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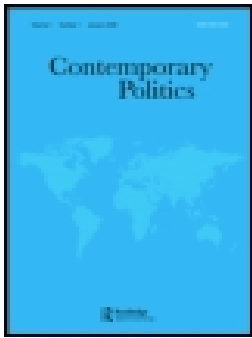
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Failing to build a network as policy entrepreneurs: Greek politicians negotiating with the EU during the first quarter of SYRIZA in government

George Dikaïos ^a and Vasiliki Tsagkroni^b

^aDepartment of Political Science and Public Administration, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece; ^bInstitute of Political Science, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The 2015 elections in Greece signalled a change in the country's government. SYRIZA, the main party of the new coalition, was elected on the promise of clashing with the European and international institutions to alleviate the burden of foreign control on Greece's policies and politics. Through a chronicle narrative, this article explains the behaviour of the two main actors for Greece, i.e. Alexis Tsipras and Yanis Varoufakis, during the negotiations with the EU and the rest of the world, highlighting their inability to act as policy entrepreneurs and to form supportive networks with their interlocutors to achieve their goals.

KEYWORDS

Policy entrepreneurs; Actor-Network Theory; Greece; SYRIZA; negotiation process; Eurozone crisis

Introduction

'Simple logic dictates that if you cannot even conceive the possibility of leaving a negotiation, then it is preferable never to enter one', Yanis Varoufakis was stating in his personal blog in 2010. A few years later, in 2015, as the Greek Finance Minister, he entered a long-lasting bargain with the European institutions. His goal was to terminate the 'heinous', as Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called it, external supervision over the Greek policies, which resulted from the country's challenging financial situation.

Over the past few years, a growing literature has attempted to explore who makes the decisions in the EU and how matters are negotiated regarding the financial crises that started in 2008/2010 (Chatzistavrou, 2018; Morlino & Sottillotta, 2019; Pircher, 2020). This article highlights a slightly different angle compared to this literature that focuses on the political processes, by emphasising on the ways major actors approached such negotiations and the political environment within which the latter took place. Such an approach becomes more relevant as, during the crisis, 'anti-establishment challengers' appeared and tried to make their voice and the will of their constituents be heard in the decision-making centres of the EU (Bosco & Verney, 2016). A prominent example of this, is the SYRIZA party (Coalition of the Radical Left) in Greece that, after five years of crisis and restrictive measures applied to the country's policies and finances, found itself in this situation when first elected in government in early 2015.

The question that this article addresses revolves around the extent to which Greek government officials designed and pursued a coherent strategy with the aim of alleviating the burden of foreign control. The paper seeks to identify the extent to which the strategy has been designed through examining a list of factors that find application to *policy entrepreneurs*, intertwining that way the work of a negotiator with a policy-maker. To that end, the process that *Actor-Network Theory (ANT)* puts forward is explored, enriched with a grain of agenda-setting approaches, in order to shed light to the perception of the bigger picture within which actors act.

The article deliberately does not delve into the intentions of the actors, but highlights their specific actions during the course of a certain timeline: the first quarter of the SYRIZA government (January 2015–April 2015), by primarily focusing on how two major actors of this particular case operated, namely the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and the Greek Minister of Finance Yanis Varoufakis. When Tsipras assumed office as the Prime Minister of Greece on 25 January 2015, he stated that Greek people chose change over establishment, leaving behind the years of ‘humiliation’ and ‘pain’ (Maltezou & Papadimas, 2015). Varoufakis, an economist and academic who had been a popular figure in Greece for his anti-establishment positions since the beginning of the crisis, was elected an MP in January 2015 and he described his acceptance of Tsipras’ invitation to join the government as a Finance Minister as ‘moral duty’ (Varoufakis, 2017). On a secondary level, actions of other European leaders and officials – that sometimes seemed reluctant to collaborate with the newly elected Greek government – are presented, in order to highlight the expansive interactions between the actors under consideration.

Some of the reasons that this particular period was chosen can be summed up in the following: SYRIZA’s discourse prior to the elections was highly anti-memorandum, blaming the ‘establishment’ and the Troika (the European Commission; European Central Bank [ECB]; International Monetary Fund [IMF]) for the crisis the country was facing (Ladi & Tsagkroni, 2019). Winning the elections, however, meant that the party had to collaborate with the actors they perceived to be responsible for the Greek financial crisis. The selected period is exceptionally important; it ended with the ‘anti-memorandum government’ turning against their pre-election rhetoric that had led them to power and requesting an extension of an existing programme that was previously highly targeted. During this time, Tsipras and the formatted coalition government would continue to use strong critical discourse towards the establishment and the institutions, would try to experiment in their negotiation strategy, and finally to conclude to a series of compromises and concessions, similar to those of their predecessors. In the end, it seems that the Greek government was never prepared to leave the negotiation and have Greece exit the Eurozone, in contrast to what Varoufakis was asserting in his blog in 2010.

The next three sections unfold the analytical framework of the article, which is based upon existing knowledge on how policy entrepreneurs act, as well as on how actors understand their role as units and as members of a network. Then the analysis takes place, followed by the discussion and the concluding remarks.

Policy entrepreneurs

The choice of the policy entrepreneurs approach seemed the most appropriate for this case, as the leading actors attempted to take advantage of a favourable situation (their

strong electoral gains) in order to promote political change that would positively impact their and their country's interests. The main theoretical approach for policy entrepreneurship was illustrated by John Kingdon in 1984, in his pivotal work on agenda-setting: policy entrepreneurs are actors that strive for change in the way business-as-usual works in politics to serve the interests they represent.

Kingdon extracts examples from the United States political system. Some years later, Pollack (1997) applied Kingdon's model to the EU, showing how policy entrepreneurs, at the national level as well as at the supranational, may operate. More recently, Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2012), using the assumptions of Kingdon, described the role of a policy entrepreneur in the policy-making of foreign affairs. In the same direction, Vanhoonacker and Pomorska (2013), based on Princen's (2011) article on agenda-setting established a twofold categorisation, *gaining attention* and *building credibility*, of how policy entrepreneurs function, in order to explain how the agenda is set within the European political sphere. *Gaining attention* refers to the actors choosing their interlocutors and delineating the scope of an issue. *Building credibility* refers to the support that actors gain in a specific structure by being established as the ones who know better how to deal with the issue at stake.

Moreover, according to the theory, policy entrepreneurs should possess a series of specific characteristics and their actions should follow a number of main strategies. Policy entrepreneurs have to be well-known and highly-regarded people in their field, to be good negotiators¹ and to be patient and persistent. Moreover, they have to have the ability to connect policy options to burning and current issues and take advantage of the political environment. Finally, and maybe most interestingly, the policy entrepreneurs act for their own (or their group's) benefit (Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2012; Kingdon, 2014; Pollack, 1997; Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2013). These strategies match the discussion on two-level games, supplementing and validating what Putnam (1988) implies in his work with regards to chief negotiators.

According to Blavoukos (2006), negotiators usually have their own opinions that are not always compatible with internal policy preferences. Furthermore, they must work in a two-level game, the national and the international, and they have to find a viable solution for both levels. A negotiator needs to be persuasive; to manage the information flows; to be able to make package deals; to be flexible on how to present the topic under negotiation. Last but not least, the negotiator should be able to promote 'changes in the number of actors involved' (Blavoukos, 2006), something that may alter the negotiation process when needed and change the dynamics of the game.

The aforementioned observations, which aim to describe the behaviour of policy entrepreneurs when they act as negotiators, can be split into two categories: characteristics and assessment factors. Characteristics refer to the essential traits someone needs to possess in order to act as a policy entrepreneur, while assessment factors regard the traits that the individual (or group) should possess in order to be successful in negotiating as a policy entrepreneur. In Table 1, we allocate the 14 elements to the category we believe more fitting for the purposes of this article.

In policy-making, the usual approach that explains how a policy entrepreneur acts is that of the multiple streams framework (Kingdon, 2014). In this article, however, instead of using this approach which puts emphasis on processes, we will focus on the Actor-Network Theory approach which gives prominence to how actors and/or networks behave, collude and interlace.

Table 1. List of the specific characteristics and factors that policy entrepreneurs, while acting as negotiators, should present and/or perform.

Characteristics

To be well-known and highly-regarded in their field.

To act for their own (or their group's) benefit.

Note: it is possible for policy entrepreneurs to have a different opinion to whomever they represent.

Assessment factors

To be a good negotiator.

To be patient.

To be persistent.

To have the ability to connect policy options to burning and current issues.

To be able to work in a two-level game and find viable solutions for both levels.

To be able to change the composition of the negotiating team.

To be persuasive.

To manage the information flows.

To be able to make package deals.

To take advantage of the political environment.

To be flexible on how to present the topic under negotiation.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) political perceptions

ANT gives prominence to human and nonhuman (material) actors and treats them as equally important within a social structure. It suggests that no preexisting perceptions should be made of who or what is the decisive factor in a certain process (Magaudda, 2011). According to ANT, social structures are not steady but, instead, in constant movement (Cloatre, 2018), and are influenced by all the elements that constitute them. In addition, according to Pollack et al. (2013, p. 1119):

ANT primarily focuses on tracing networks of association between actors, building understanding of interaction and organisation without imposing predetermined structure. At the start of an ANT study, one may not know the way in which the different actors will be connected, but it is an assumed default position that the actors will be associated in such a way that they make other actors act through transforming their world.

This excerpt emphasises the networks that actors create while acting and/or the fact that they act within them. Furthermore, ANT provides a four-step categorisation of action, which was initially established by Callon (1984). It was then utilised by social scientists to explain the course of action of certain cases and to unravel composite relations between actors (Cole & Littlejohn, 2018). Burga and Rezania (2017) support that all four steps may happen concurrently. Magaudda (2011) discusses how these four steps have been introduced to several other fields, such as organisational analysis and anthropology. This article introduces them to political science, attempting to figure out how political personnel develops the network(s) within which they act.

It should be noted that ANT is a sociological approach little applied to political science, since it is criticised for being apolitical (Alcadipani & Hassard, 2010). It has been applied recently, though, to a certain extent in International Relations and International Political Economy.² In diplomatic relations literature, Braun et al. (2019, p. 797) highlight the need for infrastructure to exist for the actor to perform, implying that an actor's network consists of established structures and organisations that will have a role in the way the actor will behave. Therefore, ANT seemed a suitable additional framework to explore the dynamics of the negotiations between the Greek and the European officials. Because of the given emphasis to the human actors in this article (while, as mentioned above, ANT puts emphasis on nonhuman actors as well), the perception of networks diverges

from the initial conceptualisation of ANT, providing also an alternative to the criticism that ANT has been subject to not being able to explain political phenomena.³ Thus, the network here refers to what relation the main human actors (attempt to) establish with other human actors in order to collaborate and achieve a certain goal.

Policy entrepreneurs and ANT in building network(s)

Policy entrepreneurs, as a concept, surfaced in the seminal work of 1984 Kingdon on agenda-setting, which described them as the ones who pursue a specific strategy with the goal to develop a new policy (or to change an existing one) or a political decision, when a window of opportunity occurs. While numerous studies have discussed their influence in the policy process and change (e.g. Mintrom & Norman, 2009; Roberts & King, 1991), the question of whether the concept of policy entrepreneurs remains descriptive, rather than theoretically critical, is still under scrutiny (Botterill, 2013). Perceiving, though, policy entrepreneurs as negotiators, allows for further exploration of how they might act to find allies and promote their interests. Deviating, thus, from the initial theorisation proposed by Kingdon on how policy entrepreneurs behave, i.e. following the multiple streams framework and anticipating for a window of opportunity to open, sometimes the policy entrepreneurs themselves have to make an effort to *create* a fitting window of opportunity, in order to achieve their policy change goals. This effort, especially when the issue at stake is crucial for many significant negotiators in the game, may be put in building network(s) of allies that would support the desired change. Therefore, what we propose here is an amalgamation of agenda-setting oriented tools, paired with the process proposed by ANT for policy entrepreneurs to create networks, which initially aims to assist the latter to pursue their goals when a window of opportunity does not appear to open; and potentially to also create this window.

The twofold classification of *gaining attention* and *building credibility* by Vanhoonacker and Pomorska (2013), mentioned above, tenons with the four-step categorisation of Callon's ANT approach (1984), creating in that way a natural connection between the two approaches. Callon's initial conceptualisation referred to *problematization*; *interessement*; *active enrolment of actors*; and *mobilising allies*. In this article, the following interpretation of the steps, which intertwines Callon with Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, is applied:

Problem designation. Two basic processes take place in this step. First, the participating actors delineate the problem at stake. Consequently, these actors define their role and that of others in relation to the problem and within a network.

Network building. The actors select the rest of the members that will participate in the network. At the same time, they attempt to impose their views on others and compel, in a way, the latter to accept their role in a particular framework.

Establishment of a new relation. At this point, the acceptance and submission to the preferences of the actors who have dominated the previous phase are identified, along with the recognition of their capabilities to deal with the said problem.

(New) network acceptance. A prominent member is appointed as advocate of the (new) network and is authorised to speak on its behalf. As the goal is to export the general knowledge that has been established through the internal interactions of the network's

members, said actor needs to have the know-how of the specific issue, as well as a team of experts to support them.

The combination of ANT and the policy entrepreneur discourse allows exploring the behaviour of (key) actors more systematically and comprehensively, as well as to shed light on the composition of the respective networks and their role, especially in a complex political environment where more actors and more networks operate. ANT supplements actually these processes by bringing the bigger picture in the foreground and by dealing with all the involved parts in a similar manner and offering the sphere within which an actor operates. In the case study under examination, the aim is to *first* highlight the significant role that the head of a team of negotiators (or a Government) often enjoys in a specific negotiating context, and, *second*, to underline all the factors that play a role in the action of a policy entrepreneur who acts as a negotiator, attempting to achieve a specific outcome. In addition, the goal is to examine how (and to what extent do) the actions of players create support systems and networks.

Methodology

The analytical framework so far offers a checklist that the actions of a negotiator/policy entrepreneur has to comply with. The paper traces and records these actions and uses the checklist as a filter of analysis. This paper is using a chronicle narrative to record the story of the negotiation process, the key actors, and the significance of interpersonal relationships in this negotiation. In this respect it approximately follows the narrative as in *The Last Bluff: The Background of 2015, The Conflicts, The Plan B*,⁴ a book by Varvitsioti and Dendrinou (2019) where the authors, in an extensive and investigating narrative, follow the government of SYRIZA from the first elections of 2015 and through the negotiations in an effort to reveal the secrets of the so-called Plan-B in case Greece crashed out of the Eurozone.

The paper also examines political memoirs like *Adults in the Room: My Battle with Europe's Deep Establishment* by Varoufakis (2017), a book that aims, according to the author, to expose the real business taking place behind the EU's closed doors. It is worth noting that this book of Varoufakis is also the object of research by Georgakakis and Lebaron (2018), who use 'the world of Yanis' – as they call it – as a spate of information on what happened during the period that he was a Minister.

The current paper also examines a variety of archival data, like official statements, e.g. by the Eurogroup, interviews given at the time, and mainly press and media releases. The use of this data, which has been associated with the analysis of agenda-setting case studies (Woolley, 2000) provides us with clarity on following the negotiations as recorded in the time of the events. Further, another reason for using archival data is that we acknowledge that the two books may be considered biased in favour of two competing viewpoints; Varvitsioti and Dendrinou describe the facts through a European lens, while Varoufakis focuses on his role against the European 'deep establishment'. By extracting information from sources published during the period we examine, we secure a triangulation of the facts to the greatest possible extent. Similarly, media discourse has been recently applied to similar research for the Greek crisis (Bee & Chrona, 2020), further underlining the argument in favour of using data coming from media in order to understand what happened during this period.

Negotiators in action

The first contact

Days after the election results, and a month before the current ongoing rescue programme was about to end (28 February), Jeroen Dijsselbloem travelled to Athens to meet Tsipras and Varoufakis to present the prevailing opinion within the European partners that the newly formed government asked for an extension. With the confidence given to him by winning the popular vote, Tsipras highlight the ‘humanitarian’ crisis that Greek citizens experienced for five years and clarified that ‘the programme has been rejected by the Greek electorate. I don’t have the right to ignore it. I want to be the prime minister that keeps their promises’ (Simos, 2015). However, he stressed the government’s intention to conclude a productive agreement with the EU that would not further burden Greek taxpayers (Simos, 2015).

With a more uncompromising attitude, and despite Dijsselbloem warning that the loan commitments should be respected and only some flexibility could be offered (Varvitsioti & Dendrinou, 2019), Varoufakis insisted that it was impossible to complete the current programme and rejected any extension to the country’s bailout (Varoufakis, 2017). In the press conference that followed their meeting, Varoufakis publicly denounced the Troika of lenders (the ECB, EU and IMF), as a committee whose aim is the ‘enforcement of an anti-European’ programme (Varoufakis, 2017, p. 170), creating a serious potential clash between the Eurogroup and the Greek government, as the Troika was a committee that reported back to the Eurogroup and therefore the Finance Ministers of the Eurozone. This statement was followed by the famous dialogue between the two men, where Dijsselbloem, leaning to the ear of Varoufakis whispers the phrase: ‘You just killed Troika’ and Varoufakis responds: ‘Wow’ (Varoufakis, 2017, p. 170).

Varoufakis’ statements on intending not to respect the obligations of Greece towards the lenders, caused a chain of additional communication channels, with the Director of Bank of Greece encouraging Tsipras to call ECB’s Director Mario Draghi, in order to minimise the damage (Varvitsioti & Dendrinou, 2019). Tsipras indeed called Draghi and made a statement to Bloomberg tipping that the Greek government will pay its debt to ECB and IMF and that there will be a new agreement with the Eurozone countries soon (Chryssoloras & Ruhe, 2015).

Seeking support at the EU level

In an effort to mobilise support from EU partners, both Tsipras and Varoufakis set off a sort of lobbying travel campaign to EU capitals to convince the Union to have Greece’s €315 billion debt alleviated and push for a viable debt deal. Tsipras met with Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, and with French President Francois Hollande (a potential ‘guarantor’ as perceived by SYRIZA), receiving the same clear message: to ask for an extension and to respect the commitments made by the previous governments as such (Varvitsioti & Dendrinou, 2019).

In his own travels, Varoufakis first met with Draghi in Frankfurt where he promised to stay devoted to continuing towards the reforms that his predecessors have failed to achieve and emerged, just after the meeting, to claim that the ECB would do ‘whatever

it takes' to support its member states (O'Donnell & Strupczewski, 2015). Despite the Greek efforts to maintain the *waiver* for regular lending facilities, a mechanism that allowed the acceptance of Greek bonds in return for bank liquidity assistance, ECB the same afternoon withdrew it (Blackstone, 2015), pointing to a widespread dismay with the new Greek government's plans by the ECB chiefs across the Eurozone.

After meeting French Finance Minister Michel Shapin without significant results and the UK Chancellor George Osborne who warned that 'the Greek debt row is fast becoming the biggest threat to the global economy' and urged Varoufakis to 'act responsibly' (Barber, 2015), the latter appeared in the Italian national broadcaster stating that: 'Let's not hide behind our finger, the debt of Italy is not viable. Euro is fragile, like building a castle with cards. If you pull out the Greek card, everything else will collapse. Who will follow after us?' (Jones, 2015). The Italian Finance Minister reacted instantly by tweeting that Italy's debt is 'solid and sustainable' (Jones, 2015), highlighting this way his annoyance.

In his last stop in Berlin, Varoufakis met with Wolfgang Schäuble. In the press conference, Schäuble talked about the progress that has been achieved in Greece during the last years, underlining the need to honour commitments regardless of the government in power and that there is still a lot to be done. He emphasised that they had an honest discussion where they agreed that they disagree, with Varoufakis interjecting and saying 'We didn't even agree that we disagree' (Ruptly, 2015).

After days of travelling, both Tsipras and Varoufakis returned to Greece without achieving a major breakthrough in terms of support from their EU partners, who appeared to take a clear stand and unify their voice towards Greece. Even a US delegation that met with Varoufakis upon his return stressed out the need for Greece to respect the existing institutional framework in order to get the desired flexibility to the debt deal (Varvitsioti & Dendrinou, 2019).

The February Eurogroups

The first Eurogroup: 11/2

Only weeks away before the rescue plan for Greece expired, the Greek government for the first time presented more concrete proposals on the alternative debt plan to the Finance Ministers of the Eurozone. In a similar tone to his prior meetings, Varoufakis outlined SYRIZA's plan and reminded the Ministers that 'on 25 January the Greek people gave us the command to end the cycle of austerity which caused economic damage and huge social costs' (Varoufakis, 2015a). He then went through to introduce the proposed commitments from the side of SYRIZA, and pledged for a bridge programme that would offer Greece an extension of the existing loan agreement.

Distrust and criticism prevailed by the Eurogroup members against what Varoufakis proposed, but the negotiations began and, at some point, an agreement appeared on the horizon. However, in a rather uncommon move, Varoufakis despite giving his initial consent, asked the consent of Athens as well. After a long-lasting phone call with Tsipras, he rejected this agreement postponing the decision to the next Eurogroup (Monaghan et al., 2015).

Dijsselbloem, although arguing that the first Eurogroup was a more to-know-us-better meeting, took the initiative to ask for a personal meeting with Tsipras, that way effectively

bypassing Varoufakis. The two men agreed that Troika, which was still operating, should work on redrafting the agreement to assist the conversations in the next Eurogroup (Spiegel, 2015a).

The second Eurogroup: 16/2

Prior to the Eurogroup meeting, Varoufakis handed in a draft proposal, though without including Troika's different suggestions. Dijsselbloem rejected this proposal as insufficient in terms of commitment (Spiegel, 2015a), leading Varoufakis to call him a liar. Dijsselbloem responded that 'we cannot agree on the content, we cannot agree on the process, but I won't let you call me a liar' (Varvitsioti & Dendrinou, 2019, p. 93). The proposal presented by Dijsselbloem was perceived as worse than the already rejected one during the first Eurogroup, and in which, according to Varoufakis 'the programme, undiluted by any adjective, returned with a vengeance' (2017, p. 260). The draft was rejected by the Greek side and was characterised as 'absurd and unacceptable'.

This resulted in the failure of the second Eurogroup. To make things worse, on the same day, the draft of the request for an extension from the Greek government was leaked to the press. The decision of the Greek side to share the draft document, was perceived as an act that challenged the trust (Spiegel & Hope, 2015) in the already tense relations between the country and the Eurozone. Dijsselbloem decided to stop direct communication with Varoufakis and to talk directly only to Tsipras and Schäuble. These three would be the major actors negotiating the necessary commitments Greece had to take in order to get the approval for the extension in the next Eurogroup, set in four days.

The third Eurogroup: 20/2

In the days before the third Eurogroup, Tsipras and Dijsselbloem communicated and agreed on a final draft. On a call they had, Dijsselbloem asked Tsipras to make sure that Varoufakis is aware of this agreement and that he would give his consent during the Eurogroup (Varvitsioti & Dendrinou, 2019). However, the day before the Eurogroup, a different document in which the essential commitments were not unambiguous and diverged from the agreed ones, was sent by the Ministry of Finance. The formal submission was perceived as a 'trojan horse' by Berlin, intended to 'thwart' the existing bailout programme (Dahl, 2015) and was rebuffed by the Germans. Tsipras clarified to Dijsselbloem right away that this was a wrong document and that his government would unambiguously abide by the originally agreed on draft document.

At the third Eurogroup an agreement was reached, with Greece gaining a four-month extension to the then current bailout programme and an obligation to submit several measures on how it will proceed during this period (Eurogroup, 2015). For its creditors, the signing of the agreement was a step of rebuilding trust, a process that the Greek government needed to also commit to. For Tsipras, this conclusion cancelled the austerity commitments made by a previous conservative-led government, claiming that Greece has 'proved that Europe stands for mutually beneficial compromises – not for doling out punishments' and that more negotiations will follow as to reach 'a final agreement to transition from the catastrophic policies of the Memoranda, to policies that will focus on development, employment and social cohesion' (Strupczewski & Maltezos, 2015). Despite the statements of Tsipras, with this agreement, Greece agreed not only

to extend a programme, that according to their pre-electoral narrative, it would have instantly denounced and replaced it with a programme of reconstruction, but also agreed on working under the monitoring of the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF, the unpopular institutional committee that they had vowed to 'ditch' as part of their pre-electoral statements. From this point onwards, the institutional committee would not be called Troika anymore, a name connected with the austerity measures implemented by the former Greek governments, but the Institutions (Vasagar, 2015). The agreement stands as a statement that Tsipras and Varoufakis abandon the anti-memorandum discourse that brought SYRIZA to the government and commit to follow the guidelines of the Institutions in order to 'honour their financial obligations to all their creditors fully and timely' (Eurogroup, 2015).

Marching around without a specific goal

The month that followed the Eurogroup was not very productive in terms of negotiation process progress. The Greek side was given this period to explore the possibility for a new agreement after the extension period was over, but this was not achieved as expected. The list with the proposed reforms sent by Varoufakis to Brussels, only showcased that it did not match the criteria set at the last Eurogroup, nor was it equivalent to the existing precepts (Varvitsioti & Dendrinou, 2019). This was not received as a positive sign from the Institutions for the progress of the negotiations. To make matters more complicated, the selection of the expert team accompanying Varoufakis included new external members and not employees of the Finance Ministry that had the experience in working and negotiating at the European arena; furthermore, the meetings were taking place in Brussels, in contrast to the previous period in Athens, causing several issues in terms of access to information and the local experts' team, a circumstance that often resulted to the Greek side being unprepared.

This situation depicted the diverging perception that Tsipras and the rest of the EU had on what the agreement of the 20 February meant. For the former, this was a new arrangement that allowed him to make a significant turn from the previous Memoranda in force and to put forward the promise of his electoral campaign, namely a 'humanitarian' crisis bill. For the latter, Greece's actions were perceived as unilateral, with the European Commission stressed out the importance of invariably following the already agreed decisions (TANEA Team, 2015).

During this 'turmoil', the Greek crisis was extraordinarily discussed at the European Council of March, marking Tsipras' coveted success to upgrade the issue politically and have it discussed in higher fora and not only by technocrats. The outcome, though, was that the EU leaders insisted on fully implementing the last Eurogroup's decisions without further delays and, additionally, created a nuisance in the Eurozone member states that required a debriefing by the European Council's President on the discussions that took place outside the preeminently responsible forum for the Greek crisis, the Eurogroup. To alleviate tensions, Tsipras travelled to Berlin to meet Angela Merkel a couple of days later, after though a statement was sent to her highlighting the need for an extra short-term financial assistance by the EU in order to settle with Greece's immediate debt obligations. Despite securing help that saved the country from impending bankruptcy, this meeting had another clear output according to Varvitsioti and Dendrinou

(2019): Tsipras was the main decision-maker from now on and Varoufakis would only have a secondary role.

'April is the cruellest month'⁵

April began with the second round of trips, this time to Russia and the US. Tsipras met with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, though without having an explicit request, although the narrative inside Greece was different. The journey did not have an outcome and it was perceived with some suspicion by the EU (Herszenhorn & Alderman, 2015). Varoufakis visited the US Treasury Secretary Jack Lew without receiving the desired support as well and creating further suspicion on Greece's intentions towards the ongoing debt negotiations. Lew stated after the meeting that 'a failure to reach an agreement would lead to immediate hardship in Greece and increased uncertainties for Europe and the global economy' (Crutsinger, 2015).

This suspicion turned to frustration towards Greece and its Finance Minister on the Riga Eurogroup on 24 April. This was the supposed deadline for the new bailout agreement between Greece and the Institutions (as decided on the 20 February Eurogroup). Varoufakis made clear that the country was running out of money, with many denouncing him as a 'time-waster', a 'gambler' and an 'amateur' (Hirst, 2015). With no progress made since February, it was the first time in a Eurogroup that a 'Plan B' for Greece was suggested by Slovenia, a proposal that was instantly characterised as 'undignified' and 'profoundly anti-European' by Varoufakis (Spiegel, 2015b). The Eurogroup ended in less than two hours, without results. Dijsselbloem urged for immediate action in getting a deal as soon as possible to receive the answer from Varoufakis that Greece was ready to make 'big compromises' as without an agreement the ramification for Greece and the Eurozone would be 'huge' (Wearden, 2015). The same day, Varoufakis tweeted: 'They are unanimous in their hate for me; and I welcome their hatred' (Varoufakis, 2015b), a borrowed memorial line from Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In an effort to ease tensions with the lenders, Tsipras allocated new people to negotiate directly with the Institutions and travel to Brussels, however maintaining Varoufakis as Finance Minister. The pressure of removing Varoufakis had been intense for months, with European officials 'eye rolling', being 'sick of being lectured' and stating that he is 'impossible' to work with (Smith, 2015). However, if Tsipras would proceed on releasing Varoufakis from his duties, that would be perceived as an act of retreat to the pressures of the creditors something that Athens wouldn't allow to show yet.

Discussion

Before analysing the steps that the Greek government officials took in order to negotiate a new agreement and/or a new relationship with Greece's creditors, it has to be noted that, in the period under examination, the rest of the EU appeared as a solid block from day one. All EU Member States leaders and Finance Ministers, as well as the EU institutions officials kept a firm stance throughout the three months under examination, stressing out the importance of Greece respecting its already agreed-upon obligations. This adds to the observation of Georgakakis and Lebaron (2018) that argue, by examining different theoretical applications in roughly the same case that the EU system dominated

over the Greek efforts for change. In the first part of this section, the personal strategy of the main actors will be tightly examined, while in the second part their perception of the composition of the network(s) within which these actors acted will be assessed.

Negotiating as policy entrepreneurs

Regarding the very definition of policy entrepreneurs, it is more than apparent that the two Greek government officials being studied in this article aimed for a change in the way the EU institutions, especially the Eurogroup, faced the Greek crisis. SYRIZA party, a fervent opponent of *Europeanization-as-usual* (della Porta et al., 2019; Lavdas, 2018), was represented by its President and Prime Minister of Greece, and by the Finance Minister. These were the two main actors in charge of representing the country in the EU and in the negotiations for the abolishment of the bailout programmes. Their efforts were aiming at the relaxation of measures by criticising the strict policies enforced to the Greek people.

On the basis of the categorisation made earlier, i.e. the characteristics and the assessment factors of the behaviour of a policy entrepreneur during a negotiation, we will begin by analysing the characteristics and then we move on to the factors.

Tsipras and Varoufakis were both well-known and highly-regarded in their respective fields. The political career of Tsipras was this of a rising star since his youth, when in 2008, at age 33, he became the leader of the predecessor scheme of SYRIZA, a position that he still holds (Tsakatika, 2021). Varoufakis is a renowned Economics professor with an extensive international career. To what concerns our case study, both individuals right after they got elected and emerged as the main negotiators of the Greek side, acted in favour of their (extended) groups' benefit, claiming on many occasions that their position stemmed from the Greek popular vote. Although the new *anti-memorandum* (and quasi anti-European in its election campaign rhetoric) Greek government had the majority of seats in Parliament, the negotiating team knew that the Greek population remained at large pro-European, supporting a solution within the boundaries of the EU (Tsirbas, 2016, p. 411). This fact acts as confirmation of the last characteristic of our table, supporting that the two men had a different opinion to whomever they represented.

Both Tsipras and Varoufakis failed in all cases not only to take advantage of the political environment but also to merely understand it, as in the cases of making public statements that led to counterproductive relations. This fact alone led to a general failure of their actions, as it hindered all the other characteristics or strategies that a policy entrepreneur, according to the theory, should present. From the first contact, both actors appeared impatient and insistent on an immediate change, without providing persuasive arguments in favour of a said change, coming into conflict with their colleagues, who insisted on requesting a clear alternative plan. This conflict intensified after Varoufakis' comments against the Troika, the Eurogroup, other countries' financial situation, as well as against Disselbloem and Schäuble at a personal level. He even (not very) subtly blackmailed the EU by stating that a failure to conclude to an agreement would have severe ramifications for the euro in general.

In addition, as the Greek crisis was unwrapping day by day, Tsipras and Varoufakis failed to try to link their case with other political issues that were not solely connected to Greece, but rather only insisted on the solution of the problem they cared about.

Two political issues, connected to the welfare state, that could have proven excellent cases for creating a wider alliance, are those of the drastic rise of unemployment and the slash of earnings for those still employed. These issues were common in most, if not all, Southern European Member States. Moreover, and similarly critical to the same group of countries, were the challenges that emerged by sovereign debt sustainability.⁶ It is evident that reflecting on and connecting to these political issues could have provided an additional argumentation, aiming at the creation of an exit from the crisis plan. However, Tsipras and Varoufakis decided to keep their focus on their narrative on criticising the strict policies as enforced and therefore inadequately addressed the social consequences of the ongoing crisis and failed to propose and produce effective reforming solutions. In the same vein, the requests for debt relief were brought up unilaterally, ousting the possibility of connecting the Greek problem with corresponding European ones.

The result of this stubbornness was that no package deals were passed throughout this period, feeding the disagreements and raising political questions on the future of Greece in the Eurozone. Further, at least two times, significant mistakes were made by leaking or providing the wrong documents to the public and to other negotiators, failing, thus, to manage the information flows. On top of that, the two appeared incapable of adjusting their requirements. Instead, whenever some alternative solution was proposed to them, they usually put forward the argument that they had the backing of the people, an argument all Heads of EU Member States, or respective Finance Ministers could use, thus sharpening the edge between them and the Greek representatives.

One of the reasons that the policy entrepreneurs approach was chosen for this article is that it adequately interprets the EU's operation. It is by now obvious that Tsipras and Varoufakis showed up as *comets* in the European political sky, not fully or not at all aware of how European bargaining works, an observation also clearly made by Cas Mudde (2017). To everybody's disappointment, the two Greek politicians appeared as 'bad negotiators', with no intention to actually negotiate. This created a severe gap of trust in the relation among the participating actors, since Tsipras and Varoufakis many times promised something and a few moments or days later they had changed their minds. All of the above underlines their failure as policy entrepreneurs.

What the policy entrepreneur theory may not be able to explain in this example adequately, is that sometimes a potential policy entrepreneur does not have a set strategy prior to their actions. The theory presupposes that policy entrepreneurs have developed a strategy and they wait for the right moment to implement it (Kingdon, 2014). This case study highlights the possibility that an actor who wishes wholeheartedly to alter the *status quo*, does not seem to have a well-built strategy. In the analysis, it is established that many times the major Greek actors went back and forth, not only at the international level but at the national as well. Of course, sometimes a policy entrepreneur could delay a negotiation purposefully (Kingdon, 2014). While this might be the case here, this delay should have had a specific goal in order to reach a more favourable agreement or policy for the entrepreneur's interests. However, all the delays in the case culminated in negative results, such as the waiver lifting by the ECB or the agreement of the second Eurogroup. Consequently, the facts prove that there wasn't a premeditated strategy for the induced delays but rather an *ad hoc* approach to one of the most institutionalised bodies of the EU (Puetter, 2004, 2016), as well as to the Union in general.

Having observed this behaviour, namely the lack of an in advance strategic planning, two factors could be added to the list of the characteristics that a policy entrepreneur should possess in a successful negotiation: first, to be consistent in their behaviour towards other actors participating in the negotiation and, second, to be trustworthy.⁷ Both these factors could assist policy entrepreneurs to achieve some of their goals much easier and save an important amount of time, something that in the case under examination worked against the end result.

Setting the negotiating field

When SYRIZA came to power, the management of the Greek crisis counted almost five years with established processes and relations between Greece and its creditors. SYRIZA got elected by arguing that it will reshuffle the dynamics operating so far, in favour of Greece's interests. As this article pays attention to actors and a part of the research focus is on the networks that the actors create and operate within, ANT's interpretation of actions of policy entrepreneurs offers the outline to do so and sheds light on the framework that the actors under examination acted. This process engulfs the behaviour of the actors discussed in the previous section and offers a bigger picture.

Tsipras and Varoufakis framed the problem as 'the mismanagement of the Greek crisis by the EU institutions in general and the Troika in particular' and attempted to reorganise and to possibly choose new networks within which they preferred to act, as 'anti-establishers' who will go against the 'system' and transform it. They both insisted on the abolition of the Troika in an aggressive manner and decided to tour around Europe to explore for potential sympathisers. It is interesting to note again that no plan was presented to whomever they met. In the first days, while Tsipras seemed more moderate and open to discuss certain aspects of the necessary back steps that he needed to take, Varoufakis' aggressive behaviour led to more conflicts rather than allies. Subsequently, Tsipras' inconsistency led his counterparts to distrust him, making it difficult for him to find actors willing to build a 'new' network to work within. By giving the impression of less than potent negotiators to others, both Tsipras and Varoufakis managed to define their roles as opponents to the hitherto efforts to solve the Greek crisis, and in their struggle to appear superior to others, they disrupted the existing network and, at the same time, failed to create a new one.

In parallel, Varoufakis, as presented in the previous section, tried to impose his views on the Eurogroup participants and to 'teach them a lesson' on what they had done wrong. This attempt resulted in a fiasco, with the Finance Ministers of the other Eurozone Member States asking for his replacement. Tsipras, on the other hand, kept a lower profile by usually reassuring his counterparts that he will implement all the necessary measures, but, each time he returned to Greece he was promising to the Greek people and to his party that none of the existing measures will be implemented, intensifying thus the image of him as inconsistent and untrustworthy.

During this period, there was no established network that included all the actors, nor any representatives of a potential network by the Greek side. Nevertheless, the previously existing network that consisted of the members participating in the Eurogroup, as well as to other EU institutions, kept its structure with a more strict approach prevailing,⁸ and Dijsselbloem was appointed to represent all of them towards Greece. Thus, the approach

of building a network is confirmed on how the rest of the EU operated, leaving out Greece. Greek officials failed to create the new networks that they hoped for, they fell to deaf ears to all of their international discussions (both within and outside the EU, where they attempted to explore potential new networks but again without having a distinct strategy) and they managed to exclude themselves from the network that was making decisions for the country's fate.

All these observations lead to the conclusion that Greek government officials failed to mobilise support or to arouse interest to their benefit. They insisted on the projection of their internal interests by not taking into consideration what their fellow interlocutors had to deal with. Moreover, these interests were not solidly defined, placing obstacles to the processes. It was like Tsipras and Varoufakis failed to understand that they were obliged to play at both levels; their behaviour seemed to be addressed only to their internal audience, significantly ignoring external pressures at a period when the internal political function depended – to a major extent – to external decisions and when the latter forcefully penetrated internal policies and politics. In support of this, Georgakakis and Lebaron (2018, p. 218) add that they 'were completely out of tune with the structure' of the network. However, with the pressures growing stronger and the danger of bankruptcy drawing closer, Tsipras yielded to the external demands by removing Varoufakis as leader of the negotiations. This seems to be Tsipras' first step to redefine his role in the network, to renegotiate and to improve his relations with the European establishment.

Concluding remarks

In the larger scheme of things, it seems that the EU faced a difficulty understanding the hard situation in which the Greek government was. By keeping its adamant position, the interlocutors of the Greek government could also be subject to criticism, especially for their inadequacy to understand the political environment that had been rising in Greece the last couple of years before SYRIZA's election. The EU acted as a *policy antipreneur* against the potential policy entrepreneurship of the Greek government, leading to a two-competing-blocks game.

Nevertheless, Greek government officials did not adequately perform any characteristics or strategies that a policy entrepreneur as a negotiator is expected to follow, resulting in the failure of creating a favourable network for their interests. While Tsipras sometimes appeared more moderate or soothing to his external fellows, he did so only under the external pressures that made him realise that there were no alternatives. His general direction seemed to be that no proposal coming from the EU should be taken into consideration, thus missing out on possible opportunities for conciliation.

The analytical framework applied in this article underpins the significance of the aforementioned characteristics and strategies, it appends them with two factors that emerge from approaches that explain how negotiations work (behavioural consistency and trustworthiness), and it showcases the importance of them in order to create a network. In reverse, the desired policy change passes through the network that a policy entrepreneur is able to build.

To put it in context, this analytical framework highlights the necessity of understanding the existence of other levels in which the 'game' is played and that these levels have influence on the level under consideration. In the EU, it is hard to act on your own as a

Member State, especially when you are at a disadvantage. Although the EU is one of the most highly institutionalised organisations in the world, anti-establishment actors spring up occasionally who think that they can do whatever they like without influencing the relations at large of their country with the rest of the EU establishment. This, however, is very difficult if not impossible to achieve. To paraphrase Putnam (1988), *domestic politics and EU affairs are constantly somehow entangled*; in that sense, the actors playing at the domestic arena are somehow obliged to mingle with the EU arena as well, creating continuous networks to promote their goals.

The negotiations of SYRIZA's government with the EU constitute an interesting case study to examine through a theoretical approach widely applied to explain how issues climb the European agenda and how the decisions are made. As these negotiations were a constant throughout the SYRIZA governance, we chose to focus on the first quarter of the latter, as the main negotiators for the Greek side were the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister themselves, in a determined attempt to bring change. Thus, policy entrepreneurs' framework, which is inextricably associated with policy-making, was expected to explain how the Greek politicians acted. As the focus was on their activity in seeking ways to pursue their goals within a pre-existing group, the ANT was expected to add to the policy entrepreneurs' explanations by providing understandings to how they approached and utilised the issue at stake to justify their selves as successful policy entrepreneurs in a negotiation. Against all expectations, the two key actors examined here did not perform adequately on any of the factors and mechanisms applied, and they displayed very little of the expected characteristics. Failing to build a network and to create a window of opportunity showcases the argument made above, that when you negotiate with the EU, you might have a much higher chance of being successful and if you follow (at least to some extent) a time-tested behaviour.

The storyline of the negotiations assessed in this article provides an insightful case for further exploration both in terms of the impending financial crisis that the EU will experience due to the coronavirus pandemic and the unavoidable tensions that will arise, but also in relation to the four-step categorisation and the in-depth understanding of the way the networks are created and established within the European-working-sphere. Examining the direct discourse both in national and international level would further highlight the pivotal role of the actors and the networks (formal and informal) taking part in the bargaining.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive list of what a good negotiator is, see Nyerges (1987).
2. See Braun et al. (2019) for a recent literature review.
3. In our case study, the human factor prevails. While the analysis could extend to other elements, such as the Eurogroup, the Euro-Working Group, the Brussels Group or the Troika, and could discuss in-depth their influence on the period under examination as nonhuman actors, this falls out of the scope of the article.
4. The book was also published (by the same publisher) in English under the title *The Last Bluff: how Greece came face-to-face with financial catastrophe and the secret plan for its euro exit*.
5. T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*.
6. For comprehensive analyses of the other political issues see the special issues edited by la Porta and Heins (2015) and by Petmesidou and Guillén (2014).

7. A defined strategy could also be not to be consistent (or even not to have a strategy). Still, this situation would require examining the actor's intentions, which this article does not address.
8. Although they were some voices of openness.

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Notes on contributors

George Dikaos is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA) and a Research Fellow at the Institute of European Integration and Policy at the same University. His main research interests include: European public policy; European and climate diplomacy; and International Organisation. He is a SYLFF Fellow, a Stavros Tsakyrakis (NKUA) Scholar, and a member of the team of the UNESCO Chair on Climate Diplomacy. His work is published in Greek peer-reviewed journals, such as the *Social Science Tribune* and *Science and Society*.

Vasiliki Tsagkroni is Assistant Professor of Comparative Politics at the Institute of Political Science. Their research includes radical right parties, best EU practices to counter populism, a cross-European policy analysis on climate change at party level and a cross-European comparative analysis of political discourse in a form of governments' responsiveness to citizens' demands and preferences between elections and the use of marketing and branding in politics, focusing on the interaction between communication strategies and political parties. They are the Co-Convenor of the Greek Politics Specialist Group of the PSA and their work has been published in journals like *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Party Politics*, *Media and Communication*.

ORCID

George Dikaos  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7114-6603>

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