All technocratic governments are equal, but some are more equal than others: the peculiarities of the Greek case

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Abstract

When, in 2011, Lucas Papademos was appointed as prime minister at the head of a technocratic government, there was media upheaval, as it was seen a foreign-imposed, dangerous solution for the Eurocrisis: one that would undermine the functioning of party democracy, even democracy as such. However, Papademos’ cabinet was neither the first nor the last technocratic cabinet Greece witnessed since the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. Four technocratic governments have marked the two turning points which led to significant change in the Greek party system: Grivas and Zolotas in 1989, and Papademos and Pikrammenos between 2011 and 2012. The paper explores these four technocratic cabinets’ peculiarities in a comparative way. It puts forward as key explanatory factors for their appointment Greece’s especially restrictive constitutional provisions on government formation, and the coexistence on the one hand of a polarized and conflictual two-party system with little incentive for coalition formation, and on the other hand severe economic crises. The importance of scandals as delegitimizing mechanisms will also be highlighted, as well as the implications of the latest 2012 elections in terms of likelihood of appointments of technocratic governments in the future.

Keywords: Greece, technocratic government, Eurocrisis, party system, scandals

Greece, once known as the cradle of democracy, was in recent years under the public scrutiny for having fallen into a situation which would have suited one of the most famous Greeks, Plato: that of technocracy. In particular when Lucas Papademos was appointed as prime minister in Greece in November 2011 it seemed like the shift was complete, and the technocrats had taken over. (BBC 2011, Donadio 2011, Economist 2011, Skelton 2011, Hopkin 2012). Greece is indeed an interesting case of a European democracy that experienced periods of technocratic governments,

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and one that is worth looking at in details in order to understand what are the causes behind the appointment of such special cabinets. But Greece is far from being alone in this. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Romania all had periods of technocratic governments (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014). Since 1945 in Europe 32 out of the total of 607 governments have been technocratic. As discussed elsewhere², a technocratic government is a cabinet:

- Whose Prime Minister is not a career politician and is not affiliated to a political party
- Whose ministers are experts in their assigned portfolios and independent (– or say to be³)
- Which is neutral vis-à-vis political parties and in its agenda (– or says to be)
- Which is not directly the expression of the result of elections or voters’ preferences
- Which is recognised by the media as technocratic

In European countries technocratic governments have been appointed either following a cabinet formation deadlock, or a cabinet resignation. Elsewhere I have shown⁴ that, amongst others, the most relevant elements that increase the likelihood of such appointments are: the presence of a scandal, of an economic crisis, of a powerful head of state and a fragmented and unstable party system. The aim of this paper is to bring out the differences between the Greek technocratic governments and those of other countries. Rather than attempting at a broad comparison, which would have to remain superficial for obvious restrictions of space, the present analysis will concentrate on those elements and dynamics which are particular to the Greek political system.

The article will proceed as follows. First, it will set the scene in terms of what makes Greece a case worth of analysis, in terms of its experience of technocratic governments. While on the outset some characteristics of Greece’s political system seem to make it an unlikely candidate for the appointment of those cabinets, in fact technocratic governments are more to be expected in Greece than elsewhere, for reasons mainly to do with the constitution of 1986. The second part of the article will chronologically describe and analyse the four cases of technocratic governments in Greece, that is, the cabinets of Ioannis Grivas (1989), Xenophon Zolotas (1989-1990), Lucas Papademos (2011-2012) and Panagiotis Pikrammenos (2012). The analysis of these four cabinets

² ‘Expertise, neutrality and efficiency: towards a conceptualization of technocratic governments’ draft paper by the author

³ The importance attributed to claims in the relationship between politics and voters, and in the context of technocratic goverment, distinguishes my definition from McDonnell and Valbruzzi’s (2014)

⁴ Draft paper: ‘Technocratic governments in Europe: why have technocrats been appointed to govern European democracies’ presented by the author at EPSA conference (June 2014) and UACES conference (September 2014)
will be done according to the explanatory variables mentioned above – scandal, economic crisis, powers of the head of state and fragmentation of the party system. Explanatory elements foreign to those explanations, or peculiar to Greece, will be of particular importance to understand the Hellenic case. The inquiry will bring to light the relevance of the conflictual nature of the Greek party system, the mistrust of the political class and the overall Greek political culture that makes the political system particularly vulnerable in periods of crisis, while particularly stable in periods of prosperity (Featherstone 2011, Mētsopoulos 2011). Finally, the article will compare the four cabinets in groups of two, dividing between the technocratic governments by agreement and technocratic governments by disagreement, two typologies that will be explained and whose implications on the party system will be assessed. The article will conclude that although Greece does not present many of the characteristics that normally constitute fertile ground for technocratic governments, the country does lend itself to these arrangements and, with the recent developments in terms of increasing fragmentation of the party system, technocratic governments might be even more likely to be appointed in the future.

**Why is Greece a special case? Stable two-party system, weak head of state, strict constitution.**

Firstly, as a premise, it should be reminded that in the present case, the focus is indeed on understanding why a democracy should turn into a technocracy. So, when considering Greece, it only makes sense to consider democratic governments after the fall of the military Junta in 1974 and after the first free, competitive elections, as that marks the complete transition to democracy (Morlino 1998: 19). Since 1974, Greece has been ruled by one-party majority governments (Pappas 2003, Bosco and Verney 2012: 131, Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2013). Indeed, for much of the post-dictatorship era, Greece was marked by a clear polarisation between three poles, New Democracy (hereafter ND) on the centre right, The Panhellenic Social Movement (hereafter PASOK) on the centre left and a third party, which can be broadly labelled as ‘the Communists’

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and which took various shapes and names in the course of the years. The logic of political confrontation was based on emotional and historical allegiances, and much less on policies and issues (Verney 1990), and the third party, the communist, had always been excluded from government participation because of the type of electoral law. This is not the ‘typical’ situation which would normally lead to a technocratic government, which is the child of an unstable, factioned and mobile political system, in which majorities are difficult to form and maintain, and where there is high volatility in voting behavior. On the contrary, as it will become clear later on, it is only recently that voters have turned their back to the traditional major political parties.

Some commentators would object that, while outwardly Greece’s party system looks stable, it has, alongside other young democracies such as Spain and Portugal, a weakly institutionalised party system because it has ‘leapfrogged’ processes of change in party consolidation (Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012: 523). However, the majority of Greece experts would agree that Greece was until recently a classic two-party system, with effective number of parties at the legislative level of between 2.1 and 2.4 (Pappas 2003: 102), the vast majority of Greek governments have been one-party governments and a good alternance in power. So in this respect Greece is an interesting case of a stable party system that gave rise to technocratic cabinets often formed in other European countries to remedy instability.

On the matter of the importance of the Head of State, Greece is also different from other countries which had technocratic governments. To give a few examples, in Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Finland, or in Portugal before the constitutional reform of 1982, the president of the Republic did play a fundamental role in the appointment game and has indeed influenced the appointment of technocratic governments, so much that they have been called ‘presidential’ governments. In Greece this is not the case, and could not be the case, both because of the new constitution passed by Andreas Papandreou who curtailed the power of the president in 1986, and because of customs which make the informal use of powes by the president unthinkable. This informal approach to presidential role is a solution that, to mention one, has adopted the president of Italy. Formally his powers are not much more than the Greek’s, but he uses his informal influence to intervene in matters pertaining to government formation, especially in cases of difficult coalition agreements.

So while the stable party system and the weak head of state make Greece an unlikely candidate for the appointment of technocratic governments, its constitutional provisions on government formation are unique and might explain some of these appointments. In most European democracies there is very little indication on government formation, other than the appointment of a formateur, and certainly nothing regarding who should be the head of government. Greece, on the contrary, has
rather strict constitutional rules which consider all scenarios, including cases where parties fail to provide a name that could gather enough support. In that case, the president gives the mandate to an unelected Prime Minister: the president of the Supreme Administrative court, or Cassation court\(^6\). Once again Greece is therefore an interesting case to study as it presents the exceptional case of ‘constitutionally-suggested’ technocratic governments.

Article 37 of the Greek Constitution which regulates government formation is as follows (emphasis added):

1. The President of the Republic shall appoint the Prime Minister and on his recommendation shall appoint and dismiss the other members of the Cabinet and the Undersecretaries.
2. The leader of the party having the absolute majority of seats in Parliament shall be appointed Prime Minister. If no party has the absolute majority, the President of the Republic shall give the leader of the party with a relative majority an exploratory mandate in order to ascertain the possibility of forming a Government enjoying the confidence of the Parliament.
3. If this possibility cannot be ascertained, the President of the Republic shall give the exploratory mandate to the leader of the second largest party in Parliament, and if this proves to be unsuccessful, to the leader of the third largest party in Parliament. Each exploratory mandate shall be in force for three days. If all exploratory mandates prove to be unsuccessful, the President of the Republic summons all party leaders, and if the impossibility to form a Cabinet enjoying the confidence of the Parliament is confirmed, he shall attempt to form a Cabinet composed of all parties in Parliament for the purpose of holding parliamentary elections. If this fails, he shall entrust the President of the Supreme Administrative Court or of the Supreme Civil and Criminal Court or of the Court of Auditors to form a Cabinet as widely accepted as possible to carry out elections and dissolves Parliament.

The above articles, as mentioned, point at the fact that, although outwardly the party system is supposed to be stable, the designers of the constitution had already foreseen potential for instability and for deadlock, and to avoid worse scenarios, they had included provisions of the kind of art.37. Indeed, as the next two sections will show, technocratic governments happened in phases of the Greek political system where the traditional stability was undermined. In other words, they happened at turning points in Greek history where these constitutional provisions were used.

\(^6\) Interestingly, there is however, no indication as what the rest of the cabinet appointments should be.
Technocratic governments in 1989: Grivas and Zolotas

It is necessary and interesting to recall the years preceding the first technocratic government, that of Ioannis Grivas in 1989, not only to ‘set the scene’ for those unfamiliar with Greek politics, but also to understand what the terrain looked like, and why it was ready for the ‘seeds of technocracy’ to grow and to blossom at the key turning point of 1989. Indeed, as Featherstone remarked, while ‘each of the elections since 1974 have seemed 'critical' for the future of Greece, that of 1989 was almost certain to prove a major turning-point as the controversies to be resolved were so fundamental to the role of the state and to the operation of the party system.’(Featherstone 1990: 101). Similarly Lyrintzis calls 1989 a turning point, which ‘led to a general disenchantment with politics and prepared the ground for the rise of political alienation and apathy’ (Lyrintzis 2005: 253)

In 1981 PASOK, was elected for the first time, and was then re-elected in 1985, with charismatic Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou at its head. Between 1981 and 1985 PASOK borrowed heavily, public sector borrowing requirements jumped from 8.1% in 1980 to 17% in 1985, hours of work were reduced and real weekly earnings raised (Dragoumēs 2004: 78-80). In October 1985, realising the slippery slope on which it was, PASOK tried to introduce a stabilization program, which secured a $1.75 billion loan from the then European Community, and which included some of the standard measures of such as devaluation, tightening of monetary policy and reduction in borrowing. The economic situation only briefly improved, but then Papandreou dismissed Professor Costas Simitis, who was the minister for national economy, and the person behind the stabilization programme. And in 1986 Papandreou passed some constitutional reforms that curtailed the powers of the president, as mentioned above, which at the time was Karamanlis, the leader of New Democracy, who brought the country in the transition from the Junta to democracy. The president could not dissolve parliament, dismiss the government, proclaim elections or suspend certain articles of the constitution anymore (Koliopoulos and Veremēs 2010: 169). This fact is extremely important because, as it will become clearer in the course of the article, the 1989 and subsequent technocratic governments in Greece had very little to do with the powers, or intervention, of the head of state.

Looking at the situation in 1989 then, the elections in June, which had seen candidates representing nearly 25 political parties running in the elections, were inconclusive. ND obtained 145 seats, PASOK 125 and the Coalition of the Forces of the Left (henceforth Synaspismos, from the Greek name) 28 seats. These elections are particularly interesting because they marked the beginning of a period where Greece started doubting whether a one-party government was indeed better than
coalition government. The 10 month-period that followed included another inconclusive election in November 1989, and was concluded in April 1990 when ND won with a small majority. These 10 months are partly the period of the technocratic governments of Grivas and Zolotas. Indeed, between June 1989 and April 1990 Greece experimented with two coalition governments, that of Tzannetakis, which united ND and Synaspismos, and that of Zolotas, which comprised of the two parties just mentioned with the addition of PASOK.

Briefly, Parliament passed a vote of no confidence on the Papandreou government, and that is why elections were held in June 1989. The Tzannetakis government was sworn in. It was the result of the lack of agreement on a name for Prime Minister between ND and PASOK. ND’s leader Mitsotakis nominated one of his backbenchers as Prime Minister, and obtained the support of the Communists. Sworn in on July 2nd, the Tzannetakis cabinet mainly had to deal with Katharsis, or purification in Greek, referring to the clearing of scandals that had been discovered regarding members of the previous PASOK government led by Papandreou. Greece has never been a country where the political class was very trusted, but in the particular case of the scandal that involved Papandreou’s cabinet, such mistrust was justified by the uncovering of unprecedented scandals and widespread corruption. The Koskotas scandal even involved Papandreou himself, who was indicted by Parliament in connection with the $200 million Bank of Crete embezzlement scandal. He was accused of helping the embezzlement by ordering state corporations to transfer their holdings to the Bank of Crete, where the interest was allegedly skimmed off to benefit his party. He was eventually acquitted in January 1992. Ministers in Papandreou’s government and people close to Papandreou were also involved, including a former Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Minister, Agamemnon Koutsogiorgas; a former Minister of Transport and Communications, Georgios Petsos; a former Cabinet Secretary, Ionnioannis Mantzouranis; a close personal friend of the Prime Minister, George Louvaris, and the former heads of four public utilities and corporations. Papandreou himself could not hold the situation together because of health problems. ‘These cases were far more pronounced than anything known to have happened under previous governments’ argues Featherstone, and ‘the explanation for their occurrence would seem to lie in the transition from traditional forms of personal clientelism to party or bureaucratic clientelism under PASOK’ (Featherstone 1990: 105).

After three months of coalition government, in October 1989, Tzannetakis resigned. Because of lack of agreement on a new coalition, the President Sartzetakis appointed the president of the Supreme Court of Greece, Ioannis Grivas, as a caretaker Prime Minister to lead the country to elections. In doing this, the president was following the constitution, ast. 37.3 as mentioned above. Ioannis Grivas took office on 12 October 1989, remaining in power for less than a month, carrying
out the task of leading the country to new elections. These were held on 5 November 1989, but produced another deadlocked Parliament as ND, despite having obtained 46% of votes, did not manage to produce a government. The Communists were not yet ready to unite with PASOK, before the scandals were cleared out and the _Katharsis_ was complete. The inability of either party to form a government lead to the use, again, of art37 in the Greek constitution, which says that:

*Art. 37.3 If all exploratory mandates prove to be unsuccessful, the President of the Republic summons all party leaders, and if the impossibility to form a Cabinet enjoying the confidence of the Parliament is confirmed, he shall attempt to form a Cabinet composed of all parties in Parliament*

Grivas resigned only on 23 November 1989, and Xenophon Zolotas was appointed Prime Minister at the head of a government of national unity. Such a solution is also the same that will give rise to the Papademos cabinet, in 2011.

Xenophon Zolotas was a former director of the Bank of Greece, and, while widely respected, was not in any way elected. He was appointed at 85 years old and kept his post only for a few months. His economics expertise was needed because by that point the country was on the verge of bankruptcy. Private sector investments had collapsed, and Jacques Delors, the then president of the European Commission, published a letter warning Greece to change its economic policies (Verney 1990). Zolotas was subsequently forced to conduct a major cabinet shift in February 1990 towards a more technocratic composition because Mitsotakis, leader of ND, withdrew his ministers from the government. The difference between the first and the second Zolotas cabinet is indeed deep, as the head of press of the Zolotas cabinet confirmed in an interview to the author: ‘the first was the more proactive one, installed to deal with the immediate bankruptcy, while the one following the reshuffle was on the contrary just a caretaker one to bring the country to the elections – and as soon as possible’ (Vassilopoulou 2014). This and the declining economy eventually forced Zolotas to resign and new elections were held in April 1990. Since then, Greece has had only one-party governments until Papademos was appointed in 2011 (more below).

In conclusion, for what concerns the first two technocratic governments, Morlino is right when he summarises the reasons behind their appointment thus: ‘behind the four short cabinets between 1989 and 1990 there is the uncovering of corruption, strong ideological and radical party conflicts, and serious economic problems’ (Morlino 1998: 67). Indeed two of the hypotheses that, discussed at the beginning of the paper, increase the likelihood of the appointment of a technocratic government hold very well for that period of crisis in Greece: that of the presence of a scandal that delegitimises the political class, and that of the presence of a severe economic crisis that puts the
country in a situation of emergency. Regarding the former, it is clear that it was not just one party to be delegitimised, but the whole party system and its relationship with the state and its finance. It was, indeed, a turning point for the Greek system that lead to a change of strategy and to a period of ‘modernisation’ (Lyrintzis 2005) which can be defined as a package of ‘economic, social and political reforms defined by their liberalising character’ (Featherstone 2005: 225). Nonetheless, as Featherstone extensively explains in his article dedicated to those scandals, the effects could have been far worse than they were. PASOK lost some votes and ND acquired some, but overall voters remained faithful (Featherstone 1990: 110) and the importance of maintaining the political cleavage between left and right was more important than the abuse of power (Verney 1990). The technocratic governments were the result of the combination of scandals together with the new electoral law which prevented ND from getting a clear majority, and the presence of an economic crisis, that created a stalemate. This situation was one in which neither major party could be in power by itself, nor it had the legitimacy to do so.

**Technocratic governments in 2011-2012: Papademos and Pikrammenos**

The second turning point in Greek political partisan history have been the May and June 2012 elections, which saw bipartitism collapse and extreme pluralism replace it (Pappas 2013) and the general dynamics of the traditional Greek party system changing (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2013). Parties that had been originally just marginal, such as SYRIZA, all of a sudden became significant. This of course included the much-discussed extreme right-wing Golden Dawn. This shift marked the end of a crisis of Greek politics which started as early as 2009, and had its peak in 2011. Europe’s South in 2011 was shattered by the crisis. Within a few months, the Greek, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese governments collapsed. The four Mediterranean countries, albeit in a different way, struck the international public as undergoing a worrying transformation in their democracies. Greece became early on ‘the sick man of Europe’, and in 2009 the then ND government was replaced, in early elections, by PASOK, headed by George Papandreou. Papandreou refused to do a structured write-down of Greek debt. February and March 2010 saw two rounds of budget cuts which had little effect and lead to the signature of the Memorandum of Agreement with the Troika in May 2010. This memorandum required Greece to reduce pensions and salaries by a quarter, reduce funds to hospitals, universities and other public sector services in exchange for a 100 billion euro loan. This lead to strikes and mobilizations throughout the remaining months of 2010 and into 2011.
In May and June 2011 started what, borrowing the concept from Gramsci, Kouvelakis calls an ‘organic crisis, when social classes become detached from their traditional political parties’ (Kouvelakis 2011: 24). In the case of parliamentary regimes, these kinds of crisis are not going to result in authoritarian solutions, but are going to ‘free itself from representative structures and the rules of parliamentary alternation of power […] taking the form of grand coalition’ (Kouvelakis 2011: 24). This is the case of the third technocratic government, the much-discussed Papademos’ cabinet. Papademos, ex-governor of the Bank of Greece and ex-vice president of the European Central Bank, was sworn in on 10 November 2011. Papandreou had resigned following the controversial attempt to propose a referendum on the bailout package, then withdrawn. Before resigning, Papandreou, on the 3rd of November, ‘asked for a vote of confidence in order to negotiate the formation of a new coalition government that he would not lead’ (Bosco and Verney 2012: 130) and in a sense Papademos’ was indeed a coalition government, or even a government of national unity. It was a cabinet which undoubtedly changed the traditional structures of representation and electoral legitimacy, without breaking the parliamentary chain of delegation. He enjoyed the support of all the three main parties (PASOK, the opposition ND and the far right Laos) so while remaining within the parliamentary framework, it was bypassing well-established relations of power and delegation, as the majority that had been chosen in the elections by the Greek people was not the majority in power anymore. Papademos’ cabinet contained both ministers from the previous PASOK government, as well as some ministers from ND (e.g. Defence and Foreign Affairs). Papademos, chosen for his knowledge of the EU and of economics, took part in the negotiations between Athens and the Troika of international creditors (the IMF, the European Commission and the European Central Bank) and was therefore deemed a good choice to continue the negotiations and ratify the 130bn euro rescue package agreed at an EU summit the previous month, and to implement the policies linked to it.

While Papademos’ cabinet was not made up of ‘independent technocrats’, the government was set out as independent, ministers promised in various forms that they would try to set partisan interests aside. The Greek media echoed these claims to independence and technocracy. In Greece trust in politicians has never been very high, but during the crisis it reached an all time low, which turned into a shift of votes from the centre to the far right in the subsequent 2012 election. This might explain the superficial layer of ‘independence’ that the ministers preferred to keep. Indeed, even though there was no specific scandal in that time, ‘the protection offered to professional politicians by the nexus of parliamentary immunities and the statute of limitations for ministerial crimes made it practically impossible to achieve a satisfactory resolution of lingering scandals, such as those
involving bribes by Siemens and land deals with the Vatopedion monastery’ (Mavrogordatos and Mylonas 2011: 987).

When Papademos resigned, according to the agreed timeline, elections were held in May 2012, but they were inconclusive. Contrary to the situation in 1989, the offer of alternative parties to vote for to express discontent with ND and PASOK was much wider, and the results of the elections in May confirmed this. ND and PASOK together achieved a mere 32% and, once again, like in Grivas’ case, President Papoulias appointed the outgoing chairman of the Council of State (the Supreme Administrative Court), Panagiotis Pikrammenos. The technocratic cabinet of Panagiotis Pikrammenos was sworn in on May 17, 2012. It is the last that Greece witnessed so far. Pikrammenos’ mandate was extremely short – only one month – and his government of technocrats was clearly designed to just lead the country to the next elections, similarly to others in Europe, such as Indhizova in 1994 in Bulgaria.

Technocratic governments in comparison: by agreement (Zolotas and Papademos) and by disagreement (Grivas and Pikrammenos)

The facts and dynamics of each individual technocratic government have been detailed above, showing that indeed the elements at play in those appointments are, as expected, scandals, economic crises and the temporary instability of the party system. What is moreover clear from the analysis is that the *leitmotif* that underpins each of those four governments is that of Crisis. Morlino defined crisis as ‘the process of decline in institutional efficacy as well as divorce and change in relations among civil society, parties and government institutions’ (Morlino 1998: 11). Both 1989 and 2011/2012 were in this sense crises, and the technocratic governments appointed in those difficult moments were indeed crisis governments. It is now interesting to assess the four governments in comparison, internally within Greece, rather than externally with other European countries. We are faced with two different kinds of technocratic governments, and that therefore the four should be really compared in pairs: on the one hand Zolotas and Papademos, on the other hand Grivas and Pikrammenos. The difference between the two kinds lies in composition, remit and constitutional role.

By agreement: Zolotas and Papademos

In the Greek context, a technocratic government by agreement is defined as one composed of ministers from parties in government and in the opposition, where only the prime minister is an
independent, non partisan politician. This sort of grand-coalition, as we have seen above, is a real case of overturning national tradition, as Bosco and Verney have argued convincingly (2012: 131). The nature of Greece party politics is conflictual, and tends to be based on systems of patronage and opposing social identities. It is clear that only a very difficult situation could lead the two main parties to unite behind a common leader (technocratic, as it happens). Contrary to other countries, where majority and opposition unite in normal times, in Greece it is only an economic emergency that so far has been able to lead to such cross-party support. This is because, in the case of an economic crisis, the relationship between the state (as in, the government) and the economy changed. Normally ‘state-economy relations are marked by… incestuous and sometimes corrupt relationship with respect to the allocation of favours and contracts’ (Featherstone 2005: 229) see also (Featherstone 1990). In situations of deep crisis, such mode of functioning of the economy means that the institutional capability of the state to deliver the required reforms is limited because of these entangled interest and culturally-based attachments. Only overcoming such deeply rooted divisions can allow the situation to be solved, and Greek politicians seem to think technocratic governments allow precisely this to happen. The Zolotas and Papademos government are cases where the enduring nature of Greece’s polarisation has been suspended momentarily.

Pericles Vassilopoulou, head of press of the Zolotas cabinet, underlined the ‘emergency’ nature of such cross-partisan agreements: ‘Regarding the Zolotas and Papademos cabinets […] I would call them ‘transition’ or ‘emergency governments’ […] It’s not by chance that the two of them were Central Bankers before. Central Bankers are organisations of the last Resort and by definition emergency entities.’ (Vassilopoulou 2014). Indeed Greek political parties have played, in those two cases, a game of blame avoidance which is not unique to Greece: ‘… a strategy which involves a consensual solution among a coalition of the major political parties in that ideas of ‘national unity’ are put forward’ (Lodge and Wegrich 2012: 205). According to some commentators, it was not even with too much effort that Greek parties played this game of blame avoidance and collaboration – which came as a surprise to the Greek people: ‘Considerable shock was therefore caused by the publication of the discussions preceding the formation of the Zolotas cabinet, which revealed that the two leaders had exchanged views in a friendly atmosphere and had even used each other’s first names’ (Verney 1990: 135-136).

So while the mechanisms of appointment are a mixture of blame avoidance and forced collaboration, the causes of the appointment of the two technocratic governments by agreement are without doubt to be found economic motives. Periods of stagnation (late 70s to mid 1990s) and crisis (2008 onwards) in the Greek economy, as identified by Michaelides et al.(2012), correspond with the
periods of technocratic governments. The profiles of the two technocratic prime ministers Zolotas and Papademos are already telling in this respect. Both were high profile economists, both had been directors of the Bank of Greece, both were respected internationally, and Papademos was one of the architects of Greece’s entry in the Euro. This is certainly in line with the expectations that in times of economic crisis redistributive concerns are trumped for concerns of efficiency (Neto and Strom 2006), so even parties that are traditionally enemies, such as ND and PASOK, agree to collaborate because the situation is dire. Because of this sense of emergency, technocratic governments by agreement had more room for manoeuvre that the technocratic governments by disagreement, as it will become clear below, even if both constitutionally could have potentially passed important reforms (Pikrammenos 2014). Zolotas in particular had indeed begun his mandates with hopes of developing a consensual approach to economic reforms and other problems, but soon realised that this could not be achieved unless parties were fully on board. And despite their outward ‘agreement’, they were not. ND showed it by withdrawing its ministers when it did not approve a major tax evasion bill and anti-pollution measures. This shows that, while the Greek parties were indeed ‘united’ under Zolotas, it was only so or the minimum time possible, and only for those reforms that were absolutely necessary. The confrontational and conflictual nature of Greek politics was ready to spring up again at the earliest moment. Papademos’ government also had a clear mandate: applying the agreements of October 27 and carrying out the austerity measures necessary. But the difference between the two, as Pericles Vassilopoulos reminds us, is that ‘Zolotas was perceived ‘internally’ to the system as being necessary to save the country from default while Papademos was externally imposed by the creditors. So the logic was rather different’(Vassilopoulos 2014). This means that, within the typology of ‘government by agreement’, one could potentially further distinguish between internal agreement, and externally-imposed agreement, but such further classification is not necessary at this stage, and it might even be argued that the ‘externally-imposed’ narrative is just yet another layer of blame avoidance game.

To conclude, technocratic governments by agreement are therefore an example of ‘grand coalition’ to use a German term, or of ‘cross-partisan support’. It is easier for political parties to justify to their constituency and agreement with the opposite party if both parties are agreeing to obey the same implacable law of technocracy, rather than one another. There is no submission or compliance to the other party, but to an ‘impartial’ Prime Minister. This is why, before Zolotas was chosen, ND and PASOK struggled to find an agreement, as each party wanted its leader as prime minister, and that would have been unacceptable for the other party. Technocracy becomes, for Greek political parties and for PASOK and ND in particular, the answer to the need to provide successful solutions
to an economic problem with international repercussions while preserving their own position and 
the status quo.

**By disagreement: Grivas and Pikrammenos**

Technocratic governments by disagreements are those governments that are truly ‘governments of 
last resort’. All other potential government formation options must have failed for it to remain the 
only choice to select ‘the President of the Supreme Administrative Court or of the Supreme Civil 
and Criminal Court or of the Court of Auditors’ (art.37.3). This constitutional provision find its 
roots in an old mistrust in politics, which preceded the days of the Junta. As a senior advisor to 
Papademos and Pikrammenos recalled in an interview with the author, ‘This stems from a tradition 
of the 50s and 60s, when people did not trust the government to organise fair elections, so a judge 
would be appointed to make sure there was no manipulation. The constitution still reflects this 
mistrust’ (Pagoulatos 2014). This is also reflected in a higher percentage of independent ministers 
in the cabinets of Grivas and Pikrammenos compared to the governments by agreement. Grivas’s 
cabinet, had 14 independents out of 22 ministers and Pikrammenos 14 independent out of 17 
ministers, while Zolotas had 7 out of 28, and Papademos 4 out of 19.

A part from the tradition which justifies the constitutional provisions, more relevant to the present 
case is the tradition of strong one-party government which, as Pikrammenos himself explained in 
interview to the author, is at the heart of the appointment of the technocratic government by 
disagreement. ‘Because of this tradition and the total lack of trust and understanding, Greek 
politicians were unable to agree to a coalition government. The constitutional solution to this 
problem was to allow as many elections as necessary, guaranteed by a supreme judge, in order to 
have a single party government’ (Pikrammenos 2014). What is interesting is what this clause in the 
constitution tells us about the atavist fears of the Greek people about their own political class. This 
also entails that the caretaker technocratic government should not pass excessively important pieces 
of legislation, even though there is no constitutional obstacle for a caretaker cabinet to pass a 
presidential decree or a ministerial act, especially in case of emergency. In the words of 
Pikrammenos himself, for his government:

*the first priority as Prime Minister was to fulfill [my] constitutional role: carry out free and equal 
elections, as soon as possible. While doing that, there were also other current things that had to be 
done. For example, Greece had undertaken some international obligations, especially in the 
memoranda signed with the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission, which had to be fulfilled 
during my government.* (Pikrammenos 2014)
So while Grivas’ and Pikrammenos’ governments were clearly caretaker cabinets, in terms of duration and remit, this does not make them less technocratic (contrary to what McDonnell and Valbruzzi (2014) have argued). The composition of caretaker technocratic government and a technocratic one could be similar, though in the Greek case this did not happen, and this was reflected in terms of democratic legitimacy. The difference between technocratic governments by agreement and by disagreement is that the former, albeit headed by technocrats, had the backing – and the ministers – from political parties. On the contrary, the latter, as the name suggest, lacked that. They were accepted, rather than supported, by the political forces as a safe vehicle to elections. And indeed, what prevented Grivas and Pikrammenos’ cabinet from taking excessive responsibilities, other than the short mandate, was ‘the need to keep a balance between the lack of direct legitimation […] and the need to be consistent with the country’s obligations’ (Pikrammenos 2014). So if anything, Grivas’ and Pikrammenos’ cabinets could be defined as ‘more’ technocratic than Zolotas’ and Papademos’.

**Conclusion: crises and the future**

The article has attempted to explain the four technocratic governments in Greece, putting them in their historical as well as comparative context, and finding patterns of similarities and difference both within the four, and beyond Greece. It has concluded that while some of the explanatory variables that are valid for other countries are also useful to account for the Greek case, such as the presence of scandals and economic crises, the nature of the Greek party system and its constitution make Greece a particular case, and one that can only be explained when taking into consideration those two latter peculiarities. All the analysis revolved around the key thread that links the four technocratic governments: crisis. It is appropriate therefore, when summing up to conclude, to return to the central idea of technocratic governments as crisis governments. If technocratic governments are manifestations of underlying ‘crises’, and where crises are a family of concepts which have in common urgency and scale (Lazar 2009: 7), clearly the Eurocrisis is neither the first nor the last crisis that Greece will go through. The difference, from now onwards, is that the nature of the party system in Greece has changed. The recent Greek government of Papandreou has reacted to the Eurocrisis in a way that, combined with the crisis itself, has caused one of the most radical changes7 in Greece’s party system since the fall of the junta. So the recent times of crisis

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7 An interesting strand of research would be to assess how far the appointment of a technocratic government can be considered the direct cause of the rise in support for extreme parties in Greece. In other words, to explore the link between technocracy and populism in the Greek case, like others have done in more
have at once opened up political opportunities for smaller actors (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou et al.: 391) and 'promoted technocratic solutions for which experts are supposedly better prepared' (Lowi 1964). Now the Greek political system is more fractioned and thus more susceptible to crises than ever, and Europe in general has seemed to become more prone to accepting the logic of emergency (White 2014), so one might indeed have good reasons worry about what the future will hold for the cradle of democracy.
References

- Hopkin, J. (2012). "Technocrats have taken over governments in Southern Europe. This is a challenge to democracy."


