culture in the European space, but also for seeing to it that such experiments of ushering in a transfer Union through euro bonds are avoided [B12], the control mechanisms are in place and functioning [B16] and – if necessary – pressure is exerted on Europe and individual countries to observe the stability rules [B9; B7; B30]. What further can be seen as determining this will to render the (cultural) mentality of stability common good in Europa, generalising as it were its blissful effects to the whole of the Euro zone [B6; B10; B12], is the implementation of certain policies, proved successful at home and now to be applied abroad, as for example the cornerstone of fiscal stability, the debt brake [B7; B14], but also budget surveillance mechanisms [B9; B25].

Although raising claims to leadership on the grounds of perceiving oneself authorised and entitled to disseminate the culture of stable finance and fiscal policies is something neither di-

rectly contested (with the exception of the Left Party) nor outright rejected, nevertheless considerable critique is mounted against certain collateral aspects of making these claims true, thereby consolidating a collective ‘We’, which many in the discursive community of the parliament would not unconditionally want to see themselves associated to. Unlike the champions of stability culture, untroubled as they are by the possibly negative impact uncompromising fiscal discipline can have upon European countries eager to safeguard their budgetary sovereignty, the opposition parties argue against the danger of German European politics reinforcing the trend of renationalisation – let alone proving one of its driving forces [B11; B22].

Obviously, it is not that much difficult to cast doubt on whether the course taken by the German government has not in fact given rise to much irritation among smaller EU-member states [B15; B27; B28], especially not, if one takes additionally into account the possibility that this kind of leadership in matters of financial solidity and fiscal stability may not be compatible with European community-mindedness: Coming to be identified in the eyes of other European nations with a Teutonic fury bent on saving money at all costs [B12] or even a China-like export fetishist Germany [B14; B27] has (according to the critical stances) in a certain sense lost its trustworthiness as willing to act in the spirit of the common European good – and this all the more so, as it demands in authoritarian manner from certain European countries unconditional compliance with austerity dictates, lest they be tossed from the Eurozone [B15, B17; B27].

To these reproaches the government camp can but reply that the persistency with which German European politics follows the consolidation course to be implemented by the over-indebted states may not be applauded [B16; B26], but neither are usually those uncomfortable policies carried through solely out of a sense of responsibility for what must be done under the strains of the current crisis [B7]. Under this light, what the opposition parties criticising the government course in reality (i. e. according to the ruling parties) do is in a sense undermine the firmness and resoluteness of the European crisis management [B12]. At the end of the day, nobody European-minded enough would tolerate the possibility of (letting) some countries going bankrupt, thus pouring more oil on the fire of nationalistic Euroscepticism [B14]. Setting the obvious apart, namely that what the European politics of the German government regarding finance consolidation and fiscal discipline consists in, is nothing more than bringing to the monetary Union some messages drawn from experiences of successful financial management made at home [B21; B24; B25], critique from the opposition should also be rejected on the grounds that it ignores the interdependencies governing the European economic space⁵: helping

⁵ For a similar argumentation in the Greek discursive context see K10.

consolidate the faltering economies in the European periphery means securing a stable economic environment, in which Germany can optimally develop forces of innovation, performance and efficiency [B23].

Such raisonnements cannot, as expected, dispel the doubts of the opposition concerning the justificatory sustainability of the leadership claim, especially when it comes to questioning the way the government coalitions have explained to the German public the course taken: Hereby, the critique focusses on the government's inability to make to the German electorate clear that the stabilisation mechanism of rescue packages would entail certain risks for the tax payers. Instead of launching an information and communication strategy apt to clarifying what is at stake, namely the fact that European solidarity also means transfers and overcoming national egoisms [B14], the decision makers have opted for a populist discourse, especially cherished by the yellow press: If not actively supported, they surely have tolerated the emergence and diffusion of a self-image abounding in stereotypes, as for example, Germany being the 'beast of burden' Europe's, the country forced to 'pay the bill' for others [B25; B16, B27].

In this way, they have instigated popular discontent [B6; B9; B15], fuelled resentments [B18], triggered animosities [B25; B19] and thus carried water to the mills of Euroscepticism [B17] – last but not least, the whole public relations policy of the Merkel government has contributed to shaping a distorted and misleading image of Germany being the stability anchor in the troubled (European) waters of fiscal unruliness and economic indiscipline [B26; B17]. As concerns the interdependency argument, one can counter that it is precisely the one-sidedness of the German economic European politics – ignoring as it does the structural macroeconomic imbalances in the Union [B27]⁶, pressing instead for austerity policies –, that has aggravated the problem of managing the impacts of the crisis effectively. Therefore, if the ruling parties take their self-proclaimed authority and the concomitant commitment to ensuring the spread of a stability culture seriously, then they could do no better, than take care to balance consolidation austerity by means of an economic stimulus programme [B9].

⁶ Arguing along these lines can be seen as drawing on the critique of the 'beggar-thy-neighbour' politics the German Government is pursuing in the eyes of the Opposition, as it worsens the budget deficits of other member states by its export overweight. This in turn is exactly the argument deployed in the Greek discursive context in order to repudiate the claim of the Greeks behaving somehow parasitic on German taxpayers' interests: Not only are German exports financed (also) by Greek consumers [K2], but Germany's arms exports to Greece and other infrastructure investments indicate the satisfaction of considerable business interests [K6] – German investments in a number of key business areas being considered (highly) dubious though, involving corruption [K2; see also K3; K5; K6]. Furthermore, it is persuasively pointed out that arguing, as the Merkel government does, that raising competitiveness as panacea of cutting deficits down to size, lacks logical rigor, for the imbalances resulting in over-indebtedness lie in the antagonistic nature of competitive markets not all being capable at one and the same time of attaining the desired levels of economic efficiency. To cut a long story short, not everybody can perform like the Germans do – one country's deficits are another's surpluses [K9; see also K11].

II. 1 Self- and Other-Perceptions related to the Greek crisis

Assuming, as one must do, when conducting research in the spirit of the sociology of knowledge, that in the context of the parliamentary discourse on the Greek crisis causal explanations and problem-solving schemes correlate with certain constellations of self-perceptions and others understandings, then attention must be drawn to how the discourse participants mobilise particular self-ascriptions as constitutive of that which in their eyes shall count as sustainable problem-solving strategy. Take for example the much talked about slogan of Merkel as the „Iron Chancellor“: It conveys self-perceptions in which knowledge claims, action competences and decision effectiveness – like those self-understandings, particularly observable in the beginning of the Greek crisis, with which the Merkel government justified the first rescue package. It consented to granting credit aid after it had made sure that the package was conform to economic and legal principles binding on the action of the German government. Complying with requisite rules was expression not of uncompromising arrogance, but of determined belief of acting in accordance with principles serving the cause of safeguarding financial stability [B9].

Not presumptuousness and moral self-righteousness motivate thus decision-making processes, but a self-consciousness suffused with the sense of normative correctness and objective assessment of the course embarked upon. Against this backdrop it is not difficult to delineate how the perceptions of others, in this case (mostly) the decision makers in Greece as the addressees of rescue policies, turn in most cases to be the obverse of those assumptions that govern beliefs about oneself. It comes then as no surprise to see, that the discursive understanding of and the agreement on the question why it has been right to resort to the bailout policy rest on argumentations that essentially deploy a perception pattern modelled on pedagogic practices: Notwithstanding the considerable risks such a policy might entail, the German government has taken responsibility for the Eurozone, helping at the same time Greece to drag itself out of the danger of state bankruptcy, out of the conviction that by these means the Greeks can be shown the right way forward [B18]. This orientational help refers to what in the economic worldview of the German decision-makers rule-governed economics, stable finances and disciplined fiscal policies amount to, the whole culminating in stable currency [B7].

The pedagogic flair of this argumentation can easily be explained, if one takes into account that one of the most prevalent perception patterns consists in a great part of the German parliamentary community holding for true that the Greek crisis is to be attributed to the propensity of

the Greeks, government and populace alike, to live beyond their means [B7; B8; B6]. Given a self-perception that is centred on monetary stability and frugal fiscal policies, but also on hard work and effort [B17], it is not difficult to see why the dominant parliamentary view of and attitude towards the over indebted country is characterised by a certain aversion against what is perceived as unsound economics, unruly fiscal management and reckless consumerism. Even less difficult is viewing these discursive self- and other-perceptions as means to explain

a) why the rescue policy and the conditions to which the credit aid is attached to are perceived as components of an educational mission German European policy must take upon itself, and

b) how the recipient of the credit comes to occupy the place of a (hopefully docile) disciple under pressure to do his homework in order to pass the class test [B27].

The ascribed status of being subject to learning obligations, but also to the necessity of well-mannered conduct towards the other EU-member states [B21], is accompanied by the perception pattern of the sinner, whom the Eurozone – if it wants to resume a robust stability path – should assign itself the role of bringing back to the road of (financial and fiscal) virtue [B21; B26]. Returning to virtuous mores is not something to be achieved without the exercise of force though [B9], because the urgent reforms to come out of the debt trap must be carried out in a very short period of time [B7].

This forceful character of the consolidation course comes in two flavours, depending on whether the austerity measures to be implemented refer to rectifying past wrongs or creating conditions for Greece to regain economic competitiveness – as regards the latter, the lesson to be learned is that raising competitiveness is not only a precondition of lenders getting their money back, but also of securing high economic efficiency, which in turn secures the stability of the common monetary space [B9]. Speaking of the coercive traits inherent in the stabilisation course the majority of the discourse participants take some pains to make the point clear that what the driving force behind wanting to see the this course taken consists in, is not the impulse to put someone to pain [B7], but on the contrary to secure conditions of recovery – both for the stability of the Euro, as well as regarding the growth perspective of Greece. Indisputably, the implementation of the consolidation measures entails some hardships and various disciplinary strains, which are nevertheless now unavoidable – the reforms, which many countries in Europe, not least of which Germany, have had in the recent decade to implement, should at last be realised also in Greece [B7; B6]. In this way, one observes hereby the discursive constitution of a collective self-consciousness based on the belief that the reform efforts gone successfully through entitle Germany to put to bare the authority, Greece must comply to, if it wants to pull

itself out of the mire of over indebtedness. If not – then the issue of friendly relationships in the EU should be reconsidered [B8].

To argue against this kind of going for the ‘hard way’ is not something that the opposition parties find difficult to do, having already castigated the manner the Merkel government has managed the issue of informing the German public of what really is at stake with the European rescue policies. In this discursive context one finds explicit argumentations directed against what the Center-Left parties perceive as the failure of the government to curb the spread of incriminating stereotypes [B15; B6; B8], this time expanding on the critique of populist sentiments against southern Europeans in general, and Greeks in particular [B15; B16], the latter being supposedly especially disinclined towards the modern work ethic. No wonder then, that the ruling parties have in the eyes of the opposition helped enrich the renationalisation tendencies observed at the level of national European policies with elements of nationalist defamation campaigns [B13] – elements that could easily be summed up under the notion of mobbing [B27]. Thus, tacitly acquiescing to the fact that the problem of effectively managing the effects of the crisis becoming an object of national contention, populist resentments and folkish enmity, the German government has provoked mirror-image reactions and triggered phenomena of European nations pitting themselves against each other [B8]. Under these circumstances, how can anybody be surprised to see perceptions of lazy Greeks [B15; B16]⁷ being complemented by such of ugly Germans? [B21]

Beyond this level of stereotypical polarisations, traces of which are at any rate rare in the deliberations of the German Parliament, the argumentative contexts in which one can work out crucial patterns of perceptions of self and others refer to what for a great number of German MPs has in the course of managing the effects of the crisis become an issue of serious concern: Who is going to foot the bill of the crisis? [B3; B6; B19] This worrying question – rhetorical as it seems at first sight – does not of course want to cast any doubt that bailing banks and over-indebted states out lies in the competence sphere of the concerted action of EU-member states, the main burden to be sure to be carried by the most powerful economies of the Eurozone. It raises rather the question, whether the costs of managing the crisis can reasonably be justified and – if this management presupposes solidarity action anyway – what solidarity in this case should consist in. Assuming further that solidarity denotes a certain reciprocity, the question

⁷ Supposedly resting on the hammock of rescue credits [B24] or, alternatively, living like modern Diogenes in a bottomless barrel [B18] – this time bottomless, because of the apparently never-ending credits. Noticeably enough, one encounters the metaphor of the ‘bottomless barrel’ also in the Greek discursive context, as the left SYRIZA argues that the interminate credit rescue programmes along with unremitting austerity measures leads to nowhere [K10].

troubling many German MPs can be seen to have its (logical) origins in the tension observed since the outbreak of the crisis between Europe as a communal reciprocity of the form of “with-one-another” on the one hand, and an asymmetrical “for-one-another”, on the other. Cast in these terms the German political actors’ self-understandings and perceptions of others revolve around belief patterns regarding the entitlement to claims on receiving solidarity assistance, on the one hand, and the responsibility/duty of providing such assistance, on the other. In this context then the issue how the discursive participants see themselves and others (Greeks) has to do with such questions as: Who deserves solidarity and why, and how much solidarity deserves the receiving party?

The fact though, that these questions are in the crisis discourse intermingled with considerations deriving from the relation between debtors and creditors, makes the issue somehow more complicated – partly because the measures to stem the crisis have demanded much more than those solidarity resources, as for example cohesion and regional development funds normally at the disposal of the EU. Like their colleagues in the European Parliament (EP) the German parliamentary actors have therefore to put arguments forth *a*) to justify the urgency and unavoidability of the rescue credits, without giving ground to the supporters of the so-called “transfer union”, and *b*) by the same means to substantiate the duty-claim of underlying the obligation to provide the Greek state with the needed liquidity aid, but all the while, at the same time *c*) to drive the point home (and to the Greeks), that the over-indebted countries must provide the creditors (und the European community) with evidence as to their trustworthiness, which means their willingness to comply with the terms of the credit agreements (i. e. budget consolidation, deficit reduction, austerity measures).

As to *a*) and *b*) the argumentations of political actors that to a great extent testify to that self-perception, of which one of the pillars is taking oneself to act as committed European, are roughly the same as that in the EP:

1. *The self-interest argument.* 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 [B10; B12; B13; B15], especially 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 – or in the case of German state bonds in fact negligible, which means the German treasury has saved billions of Euros by lower interest payments on funds the government borrowed during the

crisis. Furthermore, there is a critical twist in this self-interested solidarity, since, as the opposition parties argue, the credit assistance granted is but an instrumental means of imposing the ‘stability culture’, which in turn means among other things budgetary surveillance.

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 interests of the European commonwealth and Germany’s, 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 [B14; B21; B32].
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 [B12].

All these arguments testifying to the necessity of considering the rescue credits as form of European solidarity are in a certain sense outweighed or counterbalanced by those revolving around the question of how the asymmetry in the relation between debtors and creditors must as far as possible be minimised. On the general level this means that if solidarity duty regarding the legitimacy of the credit assistance must reasonably be justified, then the claims on the right to justifiably be recipient of solidarity assistance must too (i. e. entitlement to solidarity). In order to bring duties and entitlements in a justifiable balance then, one must ensure that the claim of the recipient (of assistance) on being entitled to it must be sustained by evidence of her commitment to and responsibility for undertaking efforts to make herself worthy of the assistance transfer (of credit resources): How should this be done? If one follows the arguments both of the ruling government coalition parties and the party of the Greens as well, then the commitment to and responsibility for (European) assistance must be but met on the side of over-indebted Greece by the corresponding commitment to and responsibility for getting on the path of recovery, which is another concept for (economic/financial/fiscal) solidity.

Indeed, in the context of the argumentations related to the Greek crisis the pragmatic force of appealing to responsibilities for and commitments to solidity is substantial. This rests on two grounds, both having a strong normative dimension: On the one hand, appeal to and demand of solidity can be seen as outflowing from that self-perception, which is characterised by the belief on being authoritatively entitled to issue economic and financial policy recommendations, which in turn is but an aspect of that leadership consciousness bent on generalising the

maxims of the stability culture mentioned above. On the other hand, demanding commitment to solidity means both assuming responsibility for the solidity course to be taken (at the European level), and at the same time attributing responsibility for the implementation of this course (in Greece) as well – in a way, a kind of reciprocal assuming of responsibility. All this boils down to the argumentation pattern of “help for self-help” [B18; B21; B29; B31]. Being under pressure to exercise its own responsibility means for the recipient of help to demonstrate willingness to help itself by embarking on the solidity course [B25; B28].

If the latter were simply considered a return to how sound economics and disciplined fiscal policies normally function, then the normative undertones in the discursive preoccupation with what Greece should do, take responsibility for and commit itself to, would not be so strong. However, as the aforementioned perception pattern of a sinner urgently in need to be brought back to the path of virtue suggests, the discursive constitution of the Greek decision makers as subjects of normative statuses is to a great extent carried by the tacit assumption that the Greek debt problem is also somehow to be connected to a kind of moral aberration. Most probably originating in the common etymological root of the words debt and guilt (‘Schulden’ and ‘Schuld’ respectively) in the German language, the German discourse on retrieving the (Greek) debt touches the sphere of moral remorse, and this to the extent that in this discursive field of self-ascribing and attributing responsibility entitlements and duties, but also claiming commitments to solidarity in exchange for solidity, one observes terms of financial stability and fiscal discipline being suffused with perceptions of propriety deriving from the value realm of moral conduct. In this way debts, indebtedness and debt relief are metonymically deployed to articulate perceptions of others governed by notions of irresponsibility as culpability, self-incurred incredibility, hardly excusable misconduct – given the aversion the predominant economic thinking in Germany cherishes against indebted households no wonder.

As regards the latter the equivocation observed in the discursive deployment of debt as conterminous with guilt can be shown to spring from those self-perceptions that take their lead from the widely esteemed prototype of sound economic conduct, namely the frugal and sparing Swabian housewife. The opposition parties pick eagerly up on this point, arguing convincingly that modelling fiscal and budgetary policies according to how this housewife supposedly (normally) behaves – as the dominant economic thinking of the Christian Democrats is subreptively fond to doing –, must be seen as faulty reasoning, public finances, i. e. spending and saving, being a much more complicated issue than that suggested by family frugality [B20]. Furthermore, this type of inductive fallacy (from the part-family to the whole-state) proves to be detri-

mental to pursuing a crisis management strategy founded on the cohesion resources of the Union, for it insinuates that it would be politically misleading, morally reproachable and economically irresponsible to consider overcoming the crisis through a (common) European debt mutualisation ('Eurobonds') [B12; B14].

III. Greek Crisis Perceptions

If anything, the possibility, or even unavoidability of issuing Eurobonds is something both the ruling social-democratic PASOK⁸ and the greatest oppositional party of the conservative Nea Dimokratia (ND) can agree on in the first two years after the outbreak of the crisis in early 2010. However strong political stances, crisis management policies and tactical considerations may otherwise differ regarding the necessity of embarking on the rescue course put forward by the European decision makers, depending at this course does on the compliance with the modalities of a Memorandum of Understanding that dictate the conditions under which relief aid in form of bilateral and European credits can be granted, there is in this period a noteworthy consensus among the greatest part of the parliamentary community that the communitarisation of debts in the form Eurobonds should be considered not only a crucial aspect of coping with the sovereign debt problem [K9; K10; K11], but also an indispensable component of a strategy that reaches beyond simply making the financial architecture of the Union more stable, aiming as it should to overcome the crisis by means of growth policies and pushing the process of political integration forward [K11]. Although, in a way comparable to what Social Democrats, Greens and the Left Party in the German parliament advocate [B15; B21], the call for a long-term policy targeting economic stimulus programmes and investment offensives – thereby helping alleviate some of the macro-economic imbalances troubling the development of a coherent European economic space –, comes mainly from the ruling Social Democrats [K2], the belief that the focus on growth policies (eventually in combination with mutual Eurobonds) will prove to be the only sustainable anti-crisis strategy in the long term, is also echoed in the relevant argumentations of Right (ND) [K1; K7] and Left (i. e. the party of SYRIZA) alike [K2; K3].

Of course, talk about (how the actors of the Greek political crisis discourse perceive and think of) alternative possibilities of escaping the grips of the over-indebtedness presupposes logically how the crisis has come to be interpreted as regards its causes, extent and consequences, the last three referring essentially to the international, or European dimension. Over-viewing the relevant argumentations one can discern two discursive lines: For the left-wing

⁸ From October 2009 till November 2011.

parties determining are those patterns of understanding according to which the last global upheavals in terms of the structural interdependency of economic and financial crisis should be seen located in crisis-ridden capitalism itself, as the communist opposition party recurrently does [K1; K2], or for that matter, in the neoliberal system of deregulated financialisation, with the accompanying blow-up of consumer debt, as the left Syriza suggests [K11]. However, the main thrust of argumentations (from the parties of the Right and the Centre-Left) focussing on diagnostics of the crisis seems to correspond to that explanation scheme that in a way structures the discursive construction of contemporary crisis realities in the German parliamentary deliberations. Accordingly, reference is made [K2] in the Greek context to those two principal and discursive polarising crisis perception patterns that run through the German debate, that is, to that for which the origins of the European malaise lie in structural faulty finance and fiscal policies (of the EU-member states) the one hand [B9], and to those perceptions on the other, which see the causes lying rather in structural macro-economic imbalances that undermine the homogeneity of European economic performance and express themselves, among others, in the competitiveness of some European economies continually worsening.

The discursive fact, visible in the deliberations both of the European and the German parliament as well, that crisis perception patterns centring on structural disparities in economic efficiency and current account imbalances are but an inferential consequence of the observation that the institutional architecture of the European economic and monetary space is deficit-ridden, reappears in the Greek context [K3; K8; K10] in two guises: Firstly, it is pointed out that, though not necessarily intended, the mechanism of the common currency has nevertheless indisputably favoured economic developments characterised by export surpluses, low inflation and expanded lending on the one side, and deficit budgets, negative trade balance, over-borrowing and low productivity on the other [K2] – in short a divisive course splitting the monetary Union in two sub-spaces, pitting the highly competitive North against the South lagging behind [K7]. Secondly, just like how the issue is frequently addressed in the European and German parliamentary contexts, one of the causes, if not of the crisis itself, at any rate of what a great deal of these discourse communities thinks of as mislead crisis management, should according to the ruling PASOK be seen originating from the unfinished project of European integration, laid manifestly bare by the fact that the monetary integration structures have not been right from the start embedded in the process of developing the political unification [K9] and economic coordination (Economic Governance) [K10] further – as the crisis struck, the vast absence of unitary political will became more than apparent [K2].

Having stopped midway, as it were, the Union has deprived itself of those problem-solving capacities hardly needed in times, when without a robust Economic Governance centring on such topics as stability policy, macroeconomic convergence [K5; K2], overseeing and coordination of budgetary and economic politics across the Eurozone the danger of reanimated nationalism paired with protectionist anti-Europeanism and folkish mutual blaming is just around the corner [K2]. This argument about collective European political will missing, a fact which ultimately fosters the view that no crisis solutions but only those in unwavering accord with national economic interests are available [K4], can in turn be attached to the critique of European decision makers falling short of the task of safeguarding the common monetary space against the speculative attacks of the financial markets [K5]. After all, one should not lose out of sight the depth of a crisis hitting the global world: it is not just a sovereign-debt calamity afflicting some countries in the European periphery [K3; K1; K2]. If one nonetheless wants to put stress on the peculiarity of the Greek crisis, one should not eschew mentioning the pivotal role the stability mechanism put in place to consolidate the Greek finances played for the other over-indebted countries such as Ireland and Portugal – whatever else the European crisis management must held responsible for, in this one point it has surely ushered in far-reaching shifts in economic policies at the European level [K2].

Pointing in this way to the moving force the Greek crisis has proved to be for engineering new financial stability schemes across the Eurozone displays however another trait closely associated with how the Greek predicament has come to be considered an explosive phenomenon triggering destabilising effects for the European monetary space as a whole. What in the German crisis discourse is by and large dealt with under the notion of ‘contagion’ [B9; B17], is in the Greek parliamentary context being given expression to by the ‘domino-effect’ [K1]. Although, at first sight, both crisis perception patterns envisage the possibility of the fragmented European economic space falling prey to financial speculations targeting each time another national economy faltering [B10; K7], there is nevertheless a noticeable deviation of content in terms of intentional purport: Whereas both the ruling coalition partners and the opposition parties in the German Bundestag deem the danger the contagion looming large, lest the European crisis management does not timely hedge off the risks accruing to EU-member states going bankrupt, in the Greek discursive context the ‘domino-effect’ is sometimes thought of as a possible negotiation asset the PASOK-Government should avail of in order to mitigating the negative impacts on economy and society the implementation of the 1st Memorandum of Understanding [at the beginning of May 2010] will bring about. Although this argument is put forward by the National-conservatives of the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) [K4] – eager as this party

is to stage a demonstration of patriotic intransigence against what it implacably takes to be a form of betrayal of national interests –, and indirectly given credit to by the left SYRIZA [K11; K7], nevertheless the rationale of the domino-effect, perceived to exercise a somehow intimidating influence on the decision making process at the European level [K6], reverberates across the criticisms the ruling party levels against the opposition supposedly speculating on the possibility of state insolvency [K5]. Last but not least, the domino perception can be given another, the opposite twist, as it can not only signify a chain of collapses of state finances, but possibly also the take-off of a counter-movement, as after Greece other crisis-afflicted nations could rise up against both finance hegemony and the dominant crisis management model as well [K11].

As far as the latter is concerned, it comes as no surprise that the occasionally fierce debates around the issue of whether intergovernmentalism, i. e. the interstate cooperation of governments in the framework of the European Council, should be held responsible for the political fallouts attending the European consolidation course, or even be castigated as bringing back in the spirit of nation-state self-interested policies – in a way detrimental to the perceived necessity of crisis management assuming a more collective and community oriented character –, are mirrored directly in the political perceptions of and beliefs about what goes wrong with the course steered by the Council, dominated as it is by powerful interests, in general, and the rescue scheme for Greece, in particular.

Regarding the former, across the political spectrum in the Greek parliament the belief seems to prevail that the intergovernmental course renationalises European politics, and worse still gives rise to a parallel policy-making structure (i.e. the ‘Franco-German axis’ [K10]) that delegitimises the other European organs, operating as it does like a new *Le Directoire* dictating its will on the anti-crisis course [K10; K11]. However, one observes slight differences in how the (authoritarian-like) power exercise of the Directory is appraised, as the ruling party, in contrast to the opposition, which either (on the left) sees the dictatorial regime of finance and fiscal discipline already come, or (on the right) discerns therein a certain disciplinary/punitive policy [K11], tends rather to point out inconsequentialities and inconsistencies in the course of setting up a stability mechanism. For others still, the duo’s leadership should not at all be credited with tackling the challenge posed by the crisis, as it cannot stand up to the kind of European leadership exercised in former times [K11; see also K6; K2] – nor do the leaders of the other member states fare any better, bowing and humbling themselves before the German chancellor [K10].

The question what the Directory is up to, at least what the disciplinary dispositive and its local Greek upshots are concerned, proves an issue the two greatest parties in the Greek parlia-

ment are is some explanatory trouble to give account of, wavering as they do between the compelling commitment to go by the drastic essentials of the European rescue policy, on the one hand, and the motivational force of resisting the multifarious consequences abiding by the rules of bailout programmes will indisputably have, on the other. In this vein, one can take a look, for example, at how the punitive character of the anti-crisis policy is reflected upon in the positions of the PASOK leadership at the turn of 2011-2012. Having put particular emphasis on the need to judge current European politics as short-sighted and misguided, it sets forth to substantiate this claim by pointing to a kind of economic sanction logic apparently governing the goal of enforcing restrictive finance and fiscal consolidation measures. Punitive or rectificatory justice can be attributed to these measures to the extent that they try to set the record right with regards to public spending: Because Greece has prior the crisis not followed a procyclical policy, cutting down expenditure and driving deficits back as long as the economy was on the growth path, the country is now under conditions of economic contraction forced to do penance by implementing exactly such a policy that but aggravates recession tendencies [K6].

Now, this could generally be considered a variation of the above mentioned argument deployed by German political actors of correcting (past) mistakes [B12], albeit in the Greek context perceptions around the consolidation course cannot just appraise positively its possibly remedying and expectably rectifying effects without at the same time pondering on the (presumably disciplinary) character of this belated correction, especially since the latter has not been result of Greek decision makers coming round to see (on their own) how fallacious not applying procyclical policies, as long as it was still possible, has proved to be. So, things being what they are, what is perceived as externally imposed rectification must also come to grips with the question of the rationale underlying the European consolidation policy, thought of as corrective sanction. Or isn't it at all?

By the beginning of 2012 the PASOK leadership reconsiders whether bemoaning the European rescue politics as being of punitive intent does justice to what the 'Directory' is really after, and expresses the certainty that after all it is not punishment what Greek politics and economy should undergo, but a kind of structural adjustment to that which Germany (above all) deems necessary of being practised in Europe as unified economic space [K11]. So it is argued that what is demanded of Greek economic politics is to adapt to the neoliberal model, supposedly successful in various European countries [see also K6] and an example for emulation in the case of Greece, allegedly long enough stuck in the mire of social welfarism and income/wealth redistribution. This argument of substituting the belief about (the will to impose or the necessity to carry) a paradigm shift for perceptions of punitive (and atavistic [K10])

intentions, displays a certain affinity to the main gist of how the ruling Christian Democrats in the German parliament mount the discursive offensive for the spread of the stability culture across Europe, something in turn echoed in the position of the Greek conservatives of ND, as they (at about this time) plead for efforts to ward off the instability of the Eurozone by means of reforming European Governance through fiscal discipline all over the board [K8].

From this it is but a step to come closer to those perceptions about the shape Europe is in, especially as regards the form of power relations [K3] that is thought of as evolving out of the way the ‘Directory’ manages the sovereign debt crisis. What attracts the majority of the discursive approaches in this matter is the observation that the directorial axis (or dictatorial ‘Merkozy’ [K11]) itself displays a hierarchical makeup, as Germany has (to all appearances) taken the lead in laying down the conditions of how stability should be restored, economic recovery regained and political will to find a way out exercised – with France treading (somehow less determined) behind [K10]. Where the German opposition parties (Greens, the Left party, as well as the Social Democrats before 2013) do not eschew to rebuke the Christian Democrats for the heavy-handedness, arrogance and intractable one-sidedness perceived as governing their European anti-crisis policy [B15], it is in the Greek crisis discourse that perceptions of Germany becoming the disciplinary centre of power gravity hold ostensibly sway [K6; K10].

Bundled together under the notion of a ‘German Europe’ (alternatively ‘German imperium’ [K10] or ‘Germanisation of Europe’ [K11]) the arguments about Germany moulding Europe in its own image take recourse to beliefs about the disciplinary regime, or worse still, fiscal dictatorship [K10], which Germany – with all the protestant vigour of resolute commitment characteristic of the unipolar hegemon [K6; K10] –, is bent upon establishing by means of the surveillance and sanction mechanisms of the Fiscal Union. As regards the latter, one of the aspects of how the German government is considered – from both the largest traditional political parties [K3 and K4] – to be following the disciplinary/punitive course against over-indebted Greece consists in beliefs about the European rescue policy but being just buying time⁹ till the new stability mechanism is in place and alone with the possibility of an orderly insolvency the German-driven consolidation regime can get rid of the Greek problem maker.

⁹ Whereas understanding the rescue policy as buying time in the Greek discourse context functions as buttress for the argument of Germany pursuing its ardently authoritarian stability course till Greece is forced out (of the Eurozone), in the German crisis discourse the Opposition deploys it in terms of a critique that centres on the claim that buying time is just but another sign of the failure of the Merkel government to get to grips with the crisis [B17].

The kind of (German-dominated) Governance some discourse participants think of as already irreversibly imposed on European economic, finance and fiscal matters is of course not that which the architects of the monetary union had in mind, setting their trust as they did on the trade-off between strong Euro and Germany's integration in the European community of states [K10]. Arguing along this line harbours an equivocation though: Assuredly, bringing about such an integrative unification as subservient to German rule is not something one could be happy about, but it is nevertheless sort-sighted and misleading to decry it on the grounds of erecting a hegemonic power structure detrimental to how the EU is supposed to run. Instead of overblowing notions of German power command and domination rule ('protectorate' [K9; K10; K11], or colonisation strategy [K11]) reminiscent of former times (i.e. military occupation [K11; K8]), one should – for example, according to the Communist Party (KKE) [K2] – take into account the fact of Germany acting in such a way that the coherence of the monetary space is as far as possible protected against the risks of excessive debt, seeing to it at the same time that it does not have to shoulder the main burden of fixing the European crisis.

III. 1 Other-Perceptions

Apropos talking about former times: What this discursive move of the Communists gives emphasis to, is the point that perceiving the present European predominance of Germany through the lenses of the historical experiences of the Second World War rather rationalises a certain attitude towards and response to the fact of Greek politics and economy having become object of external control and alien determination. In this case the argument of rationalisation serves the purpose of showing that situating the German leaders of the present in a historical continuum reaching back to 1940 is but a means of mobilising nationalist sentiments à la united front resistance: however effective in terms of reactivating anti-German stances this recourse to collective memory may be, it – so the argument goes – obfuscates more than clarifies what Germany becoming the motor of reorganising European economic matters along fiscal discipline and austerity lines really means [K7]. Noticeably, on this point there seems to arise the outline of a discourse coalition between this stance of the communist party and the ruling PASOK admonishing (in mid-2011) all those 'les amis du peuple' that want to play the patriotic card, thus not only jeopardizing the Euro-membership of Greece, but also hazarding the consequences of state bankruptcy [K3].

Now, looking more closely at argumentations about and perceptions of the current German European strategy standing somehow in relation to historical conditions the discursive participants thing sometimes advisable to take recourse to, in order to get a better picture not only of the presumed motivational forces behind German state strategies, but also of the possibly instructive content historical experience provides for contemporary Greek concerns, one encounters a number of references to German history that conspicuously enough draw positively on past experiences. To begin with, by the explanatory efforts of the discourse actors to make a rhyme out of the present predicament of over indebtedness and near-bankruptcy it is pointed out the Germany itself has gone through the straits of state insolvency, particularly after the First World War [K5], as with the Treaty of Versailles enormous reparation payments were imposed on the defeated land considered by the Allies as solely responsible for the initiating the war. The reparation burden has in turn triggered a cascade of inflationary circles, but also caused serious debt repayment difficulties, which were met by agreeing more than once on a moratorium, the whole process ending in 1932 with Germany paying only 1/8 of the war debts. The upshot of this historical reminiscence (according to the position of ND) is that even the most mortified societies and economies can pull themselves together to overcome the pitfalls of over indebtedness. Drawing positively on German debt repayment experiences is not restricted to the argumentative strategies of the Conservatives though, nor do historical references to German history confine themselves to the Interwar Time, for in addition Greek government and policy makers can also have recourse to and profit from the way Germany dealt with the problem of war debts after WWII. Thus, in a way of a historico-political knowledge transfer, representatives from the left SYRIZA [K3; K6] discursively confirm the need to project present Greek experiences back to the German history of grappling with debts, this time pointing out how the post-war country in the London Debt Agreement in 1953 succeeded in setting an end to the inherited debt troubles by achieving consent over the reduction of the repayable amount to 50%, coupling debt repayment to trade surpluses, economic growth and expansion – terms of agreement that seem to the Greek left party of SYRIZA quite pertinent for the way the EU should under the present circumstances go about with the sovereign debt.¹⁰

¹⁰ Other positive, emulative aspects of post-war and recent Germany that also are drawn attention to with regards to possible course corrections in Greece are: a) the corporatist model of class-compromise, as this has not only brought together capital and labour forging a collaborative coalition for the benefit of economic growth ('economic miracle') [K9], but also functioned as the founding pillar for developing that kind social contract [K11], which reconciles big capital interests and social state welfarism under the auspices of the social market economy; b) the tax collection system, which does not even shrink back from deploying unorthodox (i. e. sometimes not quite legal) methods to get hold of fugitive tax evaders [K3; K10; see also K8] – something apparently not quite inappropriate considering the universally vilified tax collection problem in Greece; c) German green investments in Greece, that cannot get off the ground owing to structural

III. 2 Self-Perceptions

Taken together, the (global) perception patterns underlying how the constellation of power¹¹ arising out of the mechanics of European crisis management is taken by Greek discourse actors, on the one hand, and those views in particular about (the need of) drawing on German historical experiences around the issue of dealing with debts on the other, yield in a way an ambivalent picture of the discursive resource made use of in getting to explanatory grips with how to get by the ‘Germans’. Less ambiguous is at any rate the manner in which in the political-discursive community of the Greek parliament the sovereign debt emergency is dealt with, meaning by this that set of semantic connotations, argumentation patterns, explanatory schemes and normative reasonings that constitute the crisis as a discursive phenomenon (and home-grown problem). Now, if one takes some pains to overview the parliamentary discourses both at European (European Parliament/EP) and national level (Germany, Greece), what strikes the eye is not so much the effects of the economic, finance and sovereign debt crisis being frequently couched in dramatic terms signalling breach, break and rupture, but rather that distinguishing element concerning the actors’ self-perceptions, which certainly sets the Greek debates from the European and German ones apart.

Assuredly, perception patterns rendering the crisis an alarm signal, milestone or historical conjuncture are not missing from the Greek crisis discourse, and even less references to and beliefs about the need to confront the challenge in a constructive way, that is by implementing measures aimed at correcting past mistakes, rectifying structural deficiencies, setting up robust and sustainable frameworks, and the like. However, in the Greek discursive context it looks like as if the awareness of the crisis having ushered in the paramount necessity of thoroughgoing reforms involves much more than readjusting perceptions of what to do, how to act so that the European community of states passes the crisis proof test and (eventually) comes out invigorated. Perceiving the crisis as chance, as most people in the EP and the Bundestag do – in the former case mostly on the grounds of taking integration a step further, in the latter mainly as opportunity to establish a European-wide stability regime –, assumes in the Greek parliamentary debates the character of a comprehensive reconsideration not only of matters related to reorienting political and economic action, but even such concerning fundamental self-beliefs, collective self-perceptions, behavioural certainties and normative stances. To all appearances,

shortcomings in the public administration [K10]; and d) bringing Greek sovereign bonds that have English choice-of-law terms under German law regulations [K11; see also K6].

¹¹ In extremis epitomised in such perceptions as those of (Europe and) Greece labouring “under the German boot” [see K2 and K11].

what the distinguishing feature of the Greek political-parliamentary crisis discourse consists in should be located in the way crisis-consciousness comes to be even more sense-dependent on self-critical stances: one cannot understand the way Greek political actors discursively cope with the problem of over indebtedness sloping to insolvency without understanding the full content of self-understandings (in need of) coming under the sway of thoroughgoing self-critical scrutiny. As can be shown, in the Greek context the latter

- a) reaches well beyond what such a self-critical, transformative self-understanding amounts to at the level of the European discourse, as this mostly implies institutionally backed up willingness to Economic Governance alone with finance and fiscal regulatory mechanisms, on the one side, and
- b) differs qualitatively from, or rather stands opposed to that self-understanding predominant in the German crisis discourse, determined as this is by the self-affirming certainty of and responsibility for taking a leading position in enforcing the implementation of the ‘stability culture’, on the other.

Going to some depth, as crisis perceptions in the Greek context are ostensibly forced to do, results indisputably from what is considered not just a state finance problem, but a kind of malaise afflicting politics, economics and society at large, which in turn is but another way to state that the singularity of the Greek crisis [K8]¹² is composed of various subsystems gone astray. In this sense, it is surely not far-reaching to want to address the (experience of) crisis in terms of self-perceptions centred on the notion of re-acknowledgement – as for example the PASOK leadership does [K3]: According to this way of viewing things re-acknowledgement both of collective self-representations and individual identity beliefs as well should by all means be taken to signify the indispensable presupposition par excellence of any effort to lay the cornerstone for a foundationalist move, or rather for an all-encompassing refounding the whole thus bringing the subsystems (i. e. state, civil society, economy, political system, administration, education system, mass media communication, intellectual discourses) again on track [K1] – or better, set them again on firm ground [see also K2; K10].

Now, let us call this, on first sight, rather sweeping (re-)foundationalist¹³ claim an observational report resting (presumably) on reliable knowledge of how things should actually be taken.

¹² The singularity claim can also be backed up by the belief of Greece being once again – like so often in the past – transformed into a laboratory for social-economic experiments [K3].

¹³ Or even the claim of experiencing a revolutionary situation, as the crisis now forces state and politics in Greece to do in a revolutionary way something quite self-evident and basic, namely such a thing as managing the system with plan, transparency and honesty [K4], thus founding a new a state apparatus, modern, respectable, functional and at the service of the citizens [K1] – a revolutionary deed par excellence, because in the words of the former PASOK leader and premier minister what is at stake is a fundamental transformation of a whole mode of existence [K1]. For others, the (re-)foundationalist urgency calls to mind the

Syntactically it operates with a first person plural in the subject-position, a collective entity ('We') that must commit itself to a radical re-acknowledgement (and self-reassessment), and consequently assume responsibility for starting building everything up again. However, although it is plainly clear, what the observation claim is up to and a reason for, it is not that clear where it comes from: If it is a premise for something like a conclusion (i.e. in this case the roundup-reconstruction of the societal whole), then this forward-looking inference must also be able to work backwards as well: What are the reasons for this claim to be a reasonable observation-assertion for then concluding that Greek society is badly in need of a ground-level change? Looking a little closer at (sometimes tacit) knowledge premises and normative presuppositions can help get a better picture of collective self-perceptions articulating themselves, as they obviously do in this context, as assertive claims – or, elsewhere, as normative attitudes. Splitting the premises of this constitutive 'We' up in cognitive and normative assumptions that sustain observations such as this one, has further the merit of situating perceptions of and beliefs about the crisis in a space of reasons, shot through by commitments and entitlements, authorities and responsibilities. For reasons of simplicity we call the cognitive collective WE_c and the normative, in the sense of (moral-practical) responsibilities, WE_n .

Turning at first to the question of what knowledge resources WE_c can mobilise to support the assertion of the crisis turning to a socio-historical point of no return (or 'edge of the abyss' [K9]), one observes two versions: The weaker one $WE_c(1)$ raises rather limited knowledge claims, as it restricts reference to and explanation of (determining) causes of the crisis to previous governments': a) mismanagement [K1], b) failure to address structural deficits as long as the economic climate was (still) favourable for reforms [K2] and c) generally unwillingness and/or inability to set up a long-term national planning policy framework [K4; see also K9; K10]. The strong version $WE_c(2)$ comes in two flavours, relative to space and time conditions: In the first case it raises truth knowledge claims regarding crisis determining factors spreading over the whole ensemble of societal subsystems and institutional settings, ranging from state policies and public administration down to everyday mentalities and behavioural habits [K2; K4; K8]. In the second, belief assumptions reach out to encompass a great deal of Greek history, starting from the last decades since the restoration of democracy (1974) [K1; K2; K8] and going further back to built-in shortcomings and uneven developments already in the rise in 19th century [K2; see also K10].

radical political change that occurred in the transition from military dictatorship to democracy in 1974 [K3; see also K1]. At any rate, the rupture in political, economic and societal life caused by the crisis signifies the end of the epoch having its beginning in 1974 [K1].

Articulating explicitly, or else taking implicitly recourse to seemingly wide accepted beliefs both $WE_c(1)$ and $WE_c(2)$ can raise the claim of giving expression to a kind of cross-party consensus over the question of whether there have been serious cognitive obstacles in identifying those wrong doings and wrong beings, which were ultimately to plunge the country in such a (ragged [K4] and corrupted [K6]) state as described above. If, however, in the discursive community the content of what knowledge beliefs and judgements about the (political, economic, social) antecedents of the crisis refer to is not an object of dispute, then something else surely is, namely the pragmatic significance of these knowledge judgements. Talking of the pragmatics of knowledge assertions/claims/judgements refers to those proprieties of consequence that result from committing oneself to the content of such assertive claims¹⁴: What is one entitled to, responsible for and held to account for, given one's commitment to the reliability of what one asserts to be true? Cast in these terms helps interpreting that perception pattern, which plays a major role in the Greek crisis discourse, namely the one on the grounds of which it is possible to make the move from WE_c to WE_n , from the unitary-collective subject of knowledge claims to the one of normative determinations. Since it seems to do the job quite well, a combination of $WE_c(1)$ and $WE_c(2)$, $WE_c(1-2)$, will be the target reference.

Purporting as it does to give an account of why the present crisis is but the material-logical outcome and manifestation of prior and multifarious dysfunctions, $WE_c(1-2)$ raises (in the discursive context, at least) the question what normative status such a (collective unitary) cognitive subject must ascribe to itself, in order for its generalised knowledge assumptions to have the authority, persuasive status and pragmatic force they (want to) lay claim to – presumably a weighty one. Indeed, surveying the aspects of the pragmatic dimension of $WE_c(1-2)$ (i. e. responsibilities, entitlements and authorities) attending the discursive actors' observations, beliefs and claims about the present shape Greece is in, one observes the following: The commitment to truth (claims) the crisis has forced upon politics and society, which is tellingly shared by all parliamentary parties, is perceived as necessarily attached to concomitant commitments as regards the normative stance one must take under these conditions. The knowledge $WE_c(1-2)$ raises on the polyvalent causes of the crisis entails as normative-pragmatic inference the necessity to make good on that claim by holding itself responsible for raising it at the first place. This kind of self-responsibility can then be recast in terms of normative propriety: As global knowledge stance $WE_c(1-2)$ [K2] necessitates at the same time assuming the normative stance WE_n of acknowledging the responsibility for the nexus between knowing and doing, or better knowing as doing [K1; K3].

¹⁴ See Brandom (1994: 132ff).

Such a practical-normative WE_n is exemplified by the perception pattern of a collective normative responsibility for bringing about such a state of affairs as described by the content of what $WE_c(1-2)$ is (or wants to be) knowledge about. Strongly present in parliamentary discourse, but also pervasive in everyday talk and popular discourses in the public sphere this pattern is encapsulated in the slogan of the former Vice President of the PASOK government, that “we all”, that is state and society alike, “squandered away all the money”¹⁵. Forging together knowing and doing, as this crisis perception does by the way of coupling cognitive to pragmatic self-understandings, raises however the question to what extent the commitment to (and responsibility for) the truth entails the commitment to be held responsible for this truth, or in another way, how much of the former responsibility is preserved in the latter [$WE_c(1-2) \rightarrow WE_n$].

The ‘We-all-did-it-together’-belief (CC_b = collective culpability belief) seems to favour the strong version of $WE_n(1)$, [$WE_n(1) \rightarrow CC_b$], as it establishes a direct symmetry between the two responsibilities, or between the two collectives of knowers and doers, transferring as it does the whole of cognitive responsibility into the normative one. Now, although the claim $WE_n(1)$ does not articulate itself explicitly – or, if so, rather in rhetorical intention –, it possesses enough of gravitational significance and pragmatic force (i.e. reasonable persuasiveness) to attract a considerable number of discursive argumentations that purport to rebut it in terms of putting forth the weaker version of it, the $WE_n(2)$. By contrast, rebuking it in toto does seem to be a viable, justifiably assertible option, but only if one assumes, as the Communists do [K2; K9], that collective responsibility in abstracto is false lock, stock and barrel, and one should draw a clear line between WE_n and the ‘people’, the latter being rather the ‘victim’ of the practices of the former [see also K4].

Self-perceptions exhibiting the weaker $WE_n(2)$ rest in general upon arguments deploying in one form or another the demarcation-line perception pattern. To begin with, the argument that comes very close to $WE_n(1)$ upholds the belief that WE_n is true in the normative terms of entitlement: It argues [K9], that what characterises the kind of social contract regulating the relations between state and ‘people’ up until the crisis is the fact of an all-pervasive WE_n conferring all sorts of entitlements (i.e. rights, claims, privileges, material gratifications) [K2; K4].¹⁶ If one follows this line of argument, the state, as the major embodiment of the entitlement-conferring

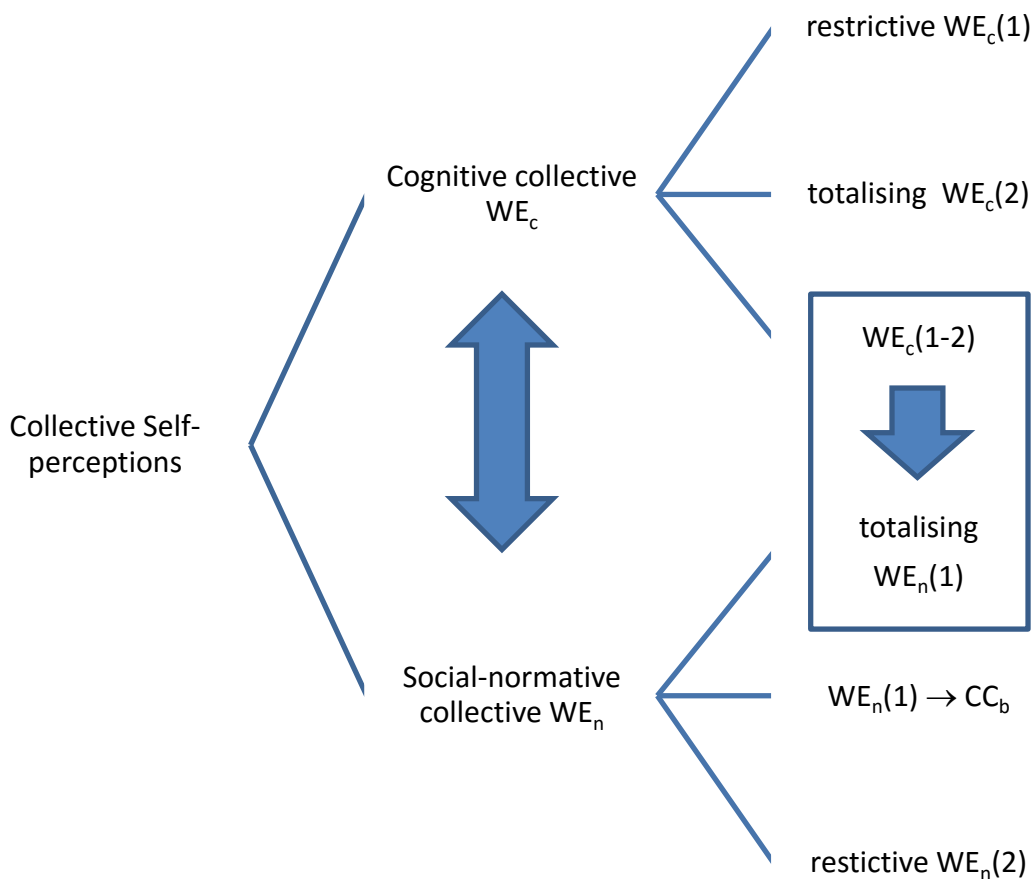
¹⁵ See Th. Pangalos, *We fooled away the money together*, (Athens: e-book 2012) (in Greek).

¹⁶ A variant of this argument consists in the claim that in the last decades before the outbreak of the crisis the 30 to 50 years olds have accustomed themselves to a consumerist way of life both to the detriment of promoting the ethics of raising productivity and the goal of augmenting the national wealth, but also at the expense of future generations as well – the (extremely) elevated consumerism was almost entirely debt-financed [K6; see also K1, K9 and K10].

WE_n, was perceived as the authority capable of meeting, responsible for taking seriously and obliged to satisfy the claims of various groups and individuals, which for their part have considered themselves entitled to raise claims to all kinds of state related benefits [K1]. As then the crisis struck hard, this structure of entitlements broke down [K11], causing a serious breach in the relations between state and society, or between certain segments of the political class and the electorate/populace.¹⁷ This kind of demarcating responsibility spheres is what the second pattern of perceiving WE_n makes use of, as it restricts the We-collective of responsibilities and entitlements to the two main political parties alternating in power since 1974 [K4]. Under this light, acknowledging responsibility means to acquiesce to the truth of the assertion that ND and PASOK as a whole, or in part [K2], have cultivated WE_n as a populist ideology and way of life [K4; see also K11].

However, although its content hardly contested, this argumentation purports (alone with the intention to denunciate the traditional type of governance and social mentalities) also to transpose even more strongly the expressive means of criticising wrong beings and doings into the moral vocabulary of guilt, repentance, and penance. For acknowledging and attributing responsibilities is (in most cases) essentially tied to questions regarding rightful intentions, truthful motivations, willing to act according normative rules, social proprieties, moral maxims, and the like. In the present discursive context such morality-centred argumentations take pride of place in the way discursive actors try to give an account of how and why the outbreak of the sovereign debt crisis must be perceived as a kind of conscience test, or even catharsis in the sphere of public ethics (much like in Greek tragedy) [K1], which politics and society alike are compelled to undergo, should they want to make good on the (re-)foundationalist claim referred to above. At this point one cannot but stress the comparative affinities observable between what in the German discourse context is treated as the nexus debt/guilt ('Schulden'/'Schuld'), on the one hand, and how in the Greek crisis discourse the huge debt leading to near bankruptcy is rendered an issue to be dealt with by deploying a certain kind of 'crime-and-punishment'-vocabulary [K1], on the other.

¹⁷ This breach of trust is sometimes also cast in terms of social psychology and morality: The break-down of the structure of rights and entitlements in the course of the crisis has had a devastating effect on popular moral consciousness/conscience, life orientations, feelings of (national) dignity and self-trust [K2; K4; K5; K9; K10]. At the same time the danger of insolvency has exposed Greece to various degrees of credibility loss [K5] and made the possibility of a brave nation becoming the object of international disgrace imminent [K5], or even a country defeated, and humiliated [K9].



Now, whereas German perceptions about debts and guilt being closely interconnected are apparently restricted to what a conscientious homo oeconomicus and/or reliable, order-minded head of the household should not do, lest he comes under suspicion of leading an irresponsible and reckless life, the discursive inquiry in the Greek context on such issues as where the propensity to accumulate such a huge debt comes from [K10], how this connects to what many arguments refer to as peoples' moral conscience [K11], life aspirations, feelings of (national) dignity [K3] and self-trust, etc. – all of them palpably suffering serious damage owing to the indebtedness of the state –, and lastly, why these questions, interdependent as they are, (must but) lead to moral (self-)examination mingled with radical self-critique – this inquiry carries a much greater load of normative-moral connotations than is the case with the dominant German perception of taking debts in general, and state debt-financed deficits in particular, as somehow being saddled with the odium of guilt.

Indeed, such conceptions of a defeated [K2; K9; K11] land in ruins [K5], with its people being humiliated and exasperated in the clutches of crisis [K1; K3; K4; K11] (with morals

devastated [K2], people's psychology wounded [K2; K11] and souls strangled [K2]), have without doubt something to do with what in the wake of the CC_b diffusing itself in popular discourses and everyday communications has come to be identified with an apparently pervasive practice of (often tacitly) ascribing to oneself the predicate of being partaker of all benefits the (state-centred) structure of rights and entitlements could make available. So, when it comes to refuting CC_b the discursive means deployed are the same as those argumentatively brought to bear to rebuke WE_n(1) [K2], that is, to argue that [WE_n(1) → CC_b] is just but a central component of the political-ideological strategy (of conceit and delusion [K9]) to forge an (imagined) identity community by appealing to (an allegedly indisputable and commonly experienced) collective guilt [K2] – to be atoned for by complying with the dictates of the austerity programmes.

This seems to be one of the underlying connotations of how the discursive community deals with the modalities and conditionalities associated with the credit packages and the Memorandum of Understanding. Arguments against the effects of the consolidation and austerity measures abound, a great number of the discourse participants being not weary of castigating them as counter-productive and one-sided, pointing out as they persuasively do that their implementation carries devastating effects to the social fabric and help dismantle the welfare state, thereby ushering in dangers of serious social disorder [K6; K1; K2; K3; K10]. However, if one follows the line of argument clearly visible in discussion of the punitive character of the consolidation regime imposed by the new European hegemon, one observes that there is something homologue in the way the necessity/ineluctability of these measures is defended [K2] in the Greek (re-)foundationalist context: Assuredly, the enforcement of austerity politics and restructuring of public finances has been forced upon Greek decision makers and society alike. Nevertheless, instead of viewing them as extraneous encroachments on national self-determination and people's dignity (or even as a kind of social hell [K5]), they should rather be seen as a kind of penance for missed chances and lack of will to push reforms forward – as the times were still favourable [K9; K6; K11]. A last line of defence could also be to perceive austerity-ridden reconstruction as emergency brake, before the country slides down the road of irretrievably becoming a 'protectorate' [K5]. Reforms are necessary, for example in taxation: after all, if everybody had paid their taxes, the country would never have run the risk of being threatened with such a predicament [K6].

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