

In the lead up to the elections, Greek political parties have resorted to half-truths on Europe

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This Sunday, Greece faces a key election. [Dionyssis Dimitrakopoulos](#) and [Argyris Passas](#) argue that in the lead up to the election, populist 'patriotic' parties have pursued a rhetorical strategy aimed at misleading voters about the real relationship between 'national independence' as they define it and membership of the Eurozone.



One of the outstanding features of the ongoing electoral campaign in Greece is the insistence of several political parties and politicians on the tactical use of half-truths in an effort to win votes. Despite valiant exceptions, their quasi-institutionalised propensity towards superficial and unsubstantiated discourse, often coupled with the constant reliance on the 'wisdom' of the leader/hegemon, leads them to the systematic use of slogans that end up misleading instead of enlightening their intended audience.



There are several examples – even now that the country's membership of the Eurozone is at stake – but two stand out. The first is the proposal of the Independent Greeks – a nationalist/populist party that sprung out of Nea Dimokratia, the main party on the right of the political spectrum in Greece – to keep Greece in the Eurozone but also 'retain national independence'. The second is the support of Nea Dimokratia and PASOK for the issuance of Eurobonds (of which there are [more](#) than [one kind](#)) while their leaders constantly refer to sovereignty, independence, self reliance, etc. One plausible explanation of these references is that Greek politicians are responding to the sense of humiliation (and anger) generated by various comments made by some European politicians against Greeks *en bloc*. However, there is a more plausible alternative explanation. These proposals are either half-truths or misleading slogans as long as they are not coupled with several necessary clarifications and details that also make a difference. What are these?

A country's membership of the European Union cannot in practice be combined with the retention of national sovereignty or independence as the latter is defined by the 'patriotic' populists. This is so because a core feature of the process of integration is the gradual sharing of competences (*pooling* as it is often called) with European institutions. These competences, at the same time, are exercised *jointly* (i.e. by EU institutions and the member states) on the basis of EU treaties. So, for example, the transition from the drachma to the Euro entailed (a) the abolition by Greece of the right to issue its own currency as well as (b) the direct participation in the management of the Euro, e.g. via the Greek finance minister's, the prime minister's and central bank governor's membership of the Eurogroup, the European Council and the decision making bodies of the European Central Bank respectively, where decisions are made *collectively*.



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Issuing Eurobonds cannot be reconciled with the 'preservation of national independence' (as the latter is defined by the 'patriotic' populists) because the relevant political decision – e.g. with regards to the timing and the terms of the loan – will be made collectively at the European level. It will not be made by individual, 'independent' states. Indeed, for this decision to be meaningful, it will be preceded not only by commitments regarding each participating state's capacity to put its own house in order, but also by the creation of European mechanisms for the collective monitoring of their public finances. These commitments and mechanisms – that are already in the process of being created – though very few talk about them in Greece – will give meaning to Eurobonds in the sense that investors will be reasonably reassured that they will not lose their money, e.g. as a result of the propensity of many Greek politicians to clientelism. As a result of this reassurance, the cost of *collective borrowing* – which is what the Eurobonds are – will be lower.

As to why – even now – several leading Greek politicians resort to half truths, there are two possibilities, none of them flattering. Either they are unaware of the precise content or the implications of their proposals or they consciously prefer to mislead Greeks citizens. The second of these two options is simply unacceptable but the first is indicative of two broader patterns as exemplified by Nea Dimokratia and PASOK, the two parties that used to dominate the Greek party system.

Over time both parties have received very generous public funding in order to cover not only their operational costs but also specifically for training and educating their staff and political personnel. Both have engaged in such catastrophic mismanagement of these funds that they have ended up having combined debts in excess of €200 million, whilst also being deprived of a serious policy making capacity. So, if it is not the lack of funds, what is it?

Both parties have always been top-heavy and lacking in terms of a culture of internal democracy (even when they were lead by politicians who believed in it). Both parties have, over time, become mechanisms for vote collection, rather than arenas where alternative ideas are debated, policy proposals identified (with costs attached to them) and selected in the run up to elections where rational voters would choose from the menu of alternative options on offer. Central to the absence of a culture of internal democracy is the role of the party leader. Both parties have almost always been lead by a leaders who ran them via a small (or large) clique of people who had personal allegiance to him, or in a minority of cases, internal 'opposition' fizzled out as soon as party office or, more often, government posts were handed out to dissenters. As a result of this internal structure, the renewal of the political personnel is almost impossible if it is meant to go beyond the sphere of influence of the party leaders.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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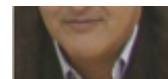


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