

SITUATION REPORT- GREECE

FOR THE “IMAGINE EUROPE”
PROJECT

THESSALONIKI, JULY 2018

Summary

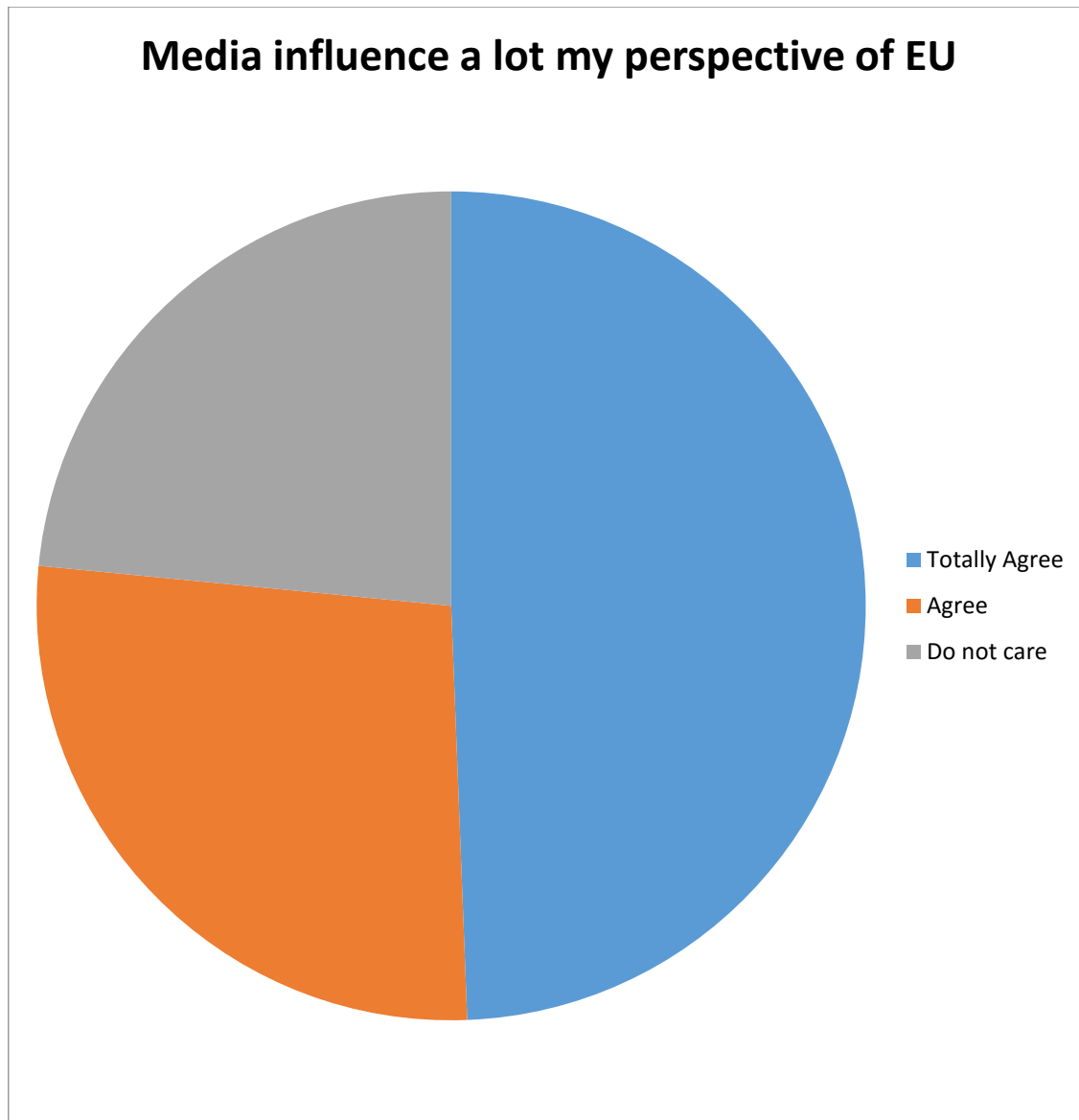
“Imagine Europe” is a strategic partnership project (01/09/2016-30/01/2018), which aims to decrease the wave of Euroscepticism and Europhobia in Europe and raise awareness in European identity by provoking the reflection on the common values and history. People that participated in the project had the opportunity to discuss, exchange opinions and be informed about this growing phenomenon and better understand the meaning of the EU to its citizens. After following a diverse methodology, including research and comparative analysis (questionnaires, focus groups, and detailed interviews), debates, informational campaigns and international seminars, the reasons of Euroscepticism were set, and on this basis it was much easier and very productive to analyze the consequences of Euroscepticism and how we can face it.

Information

Generally speaking, the findings of the interviews, the focus groups and the questionnaire are uniform. The people that took part in (more than 70% of them) were young people (18-30 years old) and a significant amount of them were university students. Since usually people in this age have participated in Erasmus+ projects (either in university or in youth exchanges, training courses and EVS), and this has a beneficial impact in their perspective of EU, most of them believe in a United Europe that has to focus on the different identities and cultures of each country, which belongs to EU. There are some people, who have bad feelings for European Union, due to economic crisis and financial difficulties that face in their life and believe that their country would have more opportunities outside European Union. This perspective of European Union is a result of growing economic difficulties in combination with unstable political situation in many countries and the gap between the North and the South, which is becoming bigger and bigger the recent years.

Many people are of the opinion that European Union should focus on social issues rather than on economic topics. That is a strong clue that the cohesion of European Union depends more on societal issues that will make the people more connected to each other rather than on economy and trade, according to the opinion of the people asked. Of course, the target group of business strongly believe that a European Union which is connected with strong economic and trade ties can flourish in any other field easier.

It is undeniable that finally all people suffer the influence of Europhobia and Euroscepticism in a lower or a bigger level, due to a variety of reasons. Among them is the role of Mass Media in the country and in which target group each person belongs to.



This report is consisted of three parts (questionnaire, interviews and focus groups) and the results of each of them.

Questionnaire

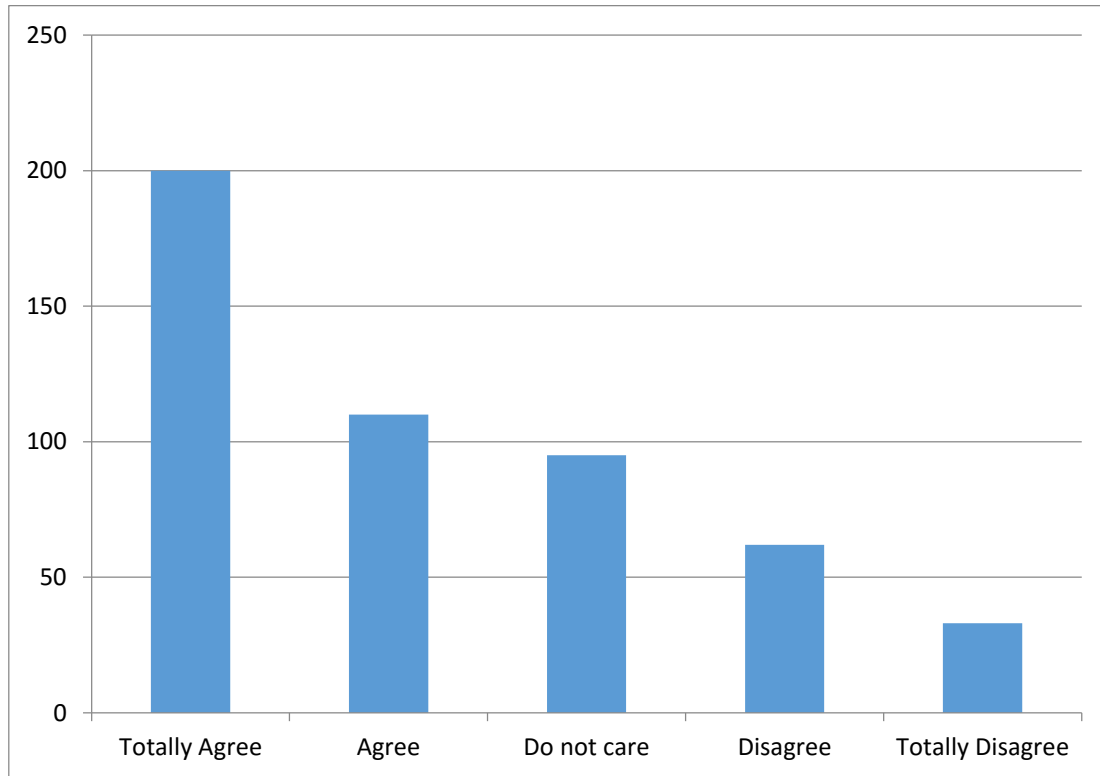
The ones that filled in the questionnaires belong mainly to the age group of 18-30 are pro-Europeans, who know about the growing phenomenon of Euroscepticism and they are worried about the politics in their country. Many of them are of the opinion that EU should have a strong social impact to the people and that means that European institutions should include in their political agendas a more societal policy, which will make the people feel that have more in common and that economic barriers that exist in some of the countries can be overcome.

It is also an important fact that people do not think that economy should be in the center of the policy agenda of EU and in the same time the European values such as humanism, exchange of ideas and political integration play a strong and crucial role in the whole structure of EU. People consider themselves European as part of their individual identity, which makes sense especially when we refer to young people who have more opportunities to travel in EU countries, find new friends and connections there and finally come to the realization that they do not differ from them in a fundamental way or in a way that makes them go through the differences more than the similarities.

Most of them refer to the ability to travel easily within the European Union territories as the greatest advantage and we cannot deny that this is a basic reason that they are pro-Europeans.

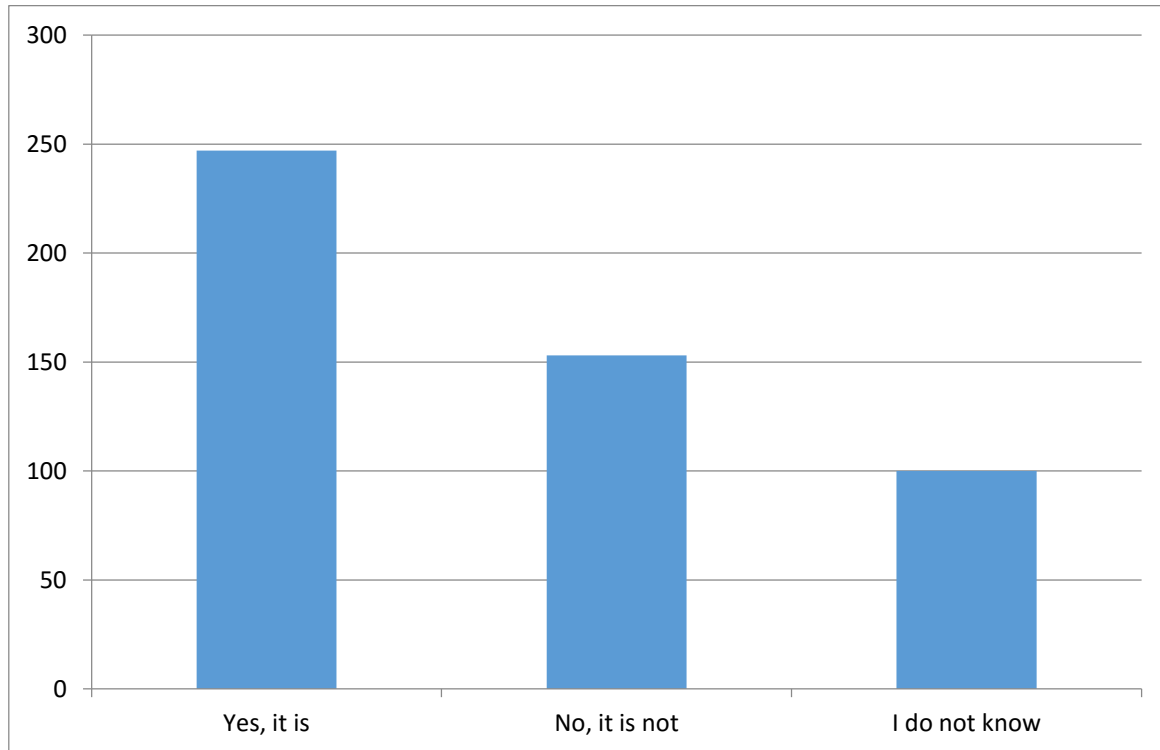
Furthermore, the most of the people that completed the questionnaire have the opinion that the active citizenship is up to them. That means that they as European Union citizens must have their own voice and this way they can participate in the democratic procedures of EU. Unfortunately, there are some that think that their participation is pointless, on the grounds that individual voices cannot change anything in European Union and only politicians can shape the situation in any way.

I want to have my own voice in EU decision making policy



To sum up, although Euroscepticism and Europhobia is a phenomenon that everyone recognize it due to instability in economics and politics, in general people still believe in a united Europe and are optimistic in terms of EU cohesion, if there are societal and political reforms in favor of further democratization of European union institutions.

Ability to move within the European Union countries is really important



Interviews

The people that were interviewed about the topic of Euroscepticism and Europhobia said that they have an idea of the phenomenon and they are worried because of the unstable political and economic situation in their countries.

Generally speaking, young people are always more likely to overcome language or cultural barriers and see the similarities between the different nations of European Union. People were asked about the impact of European politics, European Union and European values in their own economic situation, their business (if they are active in the business sector), their education and their social inclusion and national and European integration. Most of the young people answered that the fact that they are travelling in other European Union countries, they can do internships and they have even the ability to create a business (the fact that they are aware of this ability) have a great impact on their personalities and make them feel more optimistic about their future, since they can see more job opportunities in the whole continent.

In the business sector, there are people who were interviewed (4 people) and run a small business and are afraid that European integration can make their companies less visible, since there are bigger ones in stronger (economically) countries that through an advertising strategy can be more visible and consequently can have more economic benefits. These people seem to be more Eurosceptic and believe that the country can do better in a national level with national laws, only. People that are more ambitious with their companies (2 people), since they provide the public with a more useful or better advertised product are in favor of further European integration as they feel more confident that they can succeed more and more for their company and their own. It is really essential to be said, that these people were basically younger than the first ones, so probably they have enjoyed more of the advantages that European Union offer to its citizens.

To sum up, from the people that were interviewed, we had the chance to understand better the fears of a further European integration that people have and realize some basic features of the phenomenon of Euroscepticism and why it is growing more and more. It is really significant that people do care about this, both as individuals and as part of a society and their opinion is based on a variety of current topics such as economic crisis, raise of nationalism and refugee crisis.

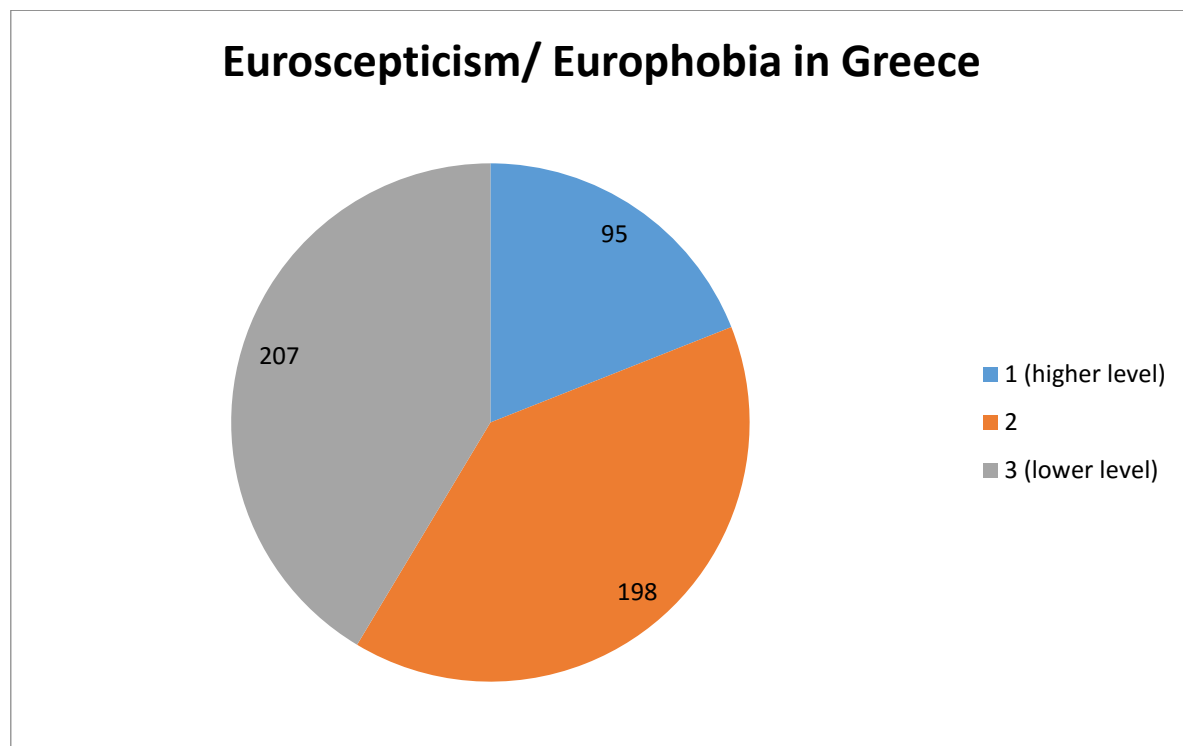
Focus Groups

Finally, in terms of the focus groups, the five target groups that had the opportunity to discuss, had common conclusions regarding the reasons why Euroscepticism is growing so fast among the people in European Union and had the chance to express their fears and their ideas and concepts in decreasing the Europhobia in European societies.

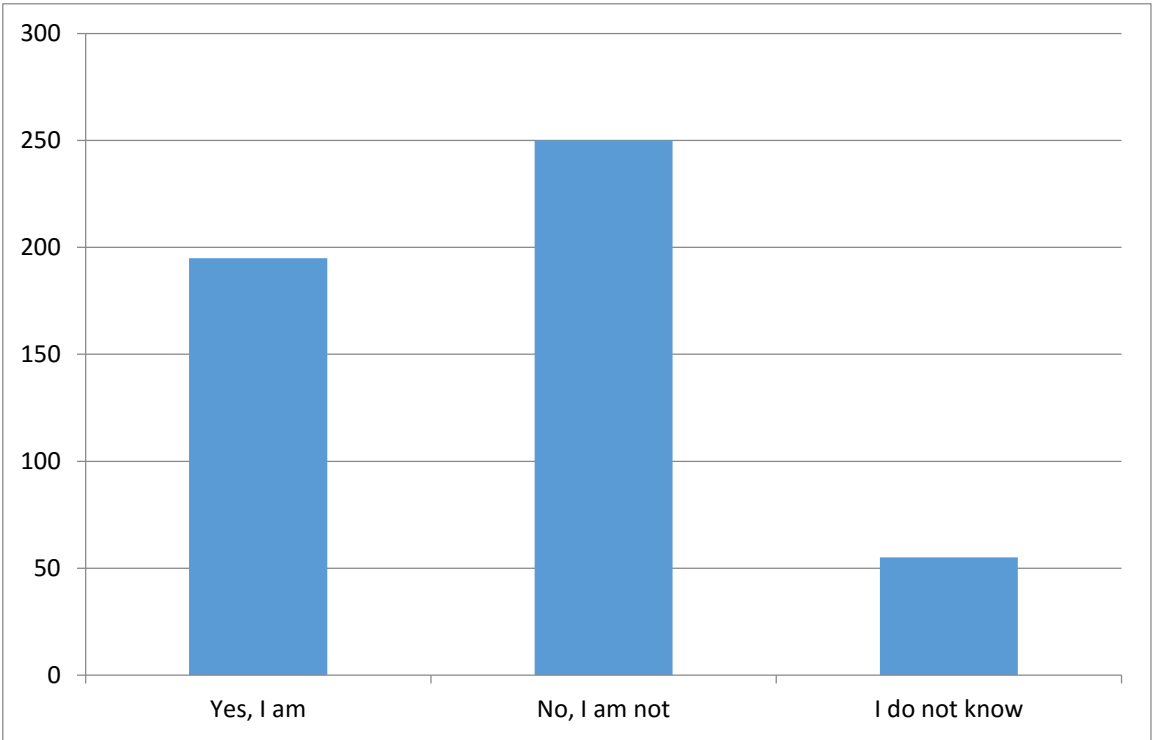
In contrary to the interviewed people, people in the focus groups talked more about social or political topics, like the refugee crisis and the raise of nationalism as situations that have to be faced as soon as possible if we would like to have a stronger European Union. Again the group of young people insisted on further integration through a better understanding of other cultures and cultural features of other European nations. All together seem to agree that their country has always to be part of European Union, since it has more things to gain than to lose and they made it clear that they can see a better future for themselves inside the EU, because the career opportunities and the job chances will be more and diverse.

The other target groups expressed some hesitations in terms of the decision making policy in European Union and seem to be skeptic about the future of EU. When they asked to elaborate on that, they realized that they present arguments, which were currently in the TV news or in the front pages of really famous (but not really credible) newspapers. They tried to be critical in the way of their thinking after this realization, but actually cannot help being Eurosceptic and certainly more pessimistic from the young people. However, they concluded in the idea that if European Union could change at some point the way of making decisions (although many of them seem not to really believe that something like that is likely to happen easily or soon), then the “United Europe dream” would be a great opportunity for everyone.

Overall, it became really clear that people in the focus groups were more open to elaborate on their opinions, to discuss and to re-think their ideas and concepts and to end up in reasonable conclusions.

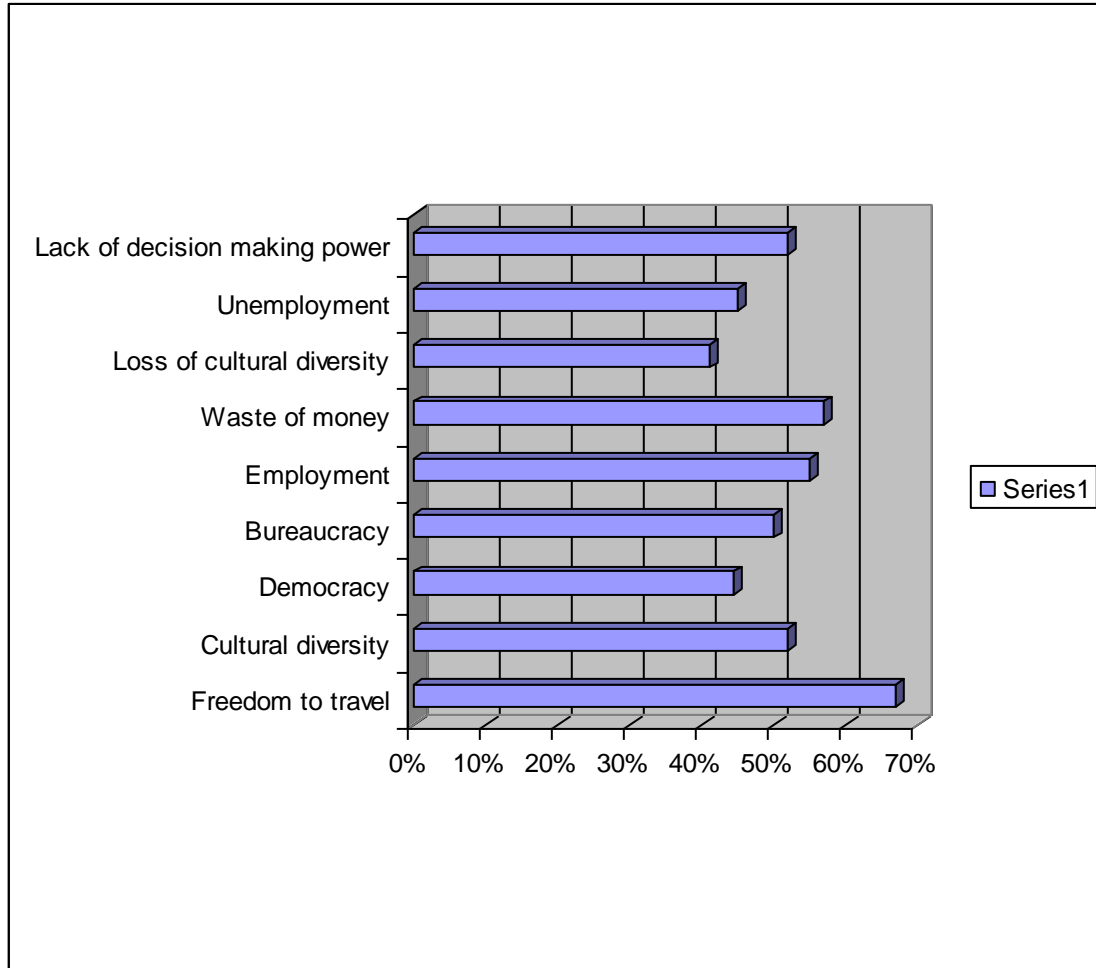


Are you against the enlargement of EU enlargement?



Overall

What does EU means to you?



*Sum is more than 100% as more than one answer is possible

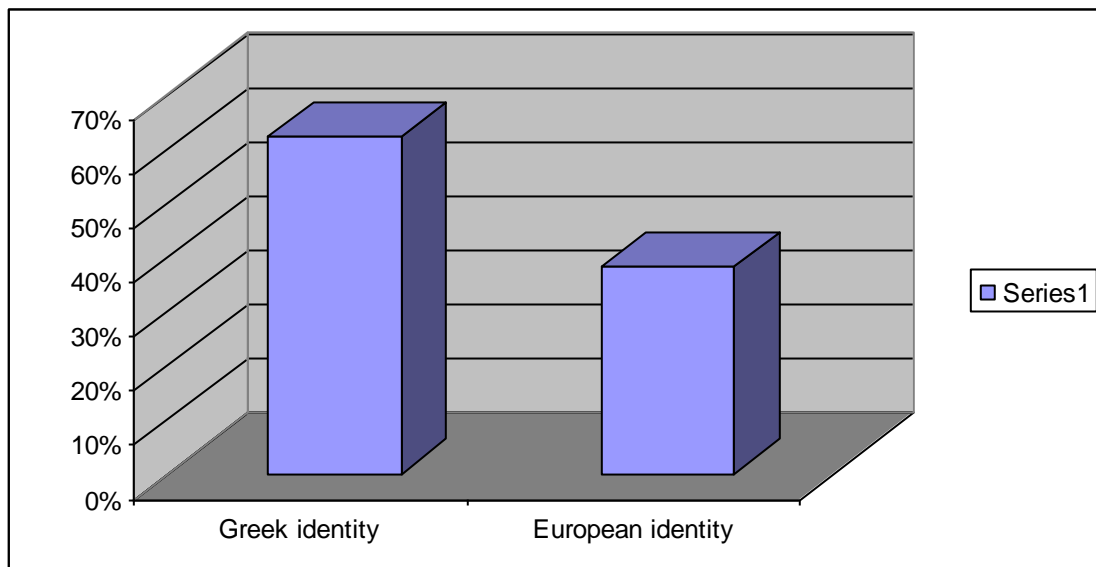
It is really interesting to try to analyze the answers we got for the question "What does EU means to you?" Most of the answers are between 40-60% which again shows a kind of "division" in the society in terms of the perspective people have about European Union. This is a result of a series of reasons that have influenced the Greek society, which in the past used to be a lot more pro-European.

A crucial question that people had to think about it was if they could identify themselves as Europeans or as Greeks. People in focus groups, after a thorough discussion about this, conclude that there are a lot of connections between these two identities and that actually the one identity includes the other. So, the simple answer was that "If you are Greek, you are European and if you are European you can be Greek". Of course there were people that partly disagreed with this statement, but they were more positive to this, if we compare them with the ones that have been asked in the interviews. In the interviews,

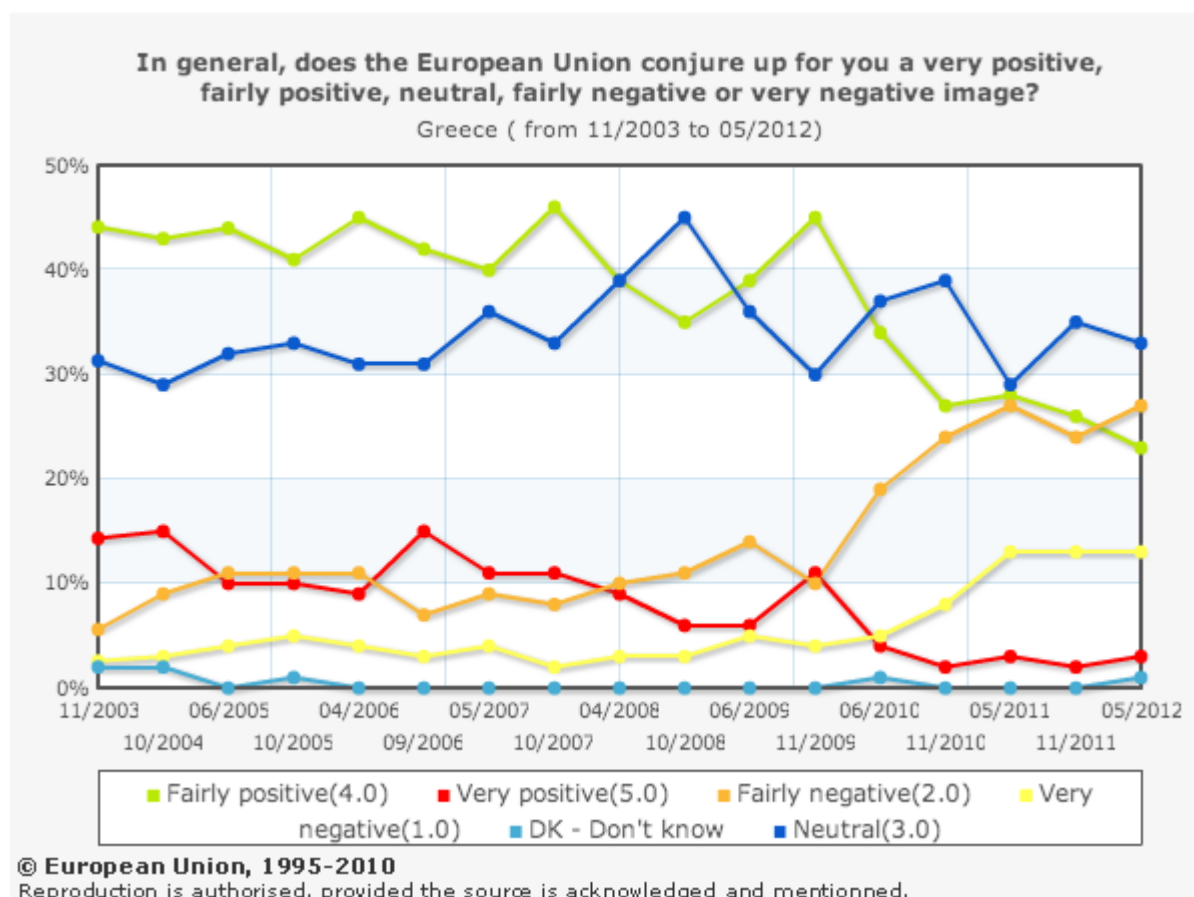
people insisted to identify themselves more as Greeks, since the language and the place they live is Greece and this makes them think that their national identity is stronger than the European one.

Again it is interesting that younger people that have benefited from many projects and funding of European Institutions had an opinion that European identity gives them a better “prestige” and image of themselves to the other, whereas the older ones strongly believe that their Greek identity is way more meaningful for many reasons, even including the history of Greece from the ancient times, the independence war and the “natural beauty” (!) Greece has, which is a thing that makes them proud of their country and to a certain extent it is not that rational reason.

How do you identify yourself the most?



It is kind of truth that the percentage of “Greek identity” (compared to European one) became bigger and bigger the last years and it is also an undeniable fact that this happened to many countries in European Union and especially to EU countries that belong in the East block of EU or countries that have been affected by economic crisis and put the blame for it in EU Economic Politics.

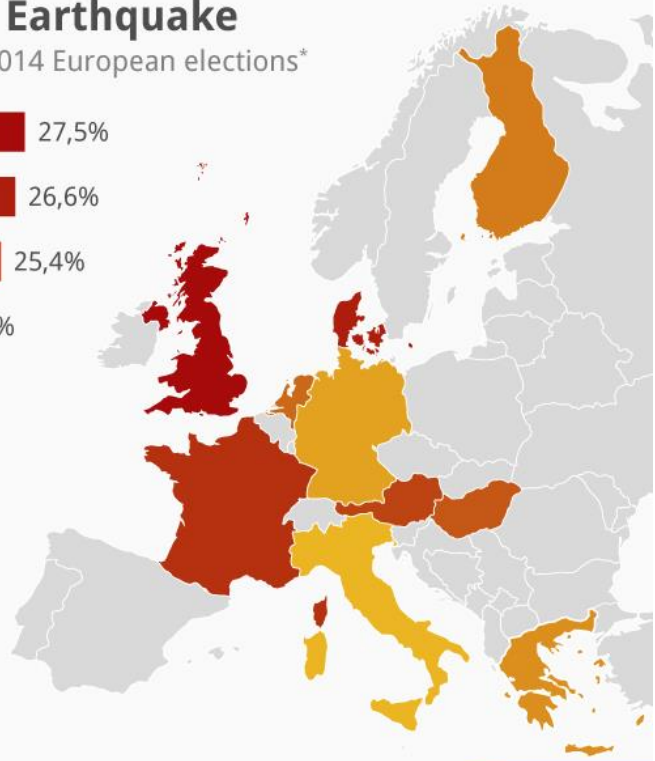
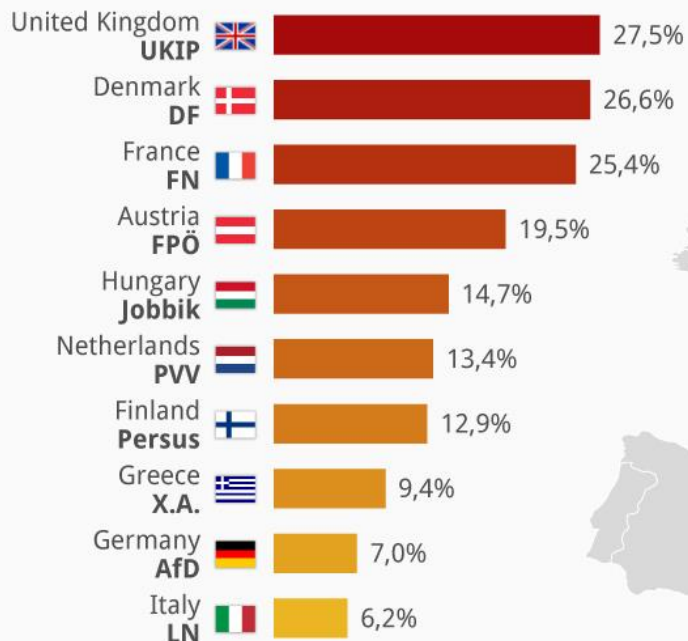


In the graphic above, the Euroscepticism phenomenon in Greece is well depicted, showing that after 2010 the perception of European Union started to be changed from “fairly positive” to “fairly negative”, making Greece one of the most Eurosceptic countries in European Union, together with United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany and Italy.

As you can see in the next photo, the rise of nationalistic parties in these countries is getting higher and higher, since there are more and more people that are disappointed because of the politics of EU or feeling sad due to their unemployment status or low income job and vote for far right parties in order to show their disappointment with the current system. Although in the photo below, you can see only the far right party that is Eurosceptic in Greece, there are also other parties that hold a place in the parliament and are strongly Eurosceptic, making Greece one of the most Eurosceptic countries.

Far-Right Leads Eurosceptic Earthquake

Performance of eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European elections*



*As of May 26, 11:00 CET

Source: European Parliament

statista

The parties that are the most Eurosceptic in Greece apart from Golden Dawn are the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), Popular Unity, LAOS and ANEL. Greece is one of the most Eurosceptic countries in the European Union, with a great percentage of the Greeks thinking that their country has not gained any benefits at all from the EU, while a major increase in Euroscepticism in Greece happened after the financial crisis of 2009

2012, the Eurosceptic parties in Greece that were represented in the parliament before the Election in January 2015 (ANEL, Golden Dawn, KKE) got 45.8% of the votes and 40.3% of the seats in the parliament. In the legislative election of January 2015 the pro-European (left and right-wing) parties (ND, PASOK, Potami, KIDISO, EK and Prasinoi-DIMAR) got 43.28% of the votes. The Eurosceptic parties got 54.64%. The Eurosceptic left (KKE, ANTARSYA-MARS and KKE (M-L)/M-L KKE) got 42.58% of the votes and the Eurosceptic right (Golden Dawn, ANEL and LAOS) got 12.06% of the votes, with Syriza ahead with 36.34%. The Eurosceptic parties got 194 seats in the new parliament and the pro-EU parties got 106 seats.¹

¹ "Parliamentary Election January 2015", Ministry of Interior, Retrieved 6/8/2018

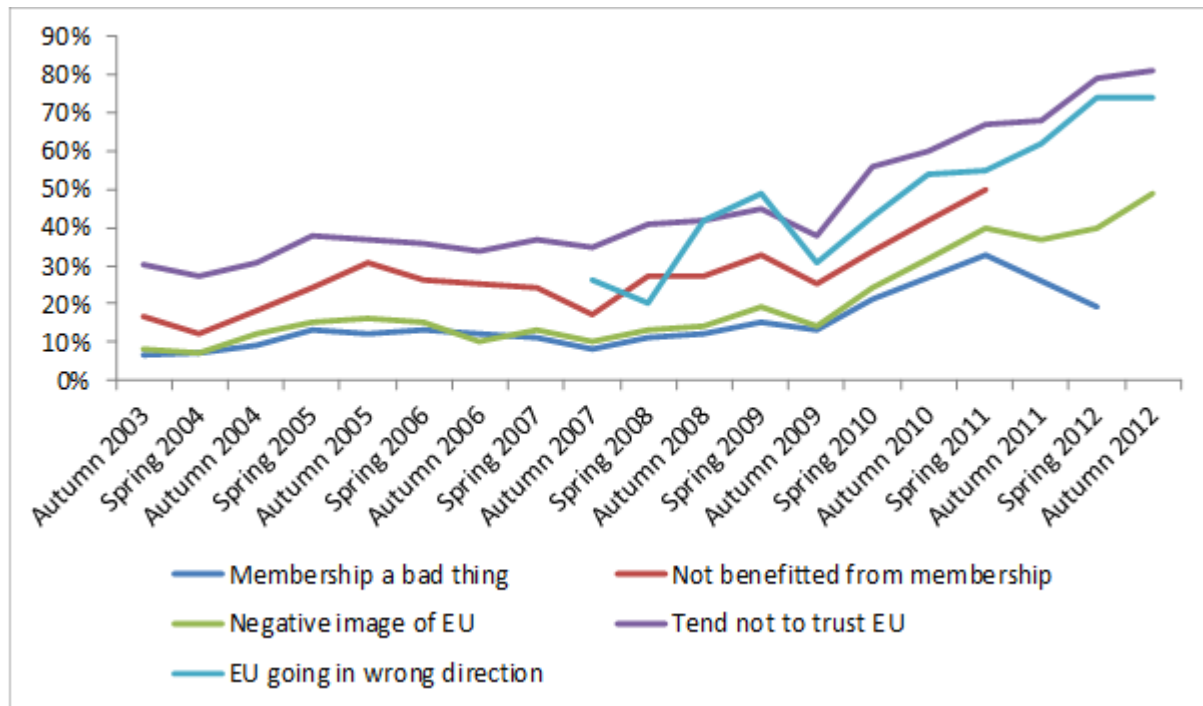
According to the polls conducted in June and July 2015 (12 polls), the Eurosceptic left would get on average 48.03% (excluding extra-parliamentary parties as ANTARSYA-MARS and KKE (m-l)/ML-KKE), the parliamentary pro-EU parties (Potami, New Democracy and PASOK) would get 33.82%, the extra-parliamentary (not represented in the Hellenic Parliament) pro-EU parties (KIDISO and EK) would get 4.44% and the Eurosceptic right would get 10.2% (excluding extra-parliamentary parties, such as LAOS, not displayed on recent opinion polls). The soft Eurosceptic parties would get 42.31%, the hard Eurosceptic parties (including KKE, ANEL and Golden Dawn) would get 15.85%, and the pro-EU parties (including extra-parliamentary parties displayed on opinion polls) would get 38.27% of the votes.

In the European Parliament election, 2014, Syriza won the election with 26.58% of the vote (a swing of 21.88%) taking 6 seats (up 5), with Golden Dawn coming 3rd taking 3 seats, the Communist Party taking 2 seats and the Independent Greeks gaining their first ever seat. Syriza's leader Tsipras said he's not anti-European and does not want to leave the euro. According to *The Economist*, Tsipras is willing to negotiate with Greece's European partners, and it is believed a Syriza victory could encourage radical leftist parties across Europe. Alexis Tsipras vowed to reverse many of the austerity measures adopted by Greece since a series of bailouts began in 2010, at odds with the Euro-group positions.² The current government coalition in Greece is composed by Syriza and ANEL (right-wing hard Eurosceptic party, led by Panos Kammenos, who is the current Minister of Defence).

² "Greece turns, Europe wobbles", *The Economist*. Retrieved 6/8/2018, "BBC News Greece election: Anti-austerity Syriza wins election". BBC News. Retrieved 6/8/2018.

Annex

How Euro-crisis influenced the perception of European Union?



Source: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2013/03/02/greece-euroscepticism/>