What It Means to Be European: Alexis Tsipras's Victory in Blogs and Online Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the assumption that new media play a crucial role in circulating discourses about Europe, this paper sets out to compare the representations of the Union circulated by the online press of two member states, Italy and the UK, which have been participating in the European political project to a significantly different extent. Two comparable corpora consisting of texts posted by online newspapers and blogs in Britain and in Italy in the period January 24-26, 2015 on occasion of Greece's general election have been collected and analyzed. The data obtained thanks to the utilization of a methodological toolkit combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics reveal the presence of common discourses about the possible causes of the electoral outcome in Greece, i.e. the victory of a mildly eurosceptic party, and about the ways in which the Greek political scene can affect that of other member states. Conversely, remarkable differences as to what it means to be part of the European Union emerge in the study: whereas British media discourse considers the EU mainly as an economic reality, their Italian counterparts construct it as a geocultural and political entity.

Keywords: discourse analysis, Europeanness, European Union, Greek general election, new media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The movement towards European unity, whose institutional history started in the aftermath of World War II, has involved nations in different fashions and to different degrees. Italy has always been heavily involved

in the European political project as it is one of the founding nations of the European Economic Community (the organization the EU originated from) in 1957 as well as an early adopter of the common currency in 2002. Differently, the United Kingdom became a member of the EU in 1973, has not yet joined the euro, and seems representative of a controversial attitude towards the notion of Europeanness: as a matter of fact, this country is about to organize a second referendum on a possible exit from the Union, after holding a first one in 1975 which witnessed a victory of the 'yes' front.

Such different degrees of institutional involvement arguably have their roots in different ways of conceiving Europe and its ongoing process of political, economic, and cultural unification. A unitary notion of European citizenship as an expression of a unitary European culture does not yet exist, possibly due to intrinsically cultural factors as well as to political and ideological reasons (euroscepticism is acquiring political strength across many countries). This lack of common identity can be distinctively perceived on occasions that affect the whole union, such as, for example, the implementation of economic policies to tackle the financial crisis that has recently spread all over the continent, or the election of a new president of the European Commission.

One of such occasions occurred on January 25, 2015 when Greece's general election was won by *Syriza*, one of the political parties which adverses the idea of an economically-based Europe as well as the austerity measures recently implemented in the Union as a way out of the financial crisis. This event sparked different reactions as well as a heated debate across the EU, as it showed Greek people's preference for a eurosceptic radical group promising more national authority and less intrusion on part of the European institutions.

Founded in 2004 as a coalition and in 2012 as a political party, *Syriza* (acronym which stands for "The Coalition of the Radical Left") proved able to attract more and more support, especially since 2009/2010, the years in which a severe financial crisis hit the country and a bailout was deemed necessary to avoid default. The three institutions that lent Greece the money it needed (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission) established the condition that a 'Memorandum of Understanding' (known to the general Greek public as "The Memorandum") imposing rigorous fiscal adjustments and structural reforms would accompany the loan agreement. Austerity measures were put in place by the recent Greek governments, with the result that the citizens started resenting both their political representatives and the three creditors. The Russian term 'Troika' (which literally means "three") was introduced to describe them and subsequently acquired a negative conno-

tation, both in Greece and elsewhere in Europe. In this scenario of rising disaffection with the EU, *Syriza* imposed itself to the public attention by promising that a Tsipras-led government would re-negotiate the loan agreements and reject austerity measures altogether. As Tsipras's positions appeared very far from those of the three creditors, some political commentators described the electorate's preference for *Syriza* as a step towards a potential Greek exit from the eurozone, a possibility that had no precedent within the Union and that would have further put its economic and political project under challenge.

In this sensitive situation, the very idea of European Union appeared to have been called into question once again, as pro- and anti-European discourses conflicted both at a national and a supranational level within the EU: the ways in which the latter was represented and perceived across the continent proved therefore crucial in order to orient the public opinion and, as regards Greece, the electoral outcome.

2. METHOD AND AIMS

As already hinted at in the previous section, Europe may mean different things to different people in different contexts (Delanty 1995, 3). This is because Europe is not a self-evident entity but the result of an ever changing process of invention and reinvention (ibid., 1). Determining what we mean by 'Europe' is extremely problematic, not only because there are various definitions of it, but also because the term represents both a label to designate this region and a structuring category separating it from the rest of the world.

Drawing on the theoretical premise of linguistic constructionism (cf. among others, Schotter 1975 and 1984; Berger and Luckmann 1976; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Davis and Gergen 1985; Potter and Wetherell 1987; Gergen 1991 and 1994; Edwards 1991, 1994, 1997, and 2005) according to which language actively 'constructs' the external reality and does not simply label it, this study regards the discourses of 'Europe' and their historical reality as mutually interdependent as well as mutually constitutive.

The role played by the mass media and new media in reproducing and circulating European discourses across the continent cannot be underestimated. Typically, newspapers articles and blogposts propagate discourses that are generated at a social, institutional or political level and that can either legitimate or challenge relations of power in society (van Dijk 2001, 353). Such relationships are founded on ideology, which permeates professional discourses as journalism (Salvi and Bowker 2014a, 488). It is

therefore possible to hypothesize that different conceptions of the European political project – rooted in different ideologies – can be found in the language of journalistic texts produced in different countries.

Starting from this premise and relying on previous linguistic research on the representation of Europe and Europeaness (cf., among others, Wodak 2004; Wodak and Weiss 2005; Triandafyllidou, Wodak, and Krzyzanowski 2009; Krzyzanowski 2010; McEntee-Alianis and Zappettini 2014; Salvi 2014; Salvi and Bowker 2014a; 2014b), the study sets out to explore the online coverage of the Greek elections (January 25, 2015) in Italy and in the United Kingdom, in order to shed light on the way these countries discursively construct Europe and its institutions. The main aim of this analysis is to compare the possibly very different representations of the Union that have emerged in two member states which have been participating in the European political project to a significantly different extent, so as to identify the features of the dominant national discourses as regards this supranational entity.

In order to analyse the discursive representation of Europe and European institutions, two comparable corpora consisting of news stories, editorials and blogposts posted on the online versions of British and Italian quality papers were collected and examined under a qualitative and a quantitative perspective. Even though news stories, editorials and blogs belong to different genres, it has been decided to consider these categories jointly so as to obtain a more representative panorama of the online media discourse on the Greek elections, that is to say without distinguishing whether such discourse took the form of a report, of an explicit comment on the event or of a diary page.

A methodological toolkit consisting of Critical Discourse Analysis (which arguably represents the most suitable means to explore social identities and representations: Stubbs 1996, 128) and Corpus Linguistics (whose reliance on electronic software guarantees a bottom-up, accurate description of texts; cf. Hardt-Mautner 1995; Stubbs 1996 and 2001; Garzone and Santulli 2004; Baker 2006; Baker et al. 2008) has been used to investigate the texts collected.

Eight online quality papers were chosen for this study: *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale*, *la Repubblica*, and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. These newspapers were chosen because their online versions are among the most visited websites in their countries of origin, which suggests that they can exert a meaningful impact on dominant online media discourse and specifically on the online media coverage of the Greek elections, thus giving a significant contribution to the discursive construal of argumentation and ideology

(cf. Salvi and Bowker 2014a). Moreover, these specific newspapers were selected in order to obtain a coverage of the Greek elections that could be as representative of the different political views as possible: *The Guardian* is usually considered to take a left-wing position, and is owned by a charitable foundation. *The Daily Telegraph*, traditionally considered the 'house newspaper' of the Conservatives, is owned by the Barclays brothers and has a right-wing perspective. *The Times* has been attributing itself a reputation of 'objectivity' and is owned by the Australian magnate Rupert Murdoch. *The Independent* is considered to take a neo-liberal stance on economic issues, while coming from the centre-left on politics (although it is not affiliated with any specific political party or group). As regards the Italian online newspapers analyzed in this study, *Il Corriere della Sera*, listed on the Italian stock exchange, is mainly owned by RCS media group, a multimedia publisher, and is traditionally considered to adopt a moderately conservative stance. Consequently, it can be affirmed that *Il Corriere della Sera* and *The Times* share similar political views, just like *Il Giornale*, owned by the Berlusconi family and affiliated to Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right party *Forza Italia*, and *The Daily Telegraph* have comparable stances. As far as the other end of the political spectrum is concerned, *la Repubblica*, once a radical left-wing newspaper, has increasingly adopted more moderate positions. Finally, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, differently from the other Italian newspapers under examination, does not utilize public funding but entirely relies on money from sales and advertising. Just like *The Independent*, it doesn't have any political affiliation.

Although collected from a variety of newspapers, the articles and blog-posts investigated in this research were published online within very few days, so that the analysis can represent a sort of 'snapshot' of the election. As a matter of fact it takes into account the period January 24-26, 2015, i.e. from the day before the election until the following one. The corpus linguistics software used for the examination of these materials is AntConc. Thanks to the application of the functions "frequency wordlists" and "concordance" it has been possible to identify the way words are distributed in each of the subcorpora (cf. Sinclair 1991) and to determine what is "central and typical" of the texts under scrutiny (Stubbs 1996, 233).

The remainder of the paper starts from the investigation of the national level and ends with the investigation of the supranational entities involved in the European political project: section § 3 explores the way in which Greece is discursively constructed in both corpora, whereas section § 4 looks at the representations of Europe across British and Italian online media. The last section instead examines the description of the European Union and the so-called 'Troika'.

3. GREECE AND AUSTERITY MEASURES

The first step into the analysis involves the overall examination of both corpora. The UK corpus includes 60,190 word tokens, whereas the Italian one contains 39,965. This difference in size shows that, as regards the online newspapers considered in this analysis, the Greek general election was covered remarkably more by the British than by the Italian media[1]. This seems to suggest that the former considered this event more newsworthy than the latter, with the result that the general public was more exposed to it than its Italian counterpart.

Table 1. – Frequency wordlist (Italian corpus).

RANK	WORD
20	Grecia
22	Tsipras
27	Syriza
33	governo
37	Atene
39	euro
40	Europa
41	partito
45	sinistra
47	Troika
48	debito
52	leader
53	greco
54	greci
58	paese
60	anni
61	elezioni
65	premier
66	UE
67	stato
69	BCE
74	Alexis
75	austerità
92	presidente
96	Italia

Table 2. – Frequency wordlist (British corpus).

RANK	WORD
10	Greece
13	Syriza
20	Greek
24	party
29	Tsipras
34	austerity
42	government
44	Europe
45	European
46	euro
47	debt
48	left
49	election
51	Athens
52	Greeks
55	country
56	people
58	eurozone
60	EU
76	Alexis
78	years
84	leader
85	right
86	economic
87	elections

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[1] Given the different sizes of the two corpora, comparisons will not be made between raw numbers but between frequency percentages.

Thanks to the Antconc application "Wordlists" it was possible to obtain a frequency wordlist of each corpus; *Tables 1* and *2* display the 25 most frequent content words relating to the election, its protagonists, the situation in Greece and its relationship to the European Union.

The two wordlists contain similar items: rather expectedly, Greece/Greek/Syriza and the name of its leader Tsipras are among the most frequently occurring content words. Immediately below these words, items belonging to the semantic domain of Europe and its austerity policies are ranked. This seems to indicate that all online newspapers, whatever their political creed and national identity, discursively establish a link between the electoral outcome and the impact and consequences of the bailout agreement which Greece accepted to sign with the so-called 'Troika' in 2010. Such a link is discursive as there is no evidence for it; however, none of the representations provided by the online newspapers seems to question it.

The following examples contain headlines which explicitly relate to austerity measures to *Syriza*'s victory. According to media linguist van Dijk (1991), headlines play a crucial role and can influence the audience's understanding process of the reported event, as they summarize what the most important aspect is according to the newspaper; such a summary necessarily implies a specific framing of what has happened.

1. Syriza's victory is a rejection of the toughest austerity regime in the euro-zone and should be respected. (*The Guardian*, Jan 25, 2015)

2. Greeks hand stunning victory to anti-austerity Syriza. (*The Daily Telegraph*, Jan 25, 2015)

3. Elezioni Grecia 2015, vince Tsipras: "Popolo ha scelto la fine dell'austerità". (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, Jan 25, 2015)

4. Grecia, la festa di Syriza. Tsipras: "Troika finita, ora soluzione anti austerità con la Ue". (*la Repubblica*, Jan 25, 2015) [2]

The ideological implications of newspapers' linking the results of the election to the economic strategies implemented in Greece are manifold and complex; however, if we limit ourselves to interpreting this data in the light of what it can reveal about Europe's representation, it may be possible to state that, just like no online journalist or blogger seems able to offer an alternative explanation for *Syriza*'s victory, no newspaper appears to ques-

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[2] 3. Greek Elections 2015, Tsipras wins: "People have chosen the end of austerity". 4. Greece, Syriza's victory. Tsipras: "The Troika is finished. Now for an anti-austerity solution with the EU".

tion the fact that the European Union and its policies can now exert such a remarkable impact on the political scene of a member state so as to prove decisive in determining its general election's outcome. This is extremely interesting, especially as it arguably represents a rather new phenomenon: until recently, citizens' electoral behaviour was considered to be mainly affected by national (and not supranational) factors.

Anyway, in both corpora references to Greece abound, as this nation's name appears among the most frequent items in both lists. A closer look at the contexts of these words suggests that the importance of the nation should not be overestimated: references to Greece mainly correspond to adjuncts giving information about either the place (geographical, political or both) where the events unfolded or the nationality of the participants and entities involved [3]:

5. The mystery *in Greece* is how so many people manage to survive without jobs or unemployment benefit. (*The Independent*, Jan 25, 2015)

6. "Today we are deciding whether the troika will return *to Greece*… or whether, through tough negotiation, the country will claim its return to dignity". (*The Guardian*, Jan 25, 2015)

7. I problemi *della Grecia* e, fatte le dovute differenze e proporzioni dell'Italia, sono di carattere strutturale, non si possono risolvere a colpi di nobili ideali e buone intenzioni, ma soprattutto non possono essere superati senza sostenere rilevanti costi sociali. (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, Jan 24, 2015)

8. *In Grecia* funziona così: al seggio ci si può portare già da casa la lista della formazione per la quale si intende dare la preferenza, per metterla dentro all'urna, mettendo la croce solo sul nome del candidato del partito una volta al seggio. (*la Repubblica*, Jan 24, 2015; emphasis mine) [4]

In the corpora, the tendency to include the country's name in spatial or genitive adjuncts prevails: it is only in one third of the cases (32%) in the Italian press and one fourth of the cases (25%) in the British coverage

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[3] Expectedly, the Saxon genitive "Greece's" is also a very common way of attributing nationality in the British online press (ex. "Even in the midst of *Greece's* financial woes a few years ago, not many could have conceived a staunchly left-wing party ever becoming government", *The Independent*, Jan 26, 2015).

[4] 7. Greece's problems, and all differences considered, Italy's problems too, are structural: they cannot be solved with noble ideals and good intentions, but, first and foremost, they cannot be overcome without significant social costs. 8. In Greece it works like this: one can bring (from home) the electoral list of one's preferred party to the poll and once at the voting station put it into the ballot box after crossing the candidate's name.

of the Greek election, that "Greece"/"Grecia" performs the subject role [5]. Sentences which attribute real agency to this nation are very limited, as confirmed by the analysis of the verbs following "Greece"/"Grecia". If Halliday's Systemic-Functional model is adopted, which examines how clauses represent experience and distinguishes among material, mental, verbal and relational processes [6], it is possible to observe that most verbs which express a material process and emphasize the fact that Greece is the "doer" of the action (cf. Halliday 1985, 103; Eggins 2004, 215) simply represent the reported words of Alexis Tsipras's victory speech. This speech, as it customarily happens, has been picked up by the international media and translated into the different European languages [7]:

9. Davanti ai suoi, Tsipras ha parlato intorno alle 22.30. [...] "Troveremo con l'Europa una nuova soluzione per far uscire la Grecia dal circolo vizioso dell'austerità e per far tornare a crescere l'Europa. *La Grecia presenterà ora nuove proposte*, un nuovo piano radicale per i prossimi 4 anni". (*la Repubblica*, Jan 25, 2015) [8]

10. Thousands of supporters turned out to watch 40-year-old Mr Tsipras speak in central Athens after his opponents conceded defeat last night. "The Greek people have written history," he said as the crowd roared its approval. "*Greece is leaving behind* catastrophic austerity, fear and autocratic government". (*The Independent*, Jan 26, 2015; emphasis mine)

A close reading of the articles and blogposts highlights that, differently from the Greek newly-appointed prime minister who attaches responsibility and merits to his own country, in Britain and in Italy agency is attributed to *Syriza*, its leader and the forces of change which originate in Greece and can potentially spread all over the continent (as underlined by examples 11 and 12). Examples 13 and 14 further demonstrate that Greece's importance is mainly described in relation to the new political developments it may foster on the European level (and, specifically, in Britain and in Italy):

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[5] When "Greece"/"Grecia" is used as a subject, it normally indicates the political rather than the geographical entity.

[6] "Behavioural" and "existential" processes are sometimes also recognized.

[7] It is to be noted that the analysis of the contexts where "Greeks"/"I Greci" appear does not yield significantly different results from that of the contexts of "Greece"/ "Grecia".

[8] 9. Tsipras held his speech in front of his supporters at around 22:30. [...] "We will find a new solution with Europe, so that Greece can emerge from the vicious cycle of austerity and Europe can resume its growth. Greece will now present new proposals, a new radical plan for the next four years".

11.   [...] Greeks are not the people they once were. Change is everywhere: in politics, financial affairs, the social fabric and states of mind. This election will be the biggest shift of all: a historic turning point in a country that, on the frontline of the euro crisis, has defiantly challenged the prevailing narrative from Brussels and Berlin. (*The Guardian*, Jan 24, 2015)

12.   "La *Grecia* – ha spiegato Giorgios Katrougalos, docente di diritto pubblico ed eurodeputato di Syriza – *sarà lo specchio del futuro d'Europa*". (*la Repubblica*, Jan 24, 2015) [9]

13.   [T]he Prime Minister said: "The Greek election will increase economic uncertainty across Europe. That's why *the UK* must stick to our plan, delivering security at home". (*The Independent*, Jan 25, 2015)

14.   [L]'eventuale ascesa del leader di Syriza che vuole rinegoziare il debito ellenico e *cambiare l'Europa* alla fine potrebbe far bene al *continente e, ovviamente, all'Italia*. (*la Repubblica*, Jan 25, 2015; emphasis mine) [10]

This explains why many of the clauses in which "Greece" has the subject role are either hypothetical or object clauses following verbs of opinion:

15.   If *Greece were* not a member of the euro, nobody would take much notice. (*The Times*, Jan 25, 2015)

16.   Gikas Hardouvelis, the departing Greek finance minister, voiced fears of an "exit by accident" *if Greece defaulted on repayments* and the markets panicked, triggering a bank run and an ECB refusal to come to the rescue. (*The Times*, Jan 26, 2015)

17.   Il voto ad Atene d'altra parte questo fine settimana sta monopolizzando l'attenzione di tutte le Cancellerie europee, molte delle quali temono un nuovo terremoto finanziario *se la Grecia dovesse spingersi troppo in là con le richieste* per ammorbidire le condizioni per il salvataggio imposte dalla troika. (*la Repubblica*, Jan 25, 2015)

18.   "No, *non penso che la Grecia farà* danni sui mercati, nemmeno se vince Alexis Tsipras". Nel suo studio al primo piano di Palazzo Chigi Matteo Renzi fa il punto sulle elezioni greche. (*la Repubblica*, Jan 25, 2015; emphasis mine) [11]

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[9] 12. "Greece – explained Giorgios Katrougalos, jurist and Syriza member of European Parliament – will be the mirror of Europe's future".

[10] 14. A possible victory for Syriza's leader, who wants to renegotiate the Greek debt and change Europe may ultimately benefit the continent, and, of course, Italy.

[11] 17. On the other hand, this weekend the vote in Athens is monopolizing the attention of all European chancelleries, many of which are afraid of a new financial earthquake, should Greece go too far with its requests to soften the Troika-imposed bailout conditions.

To draw some conclusions from the analysis so far, it is possible to state that, as regards the discursive construction of Greece, British and Italian online newspapers are fairly aligned. In spite of the unsurprising high occurrence of the term "Greece" in both corpora, the country is mainly referred to as the place where the election took place rather than as an active participant of the event. Conversely, remarkable agency is attached to the political forces competing in the electoral race and to the potential change they can bring to the European political scene. This may be interpreted as a sign that, although elections are still held at a national level, their importance within the European context is on the increase: newspapers and blogs of all political creeds portray Greece as the place where change (either for the better or for the worse) may originate and potentially spread to 'the heart of Europe'.

After exploring the representation of Greece, in the next section I will turn to the investigation of what "Europe" means and represents in the British and Italian online press.

4. The discursive construction of Europe

A first glance at the positions of the words "Europe" and "European Union" in the frequency wordlists of the two corpora reveals that, from a quantitative perspective, British and Italian online newspapers attach comparable importance to the supranational dimension of the political scene. As a consequence, the investigation of the contexts in which these terms appear will make it possible to determine similarities and differences.

The analysis of the contexts of "Europe"/"Europa" immediately suggests that these words are used with multiple meanings: "Europe" is mainly used to indicate either the institutions or the geocultural entity. In the British corpus, however, "Europe" is also used to indicate either the continent or the eurozone, thus discursively constructing the British isles as something other than "Europe":

> 19. [W]e could still have some rise in consumption coupled with a gradual decline in the current-account deficit. Exports to *Europe* are key. (*The Independent*, Jan 25, 2015; emphasis mine)

18. "No, I don't think Greece will damage the markets, not even if Alexis Tsipras wins". In his office on the first floor of Palazzo Chigi, Matteo Renzi reflects on the outcome of the Greek elections.

The complexity of references to Europe, which, depending on the context, may or may not include Britain, can be interpreted as a sign of the sense of insularity and separateness which still pervades the country. The analysis of the most frequent collocates of "Europe" in the UK corpus further attests to this: the most recurrent left collocates ("across", "and" and "Southern"/"Western") highlight an insistence on describing Europe both as a whole and as a conglomerate of different parts (showing that neither dimension prevails over the other) and reveal a negative semantic prosody for Europe as a unified entity (cf. Sinclair 1991; Stubbs 1996). As demonstrated by the following concordance lines, words belonging to the semantic domains of fear, political instability and (bad) weather are to be found in the left contexts of the collocation "across Europe" [12] (*Tab. 3*).

Table 3. – Concordance lines of "across Europe" (British corpus).

"There's going to be a polarisation also	**across Europe**
to a discredited economic model and failing governments	**across Europe."**
sending a defiant message	**across Europe**
The potential for wider revolt	**across Europe**
Greece sent shockwaves	**across Europe**
as the first plank of an anti-austerity movement sweeping	**across Europe**
a Greek exit from the euro, which would be followed by at least some turbulence	**across Europe**
a radical anti-austerity party in the Greek elections will "increase economic uncertainty	**across Europe"**,
the Prime Minister said: "The Greek election will increase economic uncertainty	**across Europe**
"The idea that one of these new forces that's cropping up	**across Europe**

These examples seem to suggest a pessimistic evaluation of the results of Greece's general election combined with the worry that similar political scenarios can present themselves in other member states, a possibility made more likely by the fact that Europe is now a unified entity. As a consequence, an indirect negative appraisal of Europe as a unified whole emerges.

Differently, when Europe is represented as a conglomerate of different countries, no conflictual element can be found the description. However, it is possible to perceive a clear tendency to distinguish between the national and the supranational dimensions, sometimes even characterizing them as

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[12] The analysis of the distribution of "across Europe" confirms that such negative semantic prosody can be equally found in all online newspapers.

opposite. The analysis of collocations reveals that "Europe" is frequently preceded by the conjunction "and" which, in turn, is often preceded by the name of another European nation. Expressions such as "Greece and Europe", "Spain and Europe" etc. can either indicate that local, national and supranational identities are accommodated one inside the other as described by the so-called "Russian doll model" (cf., among others, Hermann, Risse-Kappen, and Brewer 2004; Krzyżanowski 2010; McEntee-Atalianis and Zappettini 2014) or that the single member state is a separate entity from the Union (otherwise there would be no reason to mention the nations separately).

20. 2015 will be the year of change in *Spain and Europe*. We will start in Greece. (Russian doll model). (*The Guardian*, Jan 26, 2015)

21. Prior to the Greek vote, the Taoiseach had warned that a drift towards populism could damage *Ireland and Europe's* economic recovery. (Ireland described as a separate entity). (*The Guardian*, Jan 26, 2015; emphasis mine)

These examples attest to the still uncertain discursive representation of the status of member states within the European framework. Sometimes it is the national perspective that prevails, sometimes it is the continental one, and at other times still it is impossible to distinguish between the two [13].

In the Italian online press coverage of the Greek general election the representation of Europe also contains a rather problematic distinction: the analysis of the right collocates of "Europa" highlights the presence of a recurrent dissociation (cf. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Perelman 1982; van Rees 2005). In the Italian corpus "L'Europa" is frequently followed by the partitive genitive formed by the prepositions "d*"/"de*" and by nouns indicating political actors or institutions. The investigation of such structures reveals that Italian journalists and bloggers operate a discursive division of the otherwise unitary concept of Europe setting "l'Europa" (which mainly refers to the geocultural or political entity) apart from "l'Europa d*/de*" (which, as the use of the partitive underlines, only identifies a part of it).

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[13] It is to be noted that both example 20 and 21 were taken from the same online newspaper, that is *The Guardian*.

Table 4. – Concordance lines of "l'Europa d*/de*" (Italian corpus).

l'	**Europa dei burocrati** che impongono dall'alto
l'	**Europa della Merkel** mise la Grecia, che era
dall'	**Europa della Troika,** a quella di Draghi e
dall'	**Europa delle banche e dei poteri forti**
l'	**Europa di Bruxelles e Strasburgo**

As the concordance lines above suggest, this dissociation allows journalists to assign different values to the two "Europes" that they have rhetorically devised: as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca maintain, this figure of speech can perform an evaluative function (1969, 420). "L'Europa", i.e. the geocultural concept and the political institutions, is not given a negative portrayal: the existence of the European political project is not to be called into question. Differently "l'Europa dei burocrati / della Merkel / della Troika…" is attached a very negative evaluation: this is not the 'real', 'genuine' Europe of its citizens, but a far-off entity able to impose strict economic policies deeply affecting the lives of Europeans without really taking into consideration the difficulties caused by austerity measures. The use of the dissociation "Europa d*" *vs.* "Europa" enables the Italian online newspapers to resolve the 'cognitive dissonance' that could arise from discursively constructing Europe as a unitary whole to be accepted and rejected at the same time.

It is to be noted that the way in which "l'Europa dei burocrati / della Merkel / della Troika…" is represented can be depicted as 'populist'. Laclaus's definition of populism describes it as a discursive logic that conceives societies as divided between "the people" and "the élite" (2005); in the same way, Italian journalists and bloggers portray two different Europes: the Europe of Europeans and the Europe of the privileged, selected few. Interestingly, data about the distribution of this dissociation within the corpus reveal that those newspapers which are typically considered to be the most populist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Giornale*, are also those where this figure of speech mainly occurs. Finally, it is also important to remark that the dissociation between "Europa d*" and "Europa" is aligned with the populist discourse of Alexis Tsipras who convincingly persuaded most of the Greek electorate that the European political project was to be still embraced, even though Greece should no longer comply with the requests of the 'Troika'.

To summarize the British and the Italian discursive constructions of "Europe" comparatively, it may be stated that this concept still proves very

problematic in both nations. As regards the UK, the fact that the country belongs to the European Union while still being outside the eurozone is reflected in the dichotomous description of Europe as a whole and Europe as a conglomerate of different states in the corpus. The Italian online press, instead, does not question Europe as a geopolitical entity but signs of populist euroscepticism can be found in the coverage of the Greek general election nonetheless.

5. The EU and the Troika

References to the European Union are very common in both British and Italian newspapers (cf. *Tab. 1* and *Tab. 2*). The analysis of the most frequent collocations of "EU" and "UE" shows that this political institution is often listed together with Greece's main creditors (i.e. the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund). However, it is to be preliminarily stated that the classification of the EU together with the other two organisms represents an inaccuracy (which can be found both in the British and in the Italian online press), as it is solely the European Commission (i.e. the executive body of the Union) and not the whole EU that belongs to the three major creditors of the Greek bailout.

Interestingly, whereas Italian journalists and bloggers typically mention the tricolon "UE, BCE e FMI", the British equivalents tend to utilize only the bicolon "EU and IMF". The fact that the European Central Bank is not cited may suggest that this institution is described as if it coincided with the European Union, even though they are two separate entities with different and specialized functions: the EU is a supranational organism, while the ECB is the bank responsible for the monetary policies of the Eurozone. Although administering a smaller area, the ECB performs a role which is more similar to that of the International Monetary Fund (which is also an economic institution) than that of the European Union; however, British journalists are more inclined to link EU and IMF together than to link ECB and IMF. The investigation of the contexts where this bicolon occurs suggests that, thanks to this figure of speech, the economic nature of the IMF becomes extended to the EU as well. This may have the effect of depriving the latter of its political and cultural values, suggesting that the European project is a purely economic one:

22. They are strange bed fellows and their differences could herald a highly unstable new phase in Greece's turbulent politics as Mr Tsipras embarks on

bruising *negotiations with the EU and IMF* over the country's massive debt and deeply unpopular austerity regime. (*The Telegraph*, Jan 26, 2015)

23.   There had been hopes outside Greece that Syriza might ally with a more moderate party such as To Potami (the River), which would have tempered its stance *towards the EU and IMF.* (*The Telegraph*, Jan 26, 2015; emphasis mine)

Even though the Italian online coverage of the Greek general election differentiates between the EU and the ECB thus highlighting their different functions, the contexts in which the tricolon "UE, BCE e FMI" appear almost always represents an explanation of the three constituents of the so-called 'Troika':

24.   Non con la cosiddetta *Troika (Ue, Bce e Fmi),* ma direttamente con i suoi creditori a cui deve circa 320 miliardi di euro. (*Il Giornale*, Jan 25, 2015)

25.   *Troika* [*sic*] – *Ue, Bce e Fmi* da questo orecchio non ci sentono. Nessun passo indietro sul memorandum e sulla flessibilità del mercato del lavoro. (*la Repubblica*, Jan 26, 2015; emphasis mine) [14]

A closer look at the occurrences of "UE" and "Troika" reveals a significant preference for the latter (frequency percentages are respectively 0.19% and 0.26% of the Italian corpus). It is to be noted that this Russian term, in spite of being a loan word in both the languages considered in this study, plays a crucial role only in the Italian corpus: as a matter of fact it ranks within its first 50 items, whereas it only occurs 48 times in the British articles and blogposts and is the 170th word of the UK frequency wordlist.

The analysis of the contexts of "Troika" can shed light on why this term is so important in the Italian coverage of the Greek general election (while not being so central in the British articles). The investigation of the left collocates of "Troika" shows recurrent patterns: the Russian term is part of prepositional phrases expressing agency ("dalla Troika"; "by the Troika"), possession ("della cosidetta 'Troika'; "of the so-called Troika") or relation ("con la Troika"; "with the Troika"). As *Table 5* highlights, the three creditors are discursively represented as imposing strict, non-negotiable economic measures. Consequently, the semantic prosody of "Troika" is negative, as these institutions are attached the responsibility of the Greek vote (cf. sections 1 and 3), stemmed out of the citizens' resentment towards their austerity policies.

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[14] 24. Not with the so-called Troika (EU, ECB and IMF) but directly with its creditors, whom it owes about 320 billion euros. 25. Troika – EU, ECB and IMF will hear no talk of it. No concessions on the memorandum or on the flexibility of the labour market.

Table 5. – Random left collocates of "Troika" (Italian corpus).
quinta revisione **della troika**
accordi **con la troika**
austerità **con la troika**
condizioni imposte dalla troika
debito **con la troika**
di **aiuti dalla troika**
rottura **con la troika**
ad accettare la troika
ai **diktat della troika**
ai **piani della troika**
aiuti della cosidetta troika

Table 6. – Random right collocates of "EU" (British corpus).
EU austerity
EU austerity measures
EU bailout program
EU bailout programme
EU-dictated austerity
EU driven austerity cuts
EU-IMF-mandated cutbacks
EU imposed austerity
EU policy for Athens
EU's austerity policies
EU's basket case
EU's disastrous savings policies and negotiations

A similarly negative semantic prosody also distinguishes the term "EU" in the British online articles and blogposts. It is important to note that this unfavorable portrayal of the Union corresponds to syntactic patterns comparable to those analyzed in the Italian contexts of "Troika". *Table 6* shows that "EU" is often part of appositions performing functions analogous to those of the Italian prepositional phrases following "Troika": as a matter of fact "EU" can either express a relation or become the agent of a past participle followed by nouns belonging to the semantic domain of austerity and economic strictness.

This correspondence between the two corpora is particularly meaningful: on the one hand, it underlines that the online media discourse of both Italy and Britain identifies a responsible party for the suffering of the Greek population and depicts it in critical way. On the other hand, the institutions accountable for such painful policies are not the same in British and Italian online newspapers. The UK press's position is that of blaming the EU for imposing unpopular measures to Greece, thus demonstrating a certain degree of hostility towards the European project.

Italy's journalists instead point their fingers at the so-called "Troika". Far from emphasizing the Union's involvement and accountability for the difficult situation in Greece, the use of the hyperonym (instead of an explicit mention of the EU) enables Italian newspapers to avoid questioning the European political project altogether, while accusing an entity discursively constructed as separate and criticizing it for the hardships faced by

Greek citizens. Additionally, "Troika" is a collective noun, which means that, although including different constituents, it is processed as a single unit, with the result of once again appearing as something distinct from the European Union. This lexical choice is particularly telling as far as the position of the Italian online press is concerned: while some skepticism about the EU can now be found also in the articles and blogposts of this member state which has always demonstrated enthusiastic adhesion to the movement towards European unification, a certain precaution is taken by the media not to present European political institutions under a too unfavorable light.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Drawing on the premise that new media play a crucial role in circulating discourses about Europe, this paper has verified whether two possibly very different representations of the Union emerge in the online press of two member states (Italy and the UK) which have been participating in the European political project to a significantly different extent. The language of online newspaper articles and blogposts produced in Italy and in Britain on occasion of the January 2015 Greek general election has been analyzed and compared from a qualitative as well as from a quantitative perspective.

The examination of the corpora collected has highlighted the fact that, both in the British and in the Italian press coverage it is unproblematically assumed that national-scale political events such as an election do not solely affect the life of the citizens of the country hosting the election but have a supranational relevance: this seems to confirm that a certain degree of political unity is universally acknowledged and not called into question.

Both Italy's and the UK's press establish a discursive link between the electoral outcome, the victory of the eurosceptic party *Syriza*, and the austerity policies implemented in Greece and described as having caused significant social problems to the population. The connection between economic policies and political vote therefore represents another discursive element that can be found across languages and countries. As a consequence, it may be possible to state that the linguistic constructions of Greece, its citizens and its leaders in British and Italian newspapers is comparable.

On the contrary, as regards the ways in which Europe and the European Union are described, meaningful differences emerge. Even though representations of the interplay between Europeanness and other identities are far from clear-cut in both countries' online press, it is important to point out that UK's journalists seem to find the interaction between the

national and the supranational level more problematic than their Italian counterparts, possibly because Great Britain is a member state of the EU but it is still outside the eurozone.

Another controversial aspect the study has shed light onto is the existence of different conceptions of the European political project transpiring from the two countries' online press. Whereas the European Union in the Italian newspapers is discursively constructed as a geopolitical entity, it is portrayed as a prevalently economic pact by the British journalists, who thus deprive the institution of its cultural background. That is possibly why it is mainly the EU (and not the triad or the 'Troika' of creditor institutions) that is represented as responsible for implementing painful economic measures in Greece. Conversely, the Italian online press holds the so-called "Troika" accountable for the hardships endured by Greek citizens, thus revealing a mild euroscepticism as well as the intention not to depict the European Union too negatively.

In light of the above considerations, it may be possible to suggest that different conceptions of Europe still prevail in member states with a different degree of involvement in the unification project such as Italy and the UK. However, in spite of the latter's still very uncertain role within the Union, it cannot be denied that some traits of a common European discourse have started circulating in its online press. At this sensitive time it is not clear whether the EU is headed towards a strengthening of its political and economic unification or whether the difficulties that such an ambitious project entails will prevail. Nevertheless, it is possible to predict that all possible scenarios will probably depend, among other factors, on how the notion of Europeanness will be circulated by media discourse across the continent.

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