

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Accepting Austerity or Grexit? Predicting Acceptance of Crisis Solution Strategies from People's image of the Greece-Eu Relationship, their own Position and Norms of Justice

Gerasimos Prodromitis, Xenia Chrysochoou and Stamos Papastamou

In recent years Greece has faced a terrible economic crisis that became social, political and humanitarian and challenged its relationship with the European Union. In this paper, through a survey research with an opportunity sample of Greek people (N = 739) of different ages and professions, we investigate whether participants' image of the relationship between Greece and the EU relates to their agreement with a) harsh austerity and decrease of national sovereignty, b) decrease of the public sector and c) Grexit measures. We hypothesized and observed that this relationship is mediated by beliefs about norms of justice and beliefs of individual mobility and relative position. In particular, a positive relationship between Greece and EU predicts agreement with harsh austerity and decrease of the public sector through justice beliefs of equity whereas the relationship with Grexit is not mediated by beliefs about norms of justice. In addition, perceiving the GR-EU relationship as a relationship of domination predicts the different measures through feelings of personal or relational relative position. Legitimation of a relationship of domination and acceptance of harsh measures is observed the less people feel relatively deprived personally in comparison to their past position or in comparison to others, whereas this relationship with Grexit is observed the more relative relational deprivation is felt. These results highlight that perception of asymmetric relationships and status (at an individual or group level) between the national group and the EU and distribution of resources should be taken into account when discussing measures to combat the crisis.

Keywords: Norms of justice; Relative position Crisis; Intergroup relations; Greece; European Union

Since 2010 when the Greek Prime Minister G. Papandreou announced that the country was unable to overcome its financial difficulties and required support from the IMF, the EU and the European Central Bank, Greece faced an unprecedented economic crisis and tough austerity measures were put in place after the signature of a series of memoranda of agreement. Since then, the GDP decreased from 31.161k US dollars in 2008 to 26.55k in 2015 and government debt increased from 117.5% at the beginning of the crisis into 181.2% in 2015. This situation has severe consequences for people. Greek unemployment rate doubles the average of the Eurozone and increased from 7.76% in 2008 to 24.9% in 2015 whereas youth unemployment rate increased from 21.88% in 2008 to 49.80% in 2015 and reached an all-time high of 58.25% in 2013. The Gini index of poverty and inequality increased by 2 points between 2008 and 2013 (0.346) (OECD, 2016).

Since the beginning of the crisis more than 250,000 young qualified people immigrated. This is an incredible number for a country of approximately 11 million inhabitants. Salaries were cut on average by 35%, numbers of homeless people rose considerably and 20% of the shops in the historic center of Athens closed. Moreover, in 2011 and 2012 suicide rates have increased by 35%. During this period, Greek people considerably opposed austerity measures and impoverishment (see also Chrysochoou, Papastamou & Prodromitis, 2013). Since 2012, the rise of SYRIZA, a leftwing party opposed to the measures, in the elections gave hope to Greek people for an end to austerity through a change in government. SYRIZA won the elections in January 2015, and negotiations started with the EU for the signature of a less harsh agreement and a severe cut of the national debt. These talks concluded with the signature of another memorandum of austerity on the 13th of July 2015 after imposing capital controls and despite the fact that a few days earlier (5/7/2013) 61.3% of the Greek people rejected such agreement in a referendum. The same summer, an unprecedented number of refugees crossed Greek borders through the sea

Department of Psychology, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece

Corresponding author: Gerasimos Prodromitis
(gprod@panteion.gr)

(Frontex, 2016 estimated 890,000 people) and many of those lost their life during passage. This is the general context of the research that we present, and that was conducted in November–December 2012.

Accepting harsh measures: the mediating effect of norms of justice

This situation and the involvement in the management of the crisis and the governance of the finances of different EU institutions (European Commission, European Central Bank and lately European Parliament) made salient the relationship between Greece and the European Union in the minds of Greek citizens. Thus, in this study, we set to investigate whether Greeks' perception of this relationship would relate to their acceptance of measures and reforms considered by the EU necessary to solve the crisis or whether they would prefer a strategy of exiting the European Union. When faced with new, unfamiliar events and adversity, people try to make sense of them by socially constructing knowledge of these events in the form of social representations (Moscovici, 1961/2008). The crisis is a threatening situation (see also Papastamou et al., 2018) and also has severe consequences for people and groups. The strategies to manage the crisis are part of this representation, and we argue that they will be anchored in the way people understand the asymmetric relationships between groups, their perception of their own position and their norms and values (Doise, 1992).

The argument presented here is based on the fact that the European Union institutions have the role of managing and distributing resources among member-states (see also Reese & Lauenstein, 2014). This gives the Union a certain power acknowledged by the states through procedures considered as fair. Thus, both procedural and distributive justice issues are at stake (Deutsch, 1975; 1985; Jost & Kay, 2010; Lind & Tyler, 1998).

In terms of procedural justice, one could argue that people, as members of the EU, expect a benevolent attitude from the EU towards their country; a relationship characterized by cooperation, respect and solidarity. We expect that if they perceive the relationship between Greece and the EU to be of this kind they would be more willing to accept the measures proposed by the EU even if these measures are harsh for the ingroup. Moreover, because the issue at stake is the distribution of resources between countries the relationship between their perception of the Greece-EU relations and the acceptance of different crisis management strategies will be mediated by the different norms of justice they hold.

Social psychological theorizing (Deutsch, 1975; 1985) has proposed 3 main norms of distributive justice: proportional to one's contributions (norm of equity), according to one's needs (norm of needs) and equal for all (norm of equality). These norms are shared understandings of how distributive justice should operate. People adhere to these norms to different degrees concerning public debates of distribution and are not individual characteristics or personality traits (see also Staerklé, Likki & Scheiddeger, 2012). We believe that the adherence to these norms regarding the distribution of resources

among member-states will relate to the acceptance of different solutions to the crisis and will mediate the effect of procedural considerations to these solutions. This would be especially true for solutions that legitimize the power of the EU and the values of the current socio-political system.

Indeed, the capitalistic system based its cohesion on individual mobility that was linked to the principle of meritocracy. In other words, people could aspire to a better position "on the basis of their contributions or entitlements such as ability, effort, motivation and achievement" (Jost et al., 2010 p. 1132). In this ideology, position relates to achievements and therefore it is supposed to reward precisely these individual achievements. We could therefore expect that equity, the distribution of resources according to one's contribution, will be the privileged norm that will legitimize the system. Thus, equity might be the norm of distributive justice that would better mediate the relationship between procedural justice beliefs and acceptance of harsh measures.

Accepting harsh measures: the mediating effect of people's own position

However, the possibility of upward mobility within this system is in fact an illusion, since only a few have the opportunity to be mobile (Wright, 2001; Wright & Boese, 2015). This ideology, though, serves as a system justifying one (Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, Jost & Pohl, 2011) and supports the internalization of inequality since low-status groups are made guilty of their failure to succeed (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson & Tangler, 2001; McCoy & Major, 2007). According to research on tokenism (Wright, 2001) only if people perceive the situation that restricts their upwards mobility as unjust for their group they might engage in collective actions to change it. Otherwise, they will opt for individual strategies in order to ameliorate their own chances to succeed and exit the undervalued ingroup. Thus, people's own position might also mediate the relationship between people's image of the Greece-EU relationship and the acceptance of harsh measures. We argue that people's image of the Greece-EU relationship does not only include procedural considerations of benevolence. This relationship might be considered as determined by power issues and domination. In other words, people might acknowledge that EU is in a dominant position in relation to Greece and therefore accept harsh austerity measures. On the other hand they might feel that Greece is in a submissive position and reject the same measures that humiliate their ingroup. In the case the relationship is characterized as "dominant", people acknowledge a situation without the negative connotation implied by the "submission" of one's own ingroup. In this latter case the asymmetric relationship is clearly rejected. The relationship between a submissive versus a dominant Greece-EU relation, we believe that will be mediated by peoples' own position and their prospects for progress and social mobility. As it is argued in social identity theory (Tajfel 1974, 1975; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984; Wright, 2001; Wright & Boese, 2015), a meritocracy promotes individual mobility that keeps society cohesive

by promoting individual change in line with liberal values of individualism (Beauvois, 2004; Chrysoschoou & Iatridis, 2013) and personal control (Joffe & Staerke, 2007; McKoy, Wellman, Cosley & Saslow, 2013). Conflict for social change is undermined by beliefs that change is possible at an individual level. A question remains, though, about the conditions that would promote a collective exit from the asymmetric situation, such as the one we face when we talk about Grexit. Perhaps a strategy of exiting an asymmetric relationship is the ultimate choice when people feel that the relationship between the two groups is prejudiced, competitive and exploitative, a relationship that either their ingroup or themselves have not the characteristics to overcome.

In line with the previous arguments, we would further suggest here that people's acknowledgment of the dominant position of the EU in relation to their own country would predict conformist attitudes and acceptance of EU proposals through their belief that their own perspectives for individual mobility are open and their position in comparison to others is good. Individual mobility legitimizes the system and the asymmetries and only if people think that they are restrained in their advancement and that the core expectations promised by the system are not fulfilled, they might challenge it and engage in strategies to change it. If people believe that they are better off in comparison to others in their country, in Europe and more generally in the world, they might dissociate from the ingroup and from those more at risk to face the harsh consequences of the crisis. Thus, a legitimating image of the asymmetric relationship between Greece and EU (dominant) would predict conformity with harsh measures through the belief that people can be individually mobile and enhance their position in the future.

On the contrary, an image of the Greece-EU relationship as submissive would rather opt for a Grexit strategy through people's belief that they are relatively deprived. Relative deprivation theory (Runciman, 1966; Walker & Smith, 2002) suggests that people will engage in collective actions challenging the status quo when in comparison to others or their past position; they feel that they deserve more than what they have. In our case, we argue that people will reject harsh austerity measures and will opt for a collective exit (Grexit) instead of looking at challenging the status quo through their belief that their own relative position is low and their prospects for advancement blocked.

In other words, we propose that people should legitimize the measures suggested by those they consider in power (i.e., harsh austerity) because they feel that their prospects are open and that they are in a good position. On the contrary, they should opt for a strategy of avoidance and separatism (i.e., Grexit) and reject the austerity measures when they consider the asymmetric power situation to be a submission because they feel that their own prospects are blocked.

Hypotheses

In this study we test whether Greek people's perception of the relationship between their country and the EU relates to their acceptance of different measures as a

consequence of their ideological beliefs about distribution of resources and their estimation of their own position and prospects. Conforming strategies (e.g., accepting harsh austerity) are expected to be predicted by a positive image of a relationship based on cooperation and solidarity or an image that accepts the dominant EU position. Avoidance strategies (e.g., Grexit), will relate to a negative (prejudiced and exploitative or submissive and dependent) image of the Greece-EU relationship. These relationships will be mediated either by norms of distributive justice (when it concerns a positive image of a benevolent Europe) or by people's estimation of their own position and prospects (when the relationship is depicted in terms of power and dependence). We therefore consider that procedural considerations (a benevolent EU image) through norms of distributive justice will impact the acceptance of measures and that a legitimated or symmetric relationship (dominant versus submissive) through people's own position will relate to the acceptance or dismissal of such measures. We propose here to test a model that aims to clarify why people accept austerity or opt for Grexit and not when they will do so. In this model the understanding of social relationships through people's ideological beliefs and relative position would predict their acceptance of austerity or Grexit measures.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Seven hundred thirty-nine ($N = 739$) questionnaires were collected in November–December 2012 in Greece mostly in the area of Attica. An almost equivalent number of men ($N = 367$) and women ($N = 372$) responded. Participants were between 18 and 83 years with a mean age of 39.67 years ($SD = 14.97$). In terms of education 3.9% of the respondents had primary education, 25.5% secondary, 14.4% technical and 56.2% higher.

Participants were approached individually by researchers and were asked to reply to a battery of questions related to the perception of the country's economic crisis.

Measures

Perception of the Greece-EU relationship

The participants were asked to evaluate the relationship between Greece and EU. The following seven 8-point bipolar scales were used: "competition-cooperation", "submission-domination", "consensus-conflict", "respect-prejudice", "inequality-equality", "solidarity-exploitation", "trust-distrust". After reversing the scores of the appropriate scales so that low numbers correspond to the perception of the Greece-EU relationship as *negative* (e.g. a relationship of *competition, conflict, prejudice, inequality, exploitation, distrust*) and the high numbers correspond to the perception of the Greece-EU relationship as *positive* (e.g. a relationship of *cooperation, consensus, respect, equality, solidarity, trust*), we averaged the six scales into a composite measure of the "Greece-EU relationship perception as positive" ($\alpha = .742$). Moreover, we used the "submission-domination" item as an instrument for measurement of the Greece-EU relationship indicating the power of the EU vis-a-vis Greece.¹

Norms of distributive justice

We asked the participants to indicate the way the European Union's resources should be distributed to the member-states. The endorsement of each norm was measured with a single item: "Proportionally to the economic contribution of each member-state" ("Equity"), "According to the needs of each member-state" ("Need"), "Equally for all member-states" ("Equality"). Responses were coded from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).²

Personal and relational relative position

Two dimensions of relative position were measured. The first one had to do with the "personal relative position" and individual mobility prospects. Its index ($\alpha = .687$) was composed of the following three items: "In a few years I will have a better social position than my parents", "In a few years I will have a better social position than the one I have now", "Today I am in a better position than the one I was a few years ago", after reversing their initial scores on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) so that high values correspond to negative evaluation of the "personal relative position" In a similar way and with the same response format, the second type of relative position evaluation that we called "relational relative position" was assessed using the following five items: "In relation to other Greeks I am in a better position", "In relation to other Europeans I am in a better position", "In relation to other people in the world I am in a better position", "In relation to other Europeans, Greeks are in a better position", "In relation to other people in the world, Greeks are in a better position". After reversing the initial scores so that high values correspond to a feeling of negative relative relational position the respective index was calculated ($\alpha = .736$) and the items were averaged on a single index.

Beliefs about the management of the crisis

The instrument was consisted of eleven items representing policies and measures that countries that found themselves in a debt crisis should follow (see also Papastamou et al., 2018). Examples: "Implement rigorously austerity measures in relation to salaries and pensions", "Reduce bureaucracy to attract private investment", "Leaving the Eurozone voluntarily". Responses were coded from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Results

The eleven items concerning the beliefs about the management of the crisis were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation ($KMO = .743$, Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 = 1585,71$; $p < .0001$) which yielded three factors with eigenvalue greater than 1 explaining 55.51% of the total variance. The first factor with eigenvalue 2.68 and variance 24.36% included the items (loadings in brackets) "Accept to have a reduced management of their finances" (.716), "Concede decision-making power to the EU, IMF and European Central Bank" (.705), "Implement rigorously austerity measures in relation to salaries and pensions" (.680), "Increase direct and indirect taxation" (.651), "Implement a technocratic

government" (.599), "Create an attractive environment for private investments through the reduction of labor costs" (.539). After controlling for its reliability ($\alpha = .726$) a new variable was computed averaging the scores of the above-named items and was called "Conforming to EU requests" since it depicts the submission to the dominant regulations imposed by the EU, IMF and European Central Bank. The second factor with eigenvalue 1.93 and variance 17.59% included the items "Reduce bureaucracy to attract private investment" (.807), "Implement measures that do not threaten social cohesion" (.793), "Restrict public sector spending" (.667), which represent the "Rationalization of the public sector" as a response to the economic crisis ($\alpha = .648$). This dimension represents a redeeming synthesis between economic efficacy and conservation of social awareness with the premise of the public sector restriction. The third factor (eigenvalue 1.49 and variance 13.55%) included the items "Leaving the Eurozone voluntarily" (.830) and "Refuse to pay the debt" (.798) which represent the Grexit rationale ($r = .42$) as a conflictual and extreme response to the economic crisis and its management imposed by the dominant international forces (see also Papastamou et al., 2018; and Mari et al., 2017).

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations among variables used in the analysis. We observe slight but significant positive correlation between the "conforming to EU requests" response and the "rationalization of the public sector" ($r = .15$). This linkage is an indication of the common ideological ground between the two lines of argumentation concerning the management of the crisis (see also Mari et al., 2017). We could claim that those two lines convey the "hard" and the "soft" facet respectively of the ideologically dominant response to the crisis opposed to the Grexit solution, which is negatively correlated to them ($r = -.23$ and $r = -.19$). Also a positive correlation is observed between the positive perception of the Greece-EU relationship and the conforming response to the crisis ($r = .21$) and a negative one with the Grexit solution ($r = -.19$).

Moreover, the positive perception of the Greece-EU relationship is positively linked with its recognition as a relationship of domination ($r = .28$). It seems that the domination facet – which also holds the same positive correlation with the conforming response to the crisis ($r = .18$) and the negative one with the Grexit solution ($r = -.09$)- represents a legitimating interpretation and acceptance of the asymmetric Greece-EU relationship.

Mediation analyses were performed using Hayes' (2013) process MACRO that uses bootstrap to assess the reliability of the indirect effect in multiple mediator models (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Percentile-based, bias-corrected bootstrap CIs were calculated for the indirect effects using 10,000 bootstrap samples. Three analyses were performed with each of the beliefs about the management of the crisis as outcome variables, where "perception of the Greece-EU relationship" was set as the independent variable and "equity", "need" and "equality" as mediators. In addition, three analyses were performed with each of the beliefs about the management of the crisis as outcome variables, where perception of the "Greece-EU relationship as one of

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD
Positive Greece_EU Relationship (1)										3.48	1.26
Greece_EU Relationship: Submission-Domination (2)	.28**									3.41	2.14
Equity (3)	.09*	.007								3.62	1.91
Need (4)	-.05	.005	.02							5.26	1.61
Equality (5)	-.03	.004	-.21**	-.06						4.77	2.07
Relative Personal Position: Negative (6)	-.07*	-.10**	-.13**	-.02	.08*					4.50	1.36
Relative Relational Position: Negative (7)	-.06	-.13**	-.08*	.006	.09**	.30**				4.10	1.07
Conforming to EU requests (8)	.21**	.18**	.29**	-.03	-.06	-.19**	-.12**			2.63	1.08
Rationalization Of the public sector (9)	-.008	.07	.06	.11**	.03	-.08*	-.11**	.15**		5.62	1.22
Grexit (10)	-.19**	-.09*	-.06	.005	.09*	.12**	.11**	-.23**	-.19**	3.68	1.66

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables.

Note: The Greece-EU relationship dimensions were measured on an 8-point scale. All other variables were measured on 7-point scales.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

submission versus domination” was set as the independent variable and the feelings of the “relative personal” and “relational position” as mediators.

Perception of the relationship between Greece and EU, norms of justice and acceptance of crisis solutions strategies

“Conforming to EU requests” response to the economic crisis. From a parallel mediation analysis conducted using ordinary least squares path analysis, positive perception of Greece-EU relationship indirectly predicted intentions to prefer a conforming (in accordance with the prevailing tendency that authority has created) response to the economic crisis through its effect on the agreement with the norm of equity. As can be seen in **Figure 1**, the more participants saw the Greece-EU relationship as positive, the more they agreed with the norm of equity ($\alpha_1 = 0.124$; $p < 0.027$) in terms of distributive justice, and the agreement with the norm of equity is positively linked with a stronger intention to prefer a conforming to EU requests response to the economic crisis ($b_1 = 0.166$; $p < 0.001$). A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($a_1b_1 = 0.021$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero [.0015 to .0430]. There was also evidence that positive perception of Greece-EU relationship predicted intention to prefer a conforming to EU requests response to the economic crisis independent of its effect on the agreement with the norm of equity ($c' = 0.162$, $p < .001$). In other words, we mention a partial mediation of the link of the positive Greece-EU relationship with the conforming to EU requests response to the economic crisis through the norm of equity.

The other norms of justice, equality and need, which were tested in the model as parallel mediators with the norm of equity did not return statistically significant

results and therefore were not mentioned in the above description.

Rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis. A parallel mediation analysis using ordinary least squares path analysis was conducted to test if the positive perception of Greece-EU relationship indirectly impacted on intentions to prefer rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis through its effect on the agreement with the norms of distributive justice. As can be seen in **Figure 2**, the more participants saw the Greece-EU relationship as positive, the more they agreed with the norm of equity ($\alpha_1 = 0.124$; $p < 0.027$) and the endorsement of the equity norm accounts for a stronger intention to prefer rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis ($b_1 = 0.050$; $p < 0.042$). A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($a_1b_1 = 0.006$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero (.0002 to .0198). There was no evidence that perception of Greece-EU relationship as positive influenced intention to prefer rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis directly, ($c' = -0.105$, ns), so the pathway of the positive Greece-EU relationship to the preference for rationalization of the public sector is fully mediated by the norm of equity.

The other norms of justice, equality and need, tested in the model did not statistically significantly mediate the effect of the positive perception of Greece-EU relationship on the rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis and therefore were not mentioned in the above description.

Grexit solution to the economic crisis. Our results from a parallel mediation analysis conducted using ordinary least squares path analysis did not support the hypothesis that positive perception of the Greece-EU

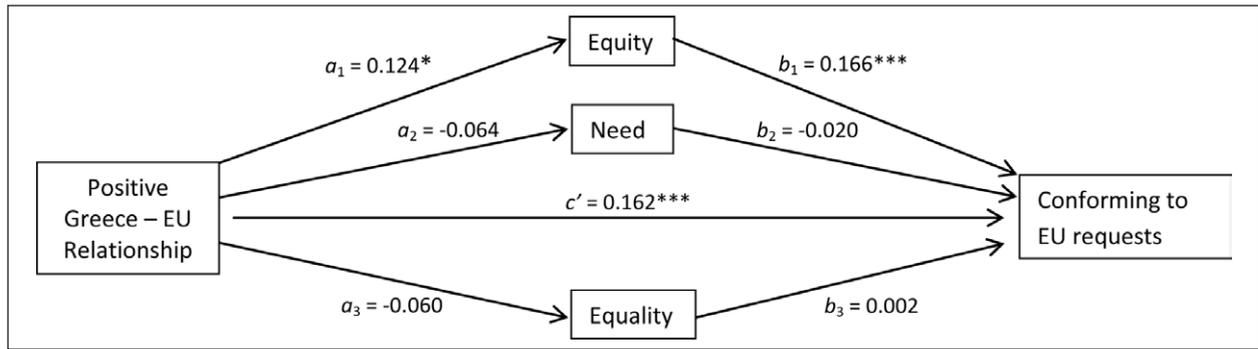


Figure 1: Parallel mediation model for the effect of the Positive Greece-EU Relationship on the Conforming to EU requests response to the economic crisis through the norms of distributive justice.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

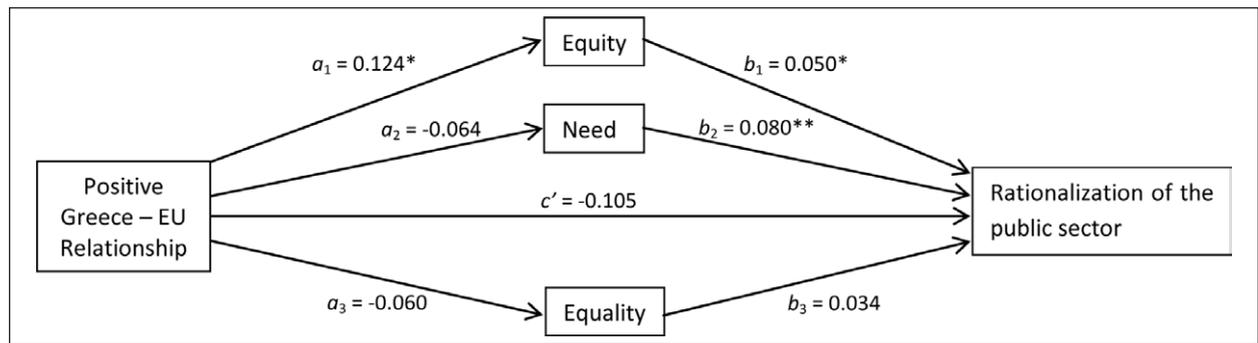


Figure 2: Parallel mediation model for the effect of the Positive Greece-EU Relationship on the Rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis through the norms of distributive justice.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

relationship indirectly impacted intentions to prefer the Grexit response to the economic crisis through its effect on the agreement with the norms of distributive justice. As can be seen in **Figure 3**, perceiving the Greece-EU relationship as positive negatively predicted intention to prefer the Grexit response to the economic crisis regardless of its effect on the agreement with the norms of distributive justice ($c' = -0.237, p < .001$).

Concerning a positive Greece-EU image, results highlight the importance of norms of distributive justice and in particular of equity as a mediator of the relationship between this positive and benevolent image and the acceptance of conforming to EU strategies. It is important to underscore that mediation effects of the norms were not found in the case of the exit strategy.

Perception of the Greece-EU relationship, relative position and crisis solution strategies.

“Conforming to EU requests” response to the economic crisis. From a parallel mediation analysis conducted using ordinary least squares path analysis, perception of the Greece-EU relationship as dominant indirectly predicted intentions to prefer a conforming to EU response to the economic crisis through its effect on the feeling of negative relative personal position. As can be seen in **Figure 4**, perceiving the Greece-EU relationship as dominant accounts for a less negative personal relative position ($\alpha_1 = -0.067; p < .004$). Moreover, the

feeling of a relatively worse personal position predicts a weaker intention to prefer a conforming to EU requests response to the economic crisis ($b_1 = -0.126; p < .0001$). A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($a_1 b_1 = 0.008$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero (.0024 to .0183). There was also evidence that perception of Greece-EU relationship as dominant influenced intention to prefer a conforming to EU requests response to the economic crisis independent of its effect on the feeling of relative position ($c' = 0.085, p < .0001$). In sum, the impact of the perception of the Greece-EU relationship as dominant to the conformist response to the crisis is partially mediated by the relative personal position.

Rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis

As can be seen in **Figure 5**, the perception of the Greece-EU relationship as dominant, indirectly predicted intentions to prefer rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis through its effect on the feeling of relational relative position. A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for this indirect effect ($a_2 b_2 = 0.006$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero (.0007 to .0149). There was no evidence that perception of Greece-EU relationship as dominant influenced intention to prefer rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis

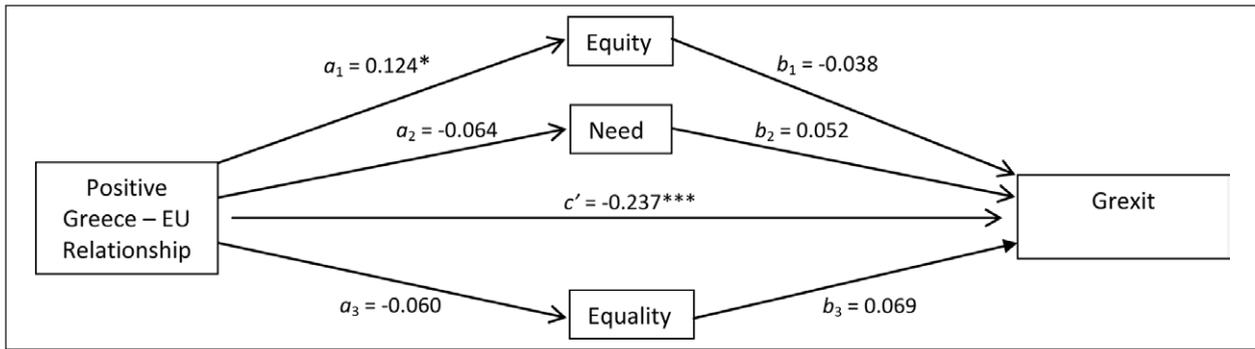


Figure 3: Parallel mediation model for the effect of the Positive Greece-EU Relationship on the Grexit response to the economic crisis through the norms of distributive justice.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

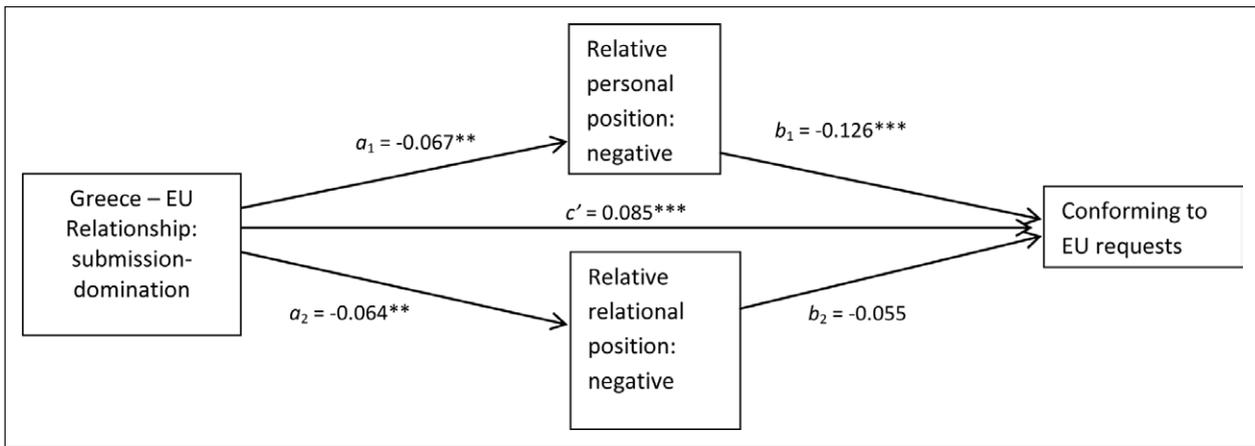


Figure 4: Parallel mediation model for the effect of the perception of the Greece-EU Relationship as one of submission-domination on the Conforming to EU requests as a response to the economic crisis through the feelings of negative relative personal & relational position.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

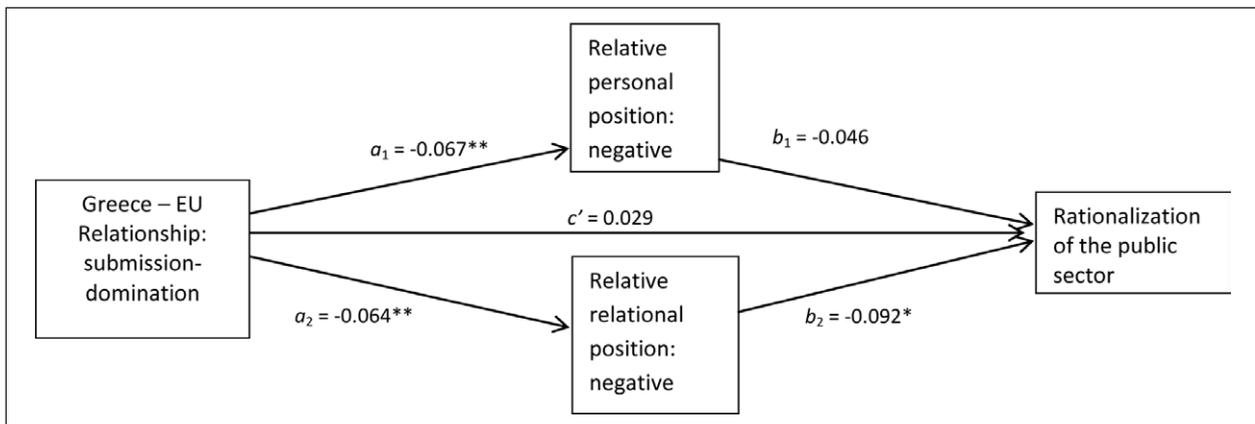


Figure 5: Parallel mediation model for the effect of the perception of the Greece-EU Relationship as one of submission-domination on the Rationalization of the public sector as a response to the economic crisis through the feelings of negative relative personal & relational position.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

directly, ($c' = 0.029$, ns). Perceiving the Greece-EU relationship as dominant is linked with a less negative relational relative position ($\alpha_2 = -0.064$; $p < .0005$), and feeling to be in a relatively worse relational position leads to a weaker intention to prefer a conforming to EU requests

response to the economic crisis ($b_2 = -0.092$; $p < .037$). In sum, the impact of the perception of Greece-EU relationship as dominant to the rationalization of the public sector as a response to the crisis is fully mediated by the relational relative position.

Grexit solution to the economic crisis. The perception of the Greece-EU relationship as dominant indirectly predicted intentions to prefer the Grexit solution to the economic crisis through its effect on both feelings of relatively worse personal and relational relative position. A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect through the feeling of negative “personal relative position” ($a_1b_1 = -0.007$) and for the indirect effect through the feeling of negative “relational relative position” ($a_2b_2 = -0.007$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely below zero for both cases: [-.0201 to -.0011] and [-.0191 to -.0003]. Both feelings of relatively worse personal and relational position, which are negatively predicted by the perception of the Greece-EU relationship as dominant, had a significant and positive effect on the preference for the Grexit solution (cf. **Figure 6**).

In line with expectations, the analysis showed the mediating role of individual mobility and relative relational position between a perception of the Greece-EU relationship as dominant and the acceptance of conforming to EU strategies. Importantly, both types of relative position mediated the Greece-EU relationship perceived as submission and the endorsement of Grexit.

It should be underscored that when the image of the Greece-EU relationship was expressing qualities that referred to a fair procedure of distribution, then norms of justice were significant mediators. On the contrary, when the relationship between Greece and the EU was denoting power and dependence the significant mediators were the relative position and the possibility of individual mobility.³

Discussion

Given the nature of the economic crisis in Greece and the involvement of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, the European Parliament and the IMF to the management of the Greek finances, the relationship

between Greece and the EU became salient. Thus, we hypothesized that Greek people’s evaluation and acceptance of the different strategies to manage the crisis will relate to their perception of this relationship. Two types of images have been taken into consideration: a positive image (a relationship of cooperation, consensus, respect, equality, solidarity and trust) corresponding to procedural considerations and an image of submission versus domination corresponding to a powerful EU position. Like in Papastamou et al. 2018 and Mari et al. 2017, three management strategies emerged: a strategy that proposed the measures of austerity named “conforming to EU request”, a strategy that focused on the public sector named “rationalization of the public sector” and a strategy of exiting the EU, here, Grexit. Our findings indicate that the two first strategies were positively correlated together, and therefore of a similar ideological underpinning, and were negatively correlated with the strategy of Grexit. Mari and colleagues (2017, this issue) found that the strategies of conformism to EU and rationalization of the public sector were supported more by people self-positioned on the right although a quadratic effect of political self-positioning showed that those strategies were even more supported by people positioning oneself in the centre. The latter also supported less the Grexit strategy.

In conjunction with these results, the current study set to investigate whether ideological variables mediated the relationship between the nature of the Greece-EU relationship and the acceptance of the different measures. In particular, because of the fact that central EU governance distributes resources among member-states, we hypothesized that a positive image of the Greece-EU relationship will relate to certain crisis management strategies through people’s beliefs about distributive justice. Moreover, we hypothesized that a perception of the relationship between Greece and EU as a relationship of

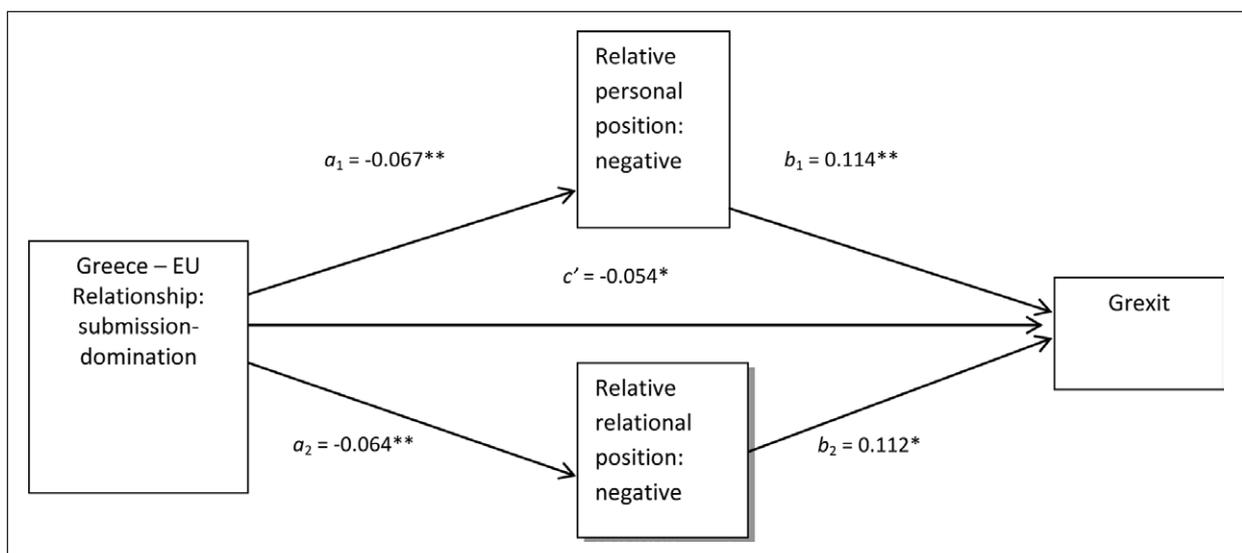


Figure 6 : Parallel mediation model for the effect of the perception of the Greece-EU Relationship as one of submission-domination on Grexit as a response to the economic crisis through the feelings of negative relative personal & relational position.

* $p < .06$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

submission versus domination will relate to crisis management strategies due to people's perception of their relative position as individuals and their prospects of individual mobility and as members of a national group.

Indeed we found that participants' positive image of the Greece-EU relationship positively affected the acceptance of "measures of austerity" dictated by the EU and the strategy of "rationalization of the public sector" and this was partially because of their beliefs on equity as a norm of distributive justice. This mediating effect, though, did not occur with norms highlighting equality or need. We can argue here that only the norm that fitted the ideological pattern of the current socio-political system had a mediating effect. Thus, the more participants believed in a cooperative relationship between their country and the EU, the more they accepted the austerity and the reforms, partially because they believe that a just distribution is when member-states' outcomes are proportional to their contributions (equity norm). It is important to underline that norms of justice in general did not interfere between the positive Greece-EU relationship and the strategy of Grexit. This relationship was negative. In other words, the more people had a positive Greece-EU image the less they opted for a Grexit strategy. These results highlight that acceptance of harsh austerity measures that will harm people in the country and reduce the public sector are accepted by those who have a positive image of the Greece-EU relationship (at a group level) and support a norm that might go against their ingroup interests.

One could expect that Greek participants would support more the norm of "need" in relation to the distribution of resources in the EU in order to favor their country. Indeed, observation of **Table 1** shows that the most supported norm of justice is "according to needs" and the least supported is "according to contributions". However, this belief (along with equality that is also preferred) does not mediate the relationship between the image of the relationship between Greece and EU and the measures. We could argue that there is a particular ideological profile that emerges here: a profile that legitimizes the asymmetric relationship between Greece and EU.

A similar pattern emerges when we look at the results concerning the perception of the relationship between Greece and EU as a relationship of submission versus domination. In this case, we hypothesized that the mediator of the relationship between this perception and the strategies to solve the crisis is the relative position people think to have and their prospects for individual mobility.

An interesting pattern emerged from the data for each strategy. Concerning the conformist strategy (acceptance of austerity and of a decrease of national sovereignty) results indicate that the more participants legitimated the powerful position of the EU in relation to Greece (domination) the more they were inclined to accept these measures. However, this relationship was also partially explained by their perception of their own position. In other words, the more they thought that the Greece-EU relationship was one of domination the more they perceived to be better off compared to their parents and their past position and aspired to a better future position

(more individually mobile), the more they accepted the conformist with EU requests measure. We could argue that because people see themselves as being individually in a good position relatively to others and believe that their current position will ameliorate, they legitimize a dominant relationship between their country and the EU and accept austerity and a diminution of national sovereignty.

Similarly we found that the more people had an image of a Greece-EU relationship as dominant, the more they were inclined to endorse a strategy that suggested a diminution of the public sector because of the relative position of themselves and their national group in relation to others. A dominant image related to a better relational position and such position was linked to a greater acceptance of a diminution of the public sector. It is, thus, because people felt that they and Greece were in a better position than others that they positively linked their image of a relationship of domination with a diminution of the public sector.

A different pattern was seen when looking at the strategy of Grexit. Here both types of relative position were connected to the endorsement of a strategy that proposed the abandonment of the EU. This time a more submissive Greece-EU relationship led to the strategy of Grexit because participants were more relatively deprived both regarding their family, their past condition and future aspirations and in relation to others. Here, a perception of a worse individual and national position leads to the endorsement of Grexit and this perception is also related to a more submissive image of the national-EU relationship. It seems therefore that people would not exit this relationship in conditions where they believe that they or their country could make it if they leave the EU. One could argue that in conditions where people feel weak, in order to avoid a submissive relationship, they are ready to exit this relationship altogether.

Looking at these results it should be mentioned that the different strategies relate to different aspects of relative position: the conformist strategy with the personal relative position in terms of mobility, the public sector with the relational relative position and the Grexit with both. We could speculate that the conformist strategy relates to a more individualistic focus: people look more where they stand themselves and, if they feel that they are individually mobile, they dissociate from others and are happy for more austerity and less national sovereignty. The strategy concerning the public sector perhaps invites a focus to the national group at present (that is believed to suffer from an oversized public sector). Thus, it is the relative position of oneself and the group that is at stake here. Finally, the strategy of Grexit, by being a strategy of abandonment makes salient both individual and group positions in relation to a submissive image of the ingroup. Further research could clarify whether these speculations hold a kernel of truth.

On the whole, however, our results give clear indications about emerging ideological profiles that relate to the acceptance of different measures. There is a legitimizing profile of an asymmetric relationship between

Greece and the EU that is favorable to conformist measures and a reduction of the public sector. This profile is linked to a consideration of the Greece-EU relationship as positive with an EU that is benevolent and dominant. In this profile, equity is the salient norm of justice and a focus on individual mobility or a focus on the national position (when it comes to the public sector). This profile may include those who, rightly or wrongly, believe that they can survive the crisis. These participants are keener to accept the beliefs propagated by people in power contradicting claims that the poor are motivated to legitimize the system (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004).

There is another profile that we are unable to say whether is more clairvoyant and relates to actual conscience of one's own real position. This profile is linked with the endorsement of the Grexit strategy. The choice of this strategy does not relate to norms of justice but to an understanding of the Greece-EU relationship as negative and submissive. In this case, because people consider that their own mobility is blocked and their own and group position is worse than those of others they opt for a strategy of abandonment of the asymmetric relationship without trying to challenge it.

The exit strategy at a collective level is underresearched in social psychology that focused more on the individual exit and on mobility towards the high-status group. Our results in Greece, along with the results of the British referendum that led to a Brexit strategy, highlight the fact that research should look more carefully to the collective exit. It would be interesting, for example, to know whether in Britain (a wealthy country) only personal relative position was linked to an exit strategy. Bauman (1998) suggested that globalization will include two categories of people: those "globalized" that would be able to move around the world and change position and those "glocalized" that will remain entrapped in their condition. Perhaps what we are currently witnessing in the reinforcement of exit strategies is the movement of those who understand that globalization is not in their benefit.

Without doubt our results confirm previous research that highlighted the importance of taking into account the asymmetric relationships between national groups belonging to the European Union. As others have proposed (Chrysochoou, 2000a, 2000b, 2013, Reese & Lauenstein 2014) these asymmetric relationships between nations impact the acceptance of European unification and the development of European identity. Our study points towards the idea that asymmetric relationships and relative positions at an individual and group level impact acceptance of EU proposed policies to solve the crisis and lead to a choice of collective exit.

These considerations point to the fact that more social psychological research is needed to understand how people make sense of their changing and threatening environments. Although our study is not on representative samples and concerns data collected in a country of the South-East of Europe, our findings highlight that it is people's perceptions of their position, their already formed ideological beliefs and their understandings of social relationships that anchor the new events and allow

people to make sense of what is happening and, as a consequence, to behave.

Notes

- ¹ Because this was a bipolar item measuring a relationship, we kept the measure of Submission versus Dominance as a single item, fearing that several items would prove to be difficult for participants. Given our findings, research in the future should try to measure this relationship with multiple items.
- ² We would like to acknowledge that the different norms of justice were measured with single items, but this is not uncommon practice in the literature of social justice (see also Verboon & van Dijke, 2007).
- ³ Although this is how we expected the mediating effects, for exploration reasons we tested models looking at the indirect effects of a positive image, relative position and strategies and the indirect effect of an image of domination, norms of justice and strategies. We found only an indirect effect of the positive perception of Greece-EU relationship on the conforming response to the economic crisis through its negative effect on a feeling of relative personal position ($-.081$ LLCI = $-.159$ ULCI = $-.002$) which in turn predicts negatively the preference for the conformist strategy ($-.124$ LLCI = $-.183$ ULCI = $-.066$). Thus, the more people had a positive EU image the more they accepted conforming to EU strategies because of their feeling of being in a better personal position.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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