

Introduction: Conflict and Consensus in Parliament during the Economic Crisis

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Since the onset of the economic crisis, parties in parliament (especially those in opposition) have found themselves faced with a dilemma: choosing between the need to cooperate with the government in order to overcome the crisis and the opportunity provided by a weakened government to stress their adversarial position so as to be more easily re-elected and possibly get into power. What have they decided to do? The present contribution introduces a collection of works exploring this dilemma in southern European countries, by examining the opposition behaviour in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain; and in the European Parliament.

Keywords: *government; parliamentary opposition; consensus; economic crisis.*

Introduction

The international financial crisis has hit Europe, especially its ‘periphery’, remarkably hard, and has had deep consequences at the economic and political levels. A series of works have explored and explained the public policy reforms undertaken;¹ others have examined the electoral costs of such a difficult situation.² An important aspect that has not been addressed in the literature so far is the impact of the crisis on the level of consensus in parliament. This is striking, given its importance in empirical terms: the lack of cooperation between parliamentary party groups and the government has significant consequences in terms of bills’ passage and legitimacy, and even in terms of government survival. Theoretically, the question is also interesting: parties in parliament (especially those in opposition) have found themselves faced with a dilemma: choosing between the need to cooperate with the government in order to overcome the crisis and the opportunity provided by a weakened government to stress their adversarial position so as to be more easily re-elected and possibly get into power. What have they decided to do? This is a crucial question, for which there is no easy or intuitive answer.

The present contribution introduces a collection of works exploring this dilemma in southern European countries, by examining the opposition behaviour in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. In so doing, we shall try to understand not

only what kind of impact the crisis has had on the level of consensus in parliament in the four countries mentioned, but also whether differences are observable across cases. We choose also to focus on the European Parliament (EP). Although there is not a clear government–opposition division across the EP, studies have shown that MPs behave differently when their national party is ‘in government’ in the EU Council and Commission (Hix, Noury, & Roland, 2006). This is particularly true for very relevant legislation or political deals that Council or Commission leaders pressure *their* members of the EP (MEPs) to support. Thus, like their counterparts in national parliaments, MEPs have found themselves under two contrasting pressures induced by the crisis: a pressure for cohesion, caused by the same sense of responsibility and state of emergency felt by the national opposition parties; and a pressure for fragmentation across party groups and countries. Therefore, we intend to explore the effects of the financial crisis in both a national and a supranational context.

Consensus, the Crisis and the Opposition’s Choice

The degree of consensus in parliament is the result of two contrasting pressures. One comes from the need of opposition parties to mark their position as distinct from that of other parties. This is a pressure towards conflict, which pushes political parties to signal their distance from the government’s policy positions. The other is a force towards cooperation that comes from the need of government to ensure large support for their policies, echoed by the opposition’s wish to take part in the decision-making and influence policy decisions. In sum, consensus in parliament is the result of the balance between a tendency towards conflict and another towards cooperation. As a rule, the latter prevails: at national level, an extremely high level of consensus in the lawmaking process has been found in almost all the European parliamentary democracies (Andeweg, De Winter, & Müller, 2008; Christiansen & Damgaard, 2008; Cowley & Stuart, 2005; Giuliani, 2008; Kaiser, 2008; Mújica & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2006). This is true to such an extent that parties generally are ‘in opposition, in the sense of being out of government, but not necessarily in disagreement on a continuing basis with government’ (Norton, 2008, p. 241). At supranational level, within the EP, a similar pressure to choose between conflict and cooperation across parties is visible. On the one hand, MEPs have incentives to act cohesively to maximise their chances of being influential, or simply to pass legislation as often an absolute majority is required. On the other, party lines, nationalities and government–opposition dynamics are drivers of conflict. As observed in national parliaments, however, cooperation prevails in the EP: on average, about two-thirds of legislation is passed with the consensus of a ‘grand coalition’ composed of the European Popular Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), and the Liberals.³

With the financial crisis, the opposition parties’ usual dilemma between conflict and cooperation has become particularly intricate. At the national level, the

difficulty of borrowing for most European countries – and for some, the conditions of the loan set by the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission (EC) – forces governments to make radical changes in their policies, notably in areas such as taxation, pensions, labour policy, and the like. Austerity measures are by their very nature unpopular and, as stated by classical economic voting theory, in bad economic times voters are much more likely to withdraw their support for the government (Healy & Lenz, 2013; Lewis-Beck, 1988). This ‘golden rule’ has not been disproved by the current crisis: in 2011 we witnessed the fall of the incumbents in all the main countries of southern Europe.⁴ As noted by Bosco and Verney, governments are always ‘wrong’ in these critical situations.

The economic storm that has broken out in Southern Europe has shown that when incumbents are ‘responsible’ – abiding by the agreements with the external actors – they end up neglecting their voters’ demands ... On the other hand, when incumbents avoid being ‘responsible’ and/or try to be primarily responsive to their voters, they lose international credibility, with dangerous consequences for the management of national sovereign debt and hence for the economic health of the country. (Bosco & Verney, 2012, p. 133)

These two extremes are well-represented by the cases of Zapatero’s government in Spain, on the one hand, and that led by Berlusconi in Italy, on the other. The first fell because his voters felt betrayed, while the second had to resign because he had not acted responsibly enough to ensure the required financial stability for his country. The political opportunities of opposition parties in such a critical scenario are thus conflicting: they have a choice between the need to cooperate with the majority to influence the direction of far-reaching socio-economic changes in order to overcome the crisis, and the chance to weaken a fragile government even further and possibly get into power if elections are held. While the executive has to act responsibly, deepening the tension between its representative and governing function in favour of the latter (Mair, 2011), the opposition parties can often grant themselves the luxury not to.

A similar reasoning can be made at the supranational level. On the one hand, the decisions taken at the EU level following the crisis are urgent, extremely relevant and are the result of difficult negotiations between the member states, so that the MEPs are inclined to act consensually for their country’s sake. In addition, many of these decisions have been passed at intergovernmental level, out of the traditional legislative procedure. As the literature shows, in many cases the EP has acted as a competence maximiser (Farrell & Héritier, 2007; Héritier, Moury, Bischoff, & Bergström, 2013; Moury, 2007), that is, it aims to maximise its influence on the decision-making process. All these factors have encouraged the EP to act cohesively, in order to ensure a quick and safe passage of these measures and/or increase its influence on them. But on the other hand, the crisis has also generated a strong pressure towards conflict. First, socio-economic

measures and reforms taken in response to the crisis are very ideological and entail considerable delegation at the EU level. As a consequence, they are likely to split the EP across party lines (left/right and pro/anti-EU integration). Second, the recent socio-economic measures entail very different costs and benefits for the different member states according to whether they are creditors or lenders, or whether they belong to the eurozone or not. This would also promote new divisions within the EP along geographical lines. As a consequence, we expect the dilemma between conflict and cooperation also to be relevant within the EP.

Preliminary Research Hypotheses

Little is said in the existing literature about the possible conduct of parliamentary parties given such an extreme quandary. Traditionally, consensus in parliament has been thought to be affected by the characteristics of the political system in which the opposition parties operate, such as the type of government, type of parties and party competition and institutional resources (Duverger, 1951; Oberreuter, 1975; Pulzer, 1987; Sartori, 1966). Typologies of opposition based on the mentioned systemic factors are still functional and effective, yet they rely on models based on an ideal image of democracy that still exists in theory, but no longer corresponds to the actual performance of political actors (Andeweg et al., 2008; Cowley & Stuart, 2005; Giuliani, 2008; Kaiser, 2008; Mújica & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2006). Consensus in parliament has been proved to be affected also by non-systemic variables such as the preferences of the political actors, the characteristics of the legislation to be approved and, in particular, the policy area involved (De Giorgi, 2011; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Jenkins, 2010; Rose, 1984; Tsebelis, 2002).

What is particularly relevant in our case is that the opposition parties' behaviour in parliament has been proved to be more adversarial on economic and social policies, as parties are expected to represent different socio-economic interests, while the highest level of consensus is usually found on matters of national interest commonly affecting the whole electorate, such as foreign affairs and defence (Rose, 1984). The idea that 'policy determines politics', that the nature of issues entails distinct patterns of cooperation and conflict (Lowi, 1972; Wilson, 1980), points to the relevance of issue-voting, which has an established tradition among scholars of decision-making and roll-call voting (Clausen, 1973; Erikson, 1978; Francis, 1967; Kuklinski, 1978; Miller & Stokes, 1963). Furthermore, the saliency that parties give to different issues has an impact on their voting behaviour in parliament (Carammia & De Giorgi, 2011; Mújica & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2006; Stecker, 2011): low issue salience suggests lack of attention from the public, hence less incentive for political parties to compete. By contrast, the more a party (and its electorate) assigns relevance to an issue, the more costly it will be to behave consensually. Although the legislation presented by the governments to save their country from the worst effects of the financial crisis might be considered as related to national interests, it is also clearly related to socio-

economic issues and innately salient. Hence, we expect the level of consensus between the government and opposition parties to decrease as the number of socio-economic and salient policies discussed in parliament increases.

Moreover, as pointed out in the existing literature, the nature of parties constitutes a crucial variable that also explains the behaviour of the opposition in parliament (Duverger, 1951; Flanagan, 2001; Sartori, 1966). In particular, we expect to find a significant difference between the so-called *radical* parties – that is, parties proposing extreme societal changes which are usually permanently in opposition – and the *mainstream* parties, with a more moderate stance, which usually alternate in government. We expect this difference between permanent and alternative opposition to play a crucial role in the choice either to support or to oppose the economic measures proposed by the governments. As a result, we expect to have two kinds of opposition:⁵ that of the mainstream parties – that is, parties with government aspirations, which are waiting to be called to replace the government in office in the near future – will behave in a more cooperative way; while that of the parties permanently excluded from power will radicalise their positions in the legislative arena even further.

In a similar vein, scholars have already worked on the impact of Euroscepticism – and conversely of pro-European attitudes – on the government–opposition dynamics and party competition at national level (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2004; Sitter, 2001, 2002; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2003) and on the voting behaviour in the EP (Hix, Noury, & Roland, 2007). In normal times ‘virtually every policy area is now affected to a greater or lesser extent by the EU ... National elections are still contested on the basis of policy choices, but policy choices are largely decided in Brussels’ (Bulmer & Radaelli, 2004, pp. 2–3). In this period of crisis, this dynamic has been stressed even further. Since the outbreak of the crisis, the EU has acquired a key influence in socio-economic policy areas and has started recommending the measures that are to be approved by the national governments. This has happened in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, where countries and banks were bailed out and the international lenders – the ECB, IMF and the EC – set conditions for the loan; but also in Italy and more recently in Cyprus. Recommendations tend towards an extremely quick reduction of public debt or deficit, but also indicate a whole series of structural reforms. Even in countries that have not been bailed out, the influence of the EC on the budget draft is undoubtedly substantial. Thus, a clear trend has been registered: an increase in the European influence over (or even a Europeanisation of) the usually controversial sectors of social and economic policy. Given this, we expect the traditionally pro-European parties to be more likely to cooperate than before on socio-economic measures, because they follow the EU recommendations/orders. Alternatively, we expect the Eurosceptic parties to have less incentive than before to collaborate when the EU influences legislation.

Thus, although we expect a general decrease in the level of consensus after the onset of the crisis (due to the rising number of salient and socio-economic

policy decisions), we expect the *net* impact of the crisis on the opposition parties' behaviour to vary significantly from one party to another. Since the onset of the crisis, the mainstream and pro-European parties, which usually alternate in government, are expected to behave more consensually than they would have done for similar policies in other circumstances. We expect the contrary to be true for the radical parties. Obviously, these two hypotheses are closely related, as parties that are permanently out of government tend to be more Eurosceptic (Sitter, 2001; Taggart, 1998).⁶

While the first hypotheses apply to both national and European legislative arenas, an additional hypothesis relates to the shift in time in the national context. As stated above, austerity measures are by their nature unpopular and so it is the government that has to implement them. In other words, during the financial crisis the major opposition parties have a better chance of replacing the incumbents in the case of new elections. This idea is consistent with the literature that economic and financial crises tend to lead to government instability and termination (Browne, Frenreis, & Gleiber, 1986).⁷ The current crisis is no exception. On the contrary, it has been the rule in nearly all the elections in southern Europe since 2011 to punish the incumbent. Of all the national elections held in the last two years in the four countries under analysis, just one has witnessed the victory of the incumbent: the Portuguese presidential election in early 2011.⁸ The impact of the economic crisis on the political development of southern Europe was clear and undoubtedly negative for the incumbents, although this did not always mean a clear victory of the main opposition parties. In fact, in several of the last elections, the incumbent parties' loss did not coincide with the official opposition's gain as would normally have been expected. In Greece, the electoral results were so confused that a further election had to be called soon after that of May 2012. In Spain, despite the 15.1 per cent of the total vote lost by the Spanish Socialist Party, the People's Party increased its own support by only 4.7 per cent (Bosco & Verney, 2012). In Italy, the situation was even worse for the centre-left coalition, which was expected to win easily the election held in February 2013: in fact, the results led to the absence of a majority in the Senate, and the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) was forced to make a post-electoral grand coalition with the main centre-right party, the *Popolo della Libertà* (PDL) of Silvio Berlusconi. It was only in Portugal in the general election held in 2011 that the increase in the vote for the centre-right PSD exceeded the incumbent socialists' loss. However, even given this variegated picture, the opposition's opportunities in the case of elections are certainly higher than in normal times. Therefore, our final research hypothesis relates to variation in time and across cases, within the same period of crisis. We expect that the more the government is in jeopardy, the greater the opposition's incentives to fight rather than to support the executive. In other words, we posit that, once the financial crisis has begun, the opposition behaves in a more conflictual way when the government's incumbency is at risk, for instance, when it lacks a majority of seats in parliament or its popularity

declines, and in a less conflictual way when it is not, that is, when elections have just been held or technocratic governments, rather than true political competitors, are in charge.

The (Economic and Political) Crisis in Southern Europe

We shall test our argument in the four southern European countries that experienced the greatest pressure from the crisis: Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain. Apart from their geographic proximity, these systems actually share controversial features at both the political and economic levels:

On the political side, they have often been portrayed as systems characterised by weakly institutionalised party systems, whose electorates nevertheless show restricted electoral volatility, along with ideological voting and extended political patronage. On the economic side, their structures appear weaker than their Northern European counterparts, with uneven economic developments typical of dual economies, large state economic involvement and reduced social mobility. (Bellucci, Costa Lobo, & Lewis-Beck, 2012, p. 470)

The sarcastic acronym PIGS – Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain⁹ – was in fact created to identify those national systems characterised by economic and political weaknesses in Europe. In recent years, those common features have actually led to nearly the same political and economic outcomes: all four countries were hit dramatically by the international economic crisis and had to face a period of political instability at the same time.

Besides these general similarities, there are in fact important differences between the four. In the course of 2011, the prime minister (PM) resigned and the government was replaced in all four countries under analysis. However, this outcome was reached in two different ways: through the call for new elections and the victory of the parties that were previously in opposition in Portugal and Spain; and through the replacement of the PM thanks to the formation of a new parliamentary majority supporting the government without going to the polls, in Greece and Italy. But the latter two governments had different destinies: on the one hand, the new Greek executive led by Lucas Papademos lasted only a few months and was followed by two general elections in rapid succession (in May and June 2012), because the results of the first one did not allow the formation of a stable government. On the other hand, the new Italian executive led by the former EU Commissioner Mario Monti almost completed its parliamentary term. Monti resigned in December 2012 and a new general election was held in February 2013, opening a new (critical) political scenario that resulted in the formation of a new government led by Enrico Letta and supported by a grand coalition, for the first time in the history of the so-called second republic.

On the economic side, Greece was the first EU member state to accept the bailout package, which was agreed with the ECB, IMF and EC in April 2010.

The implications of this agreement were both economic and political. The vote to approve the bailout package and the consequent austerity measures put the cohesion of most parliamentary party groups to a serious test. Many MPs who voted against the party whip, belonging to both the government party – the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) – and the opposition parties, were expelled. As the economic crisis deepened and the government support kept declining, the opposition parties had less and less incentive to support the government proposals. When the midterm fiscal plan was presented to the parliament in June 2011, it was supported only by the PASOK. After a cabinet reshuffle, the PM's disastrous announcement of a referendum on the measures to be approved, and ultimately his resignation, a new coalition was formed by the PASOK, the main opposition conservative New Democracy (ND), and the radical right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), at the end of 2011. But this solution was not enough to avoid going back to the polls for too long. Since June 2012, Antonis Samaras has been leading a coalition government supported by a composite majority with PASOK, the democratic left-wing DIMAR and the conservative ND (with a limited role in government).

Although the first months of 2013 in Italy seemed reminiscent of the political impasse that Greece had to face between May and June 2012, the situation was different. Bosco and Verney (2012) had actually predicted that 'the electoral epidemic spreading in Southern Europe' would have included 'the growth of abstention, increasing parliamentary fragmentation and the emergence of new political forces, notably those expressing anti-party, extreme right-wing or even racist positions' (p. 150). In the case of Italy, it was mainly the anti-party sentiment that led to the fall of both the centre-right and centre-left coalition at the election held in February 2013 and resulted in the rise of the Five Stars Movement (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*) founded a few years earlier by the famous comedian and blogger Beppe Grillo, whose list got more than 25 per cent of the votes. This caused the absence of a clear majority in the Senate and thus difficulty in the rapid appointment of a new coalition government. As noted above, the solution was to form a government supported by an unprecedented grand coalition, composed of the traditional political adversaries of the second republic – the centre-left PD and the centre-right PDL – and the new *Lista Civica* led by the former PM Mario Monti. From an economic point of view, Italy has never had to ask for a real bailout, although it has been clear from the start that the executive led by Monti following Berlusconi's resignation had to follow an exact plan agreed at European level in order to overcome the economic crisis that was seriously threatening the country.

Although the economic situation in Portugal and Spain was (and still is) worse than that of Italy, they seem to have acquired greater political stability since the elections of 2011. In Portugal, after the parliament's rejection of an austerity package – the fourth in less than one year – the Socialist PM José Sócrates resigned and international lenders were called to the rescue in April 2011. After that, the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the right-wing

Democratic and Social Centre Party (CDS) obtained an absolute majority at the general election held in June. Since that time, however, the new government led by Pedro Passos Coelho has had to act according to the rules agreed at the time of the bailout with the ECB, IMF and EC; the three main parties in parliament (the Socialist Party [PS], PSD and CDS) had taken part in the negotiations and, like the other countries rescued by the international lenders, it was the nation that had made the commitment rather than a particular government (Mair, 2011).

In the Spanish case, the Socialist government implemented the biggest redefinition of the welfare state, including public servant wage cuts, freezing pensions and limiting public debt at both state level and regional level. The new Popular Party government, appointed after the resignation of the Socialist PM José Luis Zapatero and the general election that followed, also implemented policies that contradicted its ideological claims by raising income taxes. In both cases, the political costs were very high.

So how have the opposition parties reacted to this dramatic situation in southern Europe? Have they tried to behave ‘responsibly’ by cooperating with the government in office, or have they stressed their adversarial position and tried to benefit from the difficulties and low popularity of the leading parties? In this comparative work we shall try to verify our research hypotheses about the possible behaviour of the opposition in such a critical economic and political scenario.

The Crisis in the European Parliament

As we know, the EP does not, *strictu sensu*, have one government and one opposition. But by including the EP in this study, we can further our study of the impact of the crisis on parliamentary cohesion and consensus. As a matter of fact, involving the EP represents a terrific opportunity for such an enterprise from an empirical and theoretical perspective. Empirically, the measures taken at the EU level – fiscal compact, six-pack financial regulations, measures such as the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and European Stability Mechanism (ESM) – are absolutely innovative in terms of policy relevance, but also in terms of the process that led to the decision. Analysing the way in which the EP has passed these extraordinary measures and the manner in which it was able to act cohesively to hold the EU Council and Commission accountable, when the measures needed no passage in parliament, is of fundamental importance to understand how EU democracy functions and its resilience when faced with an unprecedented crisis.

Analysing the impact of the crisis on EP cohesion is also important from a theoretical point of view. Many EU scholars (see Hix & Noury, 2009; Hix et al., 2007) have observed that a large majority of the votes in the EP can be read in terms of MEPs’ group affiliation, while only a minority of votes can be explained along national lines. The same authors also observed a shift from consensus to greater division across ideological party lines in the last decade.

As a result, the question that arises is whether the crisis has strengthened this process of ‘ideologisation’ of the EP, as the measures passed are clearly ideologically marked; or whether it represents a new driving force towards a divide across geographical lines. But more than an enlightening exercise for EU scholars, the inclusion of the EP in this study enables us to check whether the hypotheses made above on the basis of the literature on national legislatures could also apply to the EP. As Hix noted, the EU is a political system and hence it makes great sense to apply the literature developed at the national level to the EU. In fact, the decisions to save the EU from the worst effects of the crisis are of considerable importance, and hence MEPs – particularly those from mainstream parties – might be motivated by the same sense of responsibility and commitment as their national counterparts; on the other hand, radical and Eurosceptic parties might feel an incentive to distance themselves even further from the decisions taken by the mainstream parties in government. From that perspective, the last contribution of this study considers the MEPs to be under similar pressures as their counterparts in national legislatures.

The Work to Follow

In the comparative work that follows, we shall examine the preliminary hypotheses posited above through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the behaviour of the opposition parties in the four European democracies hit most acutely by the crisis – Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain – and in the EP. Each contribution will propose a combination of empirical data analysis and qualitative process-tracking, in order to test the hypotheses and/or check for alternative explanations as well as to understand the shift from consensus to dissent, or vice versa, in the opposition behaviour.

Before proceeding, we must underline once more that the relevant political differences among the four cases under analysis – above all, the characteristics, duration and stability of the new governments and the ways that led to the formation of the new executives themselves – do not allow the empirical investigation of the government–opposition dynamics in these countries to be identical. While the immediate elections in Portugal and Spain allowed the voters to assign clear responsibility of the economic situation to the incumbents and led to the victory of the main opposition parties, the technocratic parenthesis in Italy and Greece prevented the electorate from giving the same clear judgement and – together with further country-related factors that will be explored in depth in the works to follow – contributed to the (nebulous) electoral results that we mentioned above and, in both cases, the implosion of the party system. As a consequence, while Portugal and Spain will allow us to test our hypotheses and compare the results, Greece and Italy will be treated slightly differently, as will the EP, given its different supranational nature.

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Notes

1. See, among others, Matsaganis (2011, 2012), Navarro (2012) and Royo (2012).
2. See, in particular, the whole Electoral Studies Special Symposium 'Economic Crisis and Elections: The European Periphery', edited by Bellucci et al. (2012), and the *South European Society and Politics* special issue 'Elections in hard times: Southern Europe, 2010–11', edited by Bosco and Verney (2012).
3. Source: VoteWatch.eu for the seventh legislature.
4. It is only in Spain that elections would normally have been called just four months later; the Portuguese, Greek and Italian governments were all close to their midterm point (the parliamentary term is five years in Italy, but four years in Portugal, Greece and Spain).
5. As pointed out by Mair (2011), it seems that 'governing capacity and vocation' have become characteristic of a fairly restricted group of parties that belong to the mainstream of the party system and are able to offer voters a choice of government. On the other hand, the capacity of 'representation', or expression of the people's voice, when it has not moved completely outside the legislative arena, has become the characteristic of a different group of parties. These parties constitute the 'new opposition'. They rarely govern, they are usually distinguished by a strong populist rhetoric and, even if not equal to the anti-system parties of Sartori (1976), they share with those parties a kind of 'semi-responsible', if not completely 'irresponsible', opposition. 'In other words, it is possible to speak of a growing divide in European party systems between parties which claim to represent, but do not deliver, and those which deliver, but are no longer seen to represent' (p. 14). In our opinion, this divide is crucial to the understanding of the government–opposition dynamics during the financial crisis, not just in southern European countries but in all European democracies.
6. It is actually so hard to combine Eurosceptic stances with government ambitions that Eurosceptic parties that want to become credible coalition partners frequently moderate their hostility to Europe (Conti & De Giorgi, 2011; Costa Lobo & Magalhães, 2011).
7. This argument is clearly supported in Portugal, which had already experienced two financial crises that pushed the country into requesting international financial assistance from the IMF in 1978–79 and in 1983–85. Those interventions, like the current one, triggered political instability and early elections.
8. It has to be noted that, although the Constitution gives the Portuguese president quite a strong set of powers, in practice the Portuguese presidents have tended not to use them. As they do not play a direct role in the government of the country, they are therefore less likely to be held responsible for its bad status by the voters.
9. At first, the initial 'I' referred to Italy, then it was linked to Ireland, and since that time sometimes a second 'I' has been added: PI(I)GS.

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