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## Elections and referenda during the crisis period in Greece: an analysis of international officials' statements in the Greek media

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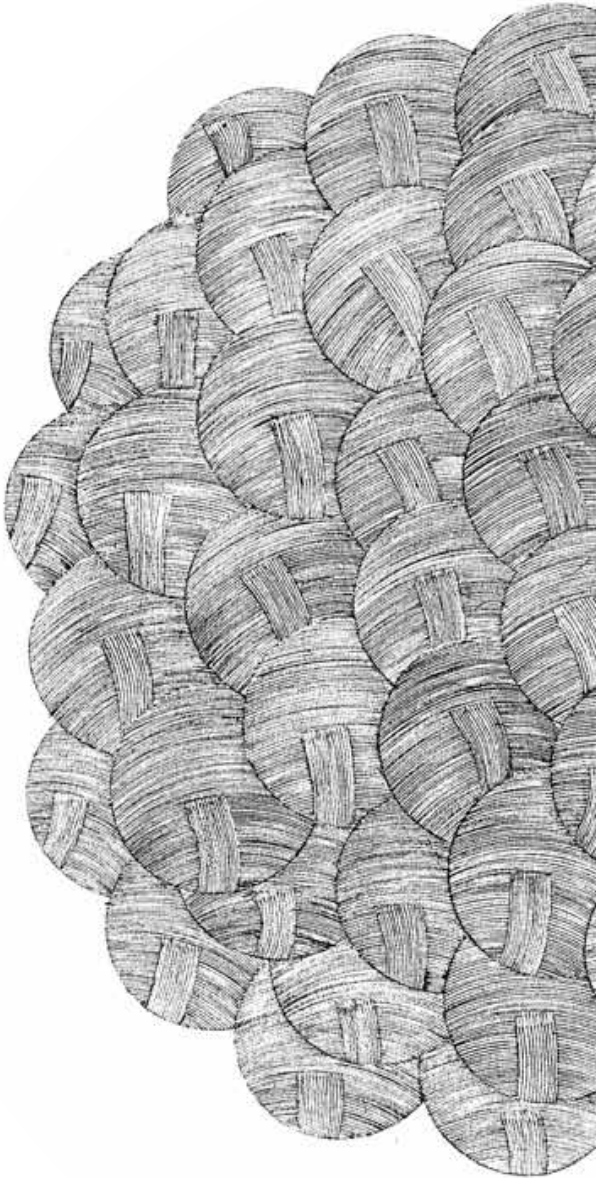
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Greek Political Science Review

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# Elections and referenda during the crisis period in Greece: an analysis of international officials' statements in the Greek media

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Έχοντας ως θεωρητική αφετηρία τις θεωρίες που εστιάζουν στις πολιτικές ελίτ, η παρούσα έρευνα αποσκοπεί στο να διερευνήσει τις δηλώσεις μη Ελλήνων πολιτικών αξιωματούχων αναφορικά με τη λειτουργία του ελληνικού κράτους (π.χ. νομοθετικές διαδικασίες, εκλογές, δημοψήφισμα, λειτουργία των κυβερνήσεων), όπως αυτές προβλήθηκαν από ελληνικά ΜΜΕ. Η ποσοτική ανάλυση περιεχομένου που εφαρμόστηκε, φανερώνει μια σημαντική -σε λεκτικό επίπεδο- «παρέμβαση» εκ μέρους μη Ελλήνων (κυρίως Ευρωπαίων) αξιωματούχων, οι οποίοι αποσκοπούν στην προώθηση των σε διεθνές επίπεδο προαποφασισμένων και προγραμματισμένων προγραμμάτων δημοσιονομικής προσαρμογής και σε κριτική των διαδοχικών ελληνικών κυβερνήσεων.

### Λέξεις κλειδιά:

Διεθνείς πολιτικές ελίτ, ελληνική πολιτική, ανάλυση περιεχομένου, ΜΜΕ, εκλογές

## ABSTRACT

Drawing heavily on the various approaches focused on political elites, the current paper seeks to explore the statements of international political officials regarding the function of the Greek state, e.g. the legislative procedures, elections, referenda and functions of the Greek government, as transmitted by mainstream Greek media. Our quantitative content analysis demonstrates a rather significant intervention on behalf of international – predominantly European – elites to fundamental functions of the Greek state through their statements, seeking to promote the implementation of the internationally planned and accepted fiscal consolidation programmes for Greece and a critique predominantly towards the different Greek governments.

### Keywords:

International political elites, Greek politics, content analysis, media, elections

## 1. CONTEMPORARY ELITE THEORIES

Contemporary elite theories approach the internationalisation of politics as a major factor in the formation and function of political elites, both at the national and international levels. These elite theories serve as the theoretical background and conceptual framework of the current research. More precisely, we focus on the political discourse of international elites' that has only marginally captivated research attention, even though international elites constitute a major factor for forming political decisions.

At the political level, the emergence of globalisation and international organisations (IOs) has caused fundamental changes in the formation of traditional political systems (Pevehouse, 2002: 515-516; Best & Higley, 2010: 9-13). On a financial level, globalisation has restricted the role of nation-states (Keller, 1963: 76; Magone, 2015: 37; Schmidt, 2014).

This transfer of power from the national to the international level is a process conducted with the consensus of the national elites (Best, Lengyel & Verzichelli, 2012: 1-6). Especially in the case of the EU, national elites have played a very prominent role in the establishment and operation of the EU's newly created political structure. Based on the theory of 'elite settlements' (Burton & Higley, 1987; Higley & Burton, 2006), Best, Lengyel and Verzichelli (2012: 1-6) argue that the process of establishing institutions within the EU is driven by a consensus among all national elites, a process which creates fertile ground for elite cooperation between the representatives of different member states.

In many cases, the operation of IOs aims at the reproduction of the sovereign status quo through international agreements, which 'serve as a credible external guarantee that safeguards elites, especially financial ones' (Pevehouse, 2002: 526). One cannot ignore, though, the fact that national political elites are bound by their commitments to their national electorates, while international financial elites have no homeland (Best & Higley, 2014: 170).

According to Putnam (1988), national and international decision-making processes are associated under the 'two-level game', which takes place at both the national and international levels. At the national level, 'domestic groups pursue their interests by putting pressure on the government to adopt specific policies, while at the international level, national governments seek to simultaneously maximise their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures and minimise the adverse consequences of the policies decided at the international level' (Putnam, 1988: 434).

In the same vein, the development of effective and successful bonds between the national elites of different countries is a prerequisite for their successful and effective survival. The term 'international elite cartels' refers to the

cooperation between national political or economic elites whose national components interact and support each other in terms of advocating specific proposals and policies. These elite alliances are of major importance, especially during electoral and/or crisis periods (Higley & Pakulski, 2007: 20-21).

In the aforementioned observations, the EU holds a prominent role. The main effects of the EU on domestic policies can be classified into two categories. The first is related to Habermas' 'post-democratic executive federalism' (Pitky, 2014: 139-142), according to which the European Council imposes the most important policies at a European level, while both national and European parliaments have very limited roles and intervention potential. The second refers to the adoption of specific agreements and directives on behalf of the national elites, with a considerable impact on the elections and civic participation. As previous research demonstrates, in the fields where the EU holds a strong influence, national political parties –especially governmental or major opposition parties – tend to present similar proposals (Nanou & Dorussen, 2012: 6-7), a condition which largely causes the distantiation of citizens from participatory procedures (Tsatsanis, Freire & Tsirbas, 2014: 506; Best & Higley, 2014: 3-4).

The internationalisation of politics has multiple effects on the distribution of power and the formation of political attitudes, since it creates new forms of conflicts, such as the marginalisation of traditional 'national' political cleavages and the rise of new 'international' ones (Tsatsanis, Freire & Tsirbas, 2014: 520-521). The cleavages 'north versus south' and 'core versus periphery' in Europe stand as characteristic examples (Cotta, 2014: 75). However, several other cleavages, such as 'left versus right', 'haves versus have-nots' or 'Greece versus others' (Wodak & Angouri, 2014: 417-419), are also related to the internationalisation of politics, as well as to crisis conditions which influence the quality of democracy usually in a rather negative way. In the aforementioned context, Maurizio Cotta (2014: 63-66) has aptly referred to the existence of a European Elite System (EES) within the EU, which is comprised of several national and international officials and can be divided into three distinct categories.

The first category consists of the representatives of the European Council and the Council of Ministers, who hold by default a double role both as national representatives of their countries and members of a supra-national assembly. The second category is that of the Commissioners who hold a strong bureaucratic role and are supposed to be the most 'Europeanised elite component'. A third category of the EES is the European Parliament Members (MEPs), especially those in long-term service or those who hold significant parliamentary positions. In the EES, Cotta includes the members of the Executive Board of the ECB, as well as the representatives of each member state in the European Court of Justice. Cotta's definition of the EES within the EU will be used for defining European elites under the scope of the current research, since the EES is a significant group

of international elites. The only addition we make to Cotta's approach is that we incorporate all the members of the European Parliament since the current economic conditions have contributed to the election of several influential national political elites' members to the European Parliament (i.e., Pablo Iglesias from Spain or Nigel Farage from the UK). MEPs also hold a multilevel representative role given that they should 'balance the interests of their national electorate, their national party and their EP party group' (Hoffmann-Lange, 2012: 202).

At this point, we should stress that the definition of international elites follows the description of elite sectors, which includes different elite categories, i.e. economic, political or administrative elites (Dogan, 2003: 5-6; Lopez, 2013: 3). Additional clarification regarding the definition of international elites should be made. Although, in the framework of our project, we refer to international elites as a whole, it should be clarified that international elites are not a single category with identical characteristics, views and proposals. Regarding the Greek crisis, when referring to international elites, we mainly refer to the institutions that constituted the 'troika' (from mid-2010 to early 2015) or the 'Institutions' (from early 2015 onwards) and their close associates, which were mainly involved in the management of the Greek crisis.

## **2. THE CRISIS AND THE CREATION OF NEW FORMS OF GOVERNANCE**

The emergence of worldwide crises (i.e., debt, environment, refugees) has created new forms of governance at the national and international levels (Isakhan & Slaughter, 2014: 12). Contemporary democratic and elite theories estimate the impact that these crises have on political systems, not only as a form of regime change but as a form of rapid socioeconomic and political changes as well (Best & Higley, 2014: 3-4; Karoulas & Poulakidakos, 2016: 3-9).

Political transformations during crisis periods break the traditional bonds between political elites and society (i.e., citizens, civil society, and social partners). The detachment of citizens from traditional political powers can be largely interpreted through several prominent theories. Putnam's 'two-level game', as already mentioned, refers to the necessity of pressure groups and citizens' favourable policies to be represented at an international level. 'Economic voting theory' refers to the possibility of citizens withdrawing their support from governmental parties due to the crisis conditions and the lack of effective representation (Freire, Teperoglou & Moury, 2014: 479). The rejection of mainstream political powers is the result of a generalised trend, already evident since the first decade of the 21st century, according to which strong support for democratic institutions coexists with a general disappointment regarding their efficiency (Teixeira, Tsatsanis & Belchior, 2014: 502).

Under the aforementioned context, since the democratic debate and decision-making process are marginalised in favour of adopting policies under an 'urgent' framework, one of the most evident implications of the crisis is the marginalisation of traditional democratic institutions, i.e. parliament and the political parties (Pevehouse, 2002: 517-518).

Financial crises also contribute to the enhancement of the role of international officials through the formation of new institutions and procedures on behalf of international elites (for example the 'troika' or the 'Institutions' in the Greek case). These new institutions intervene and impose policies (Pitty, 2014: 125-131) that have specific financial aims as their reference point. As a result, the power of national elites becomes marginalised (Cotta, 2014: 19; Best & Higley, 2014: 178), while in many cases technocrats, i.e. European Commission, ECB, influence the decision-making process and the adoption of specific policies (Best & Higley, 2014; Wirsching, 2018).

According to Best (2014: 41), there are 'four fundamental, but not mutually exclusive choices' under the EU framework to face the crisis: coordinated actions of national governments (intergovernmentalism), intervention by the European Union (multilevel governance), intervention by international financial institutions (multilateralism) and autonomous actions by national governments (unilateralism). Best's crisis interpretation model offers a concrete framework for the evaluation of interventions on behalf of international officials. The responses of national political elites in 17 European countries when asked to prioritise specific actions to reduce the impact of the crisis in the Eurozone are of utmost importance. Based on their responses, the coordinated actions of national governments stood out as the most popular action, followed by the interventions on behalf of the European Union, while the less preferable choice was that of autonomous actions taken by national governments (Best, 2014: 41-48).

Briefly, crisis creates the preconditions for a further marginalisation of the role of national elites, especially in financial and budgetary issues (Cotta, 2014: 78-79). However, several additional events have taken place in the operation of national political systems in the EU. First, crisis conditions resulted in a high turnover of national political elites, especially in countries like Greece and Italy, where the crisis has been more intense and conflictual compared to other countries. Moreover, the management of the crisis by both national and international elites had an unprecedented impact on the attitudes of citizens. Among the most important implications are the emergence of Euroscepticism, the empowerment of far-right parties and the rejection of both national (i.e., lack of participation in elections) and EU political systems (i.e., results of the referenda in Greece and the United Kingdom, where an anti-European rationale has prevailed). However, we should clarify that the rise of Euroscepticism, as well as of the far-right parties in many European countries, cannot be exclusive-

ly attributed to the financial and monetary crisis. Alongside the negative economic conjuncture, refugee and environmental crises or terrorist attacks should be considered empowering factors as well.

IOs' involvement during the contemporary crisis period has also influenced the traditional operation of political systems in countries like Greece and Italy. More technocratic and pro-European governments, such as the Monti government in Italy and the Papademos government in Greece, have replaced elected governments and prime ministers. The phenomenon of technocrats and representatives of economic elites occupying political positions is not unusual and falls under the 'revolving doors theory' (Freund & Bendel, 2017; Wirsching, 2018), a condition that largely verifies the priority of financial policies in contemporary politics. What is even more interesting during the current crisis period is the fact that the interchangeability between economic and political elites within Europe is even more intense (Freund & Bendel, 2017).

The aforementioned implications in democratic operation, as well as the prioritisation of economic goals over social ones by most IOs, have brought about the quest for the creation of a supra-national system of elite auditing, aiming at the effective management of the crisis (Best & Higley, 2014: 170-171). The Eurozone crisis as a characteristic example of the role of IOs in managing the crisis.

### **3. THE GREEK CRISIS AND INTERNATIONAL ELITES**

The crisis conditions had an unprecedented impact on the operation of the Greek political system. The signing of the first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2010 created a new operational framework, not only for the Greek governments, but also for all mainstream Greek political parties. In the specific condition, international elites had a very prominent role, since the interventions on behalf of European officials and representatives of international financial organisations (such as the IMF), which were mainly involved in managing the crisis, have become common practices (Papadimitriou et al., 2018).

During the crisis period, a break of traditional cooperative bonds and the emergence of a new negotiation framework between the Greek political elites and the international elite institutions like the ECB and the European Commission took place (Pitty, 2014: 126-138; Papadimitriou et al., 2018). The break of bonds usually took the form of a negative evaluation of Greek political elites. This condition is closely related to the fact that during the crisis years, Greece faced an extremely high level of political elite replacement, the highest—together with Italy—among all European countries that faced a crisis (Best & Higley, 2014: 176; Kakepaki, 2016: 22-23). On top of that, Greece faced an increase in the democratic deficit regarding the decision-making process. All the important

financial policies up to 2015 were actually debated and negotiated with the representatives of the 'troika' (IMF, ECB, EC), institutions whose members are not directly elected by the citizens (Pitty, 2014: 125-126)<sup>1</sup>. Similar interventions on behalf of the 'troika' were evident in different aspects of the Greek political system, ranging from the evaluation of the Greek political elites (especially during the referendum, election and negotiation periods) (Ntampoudi, 2014), to the effective implementation of MoUs' policies or the non-adoption of bills on behalf of the Greek governments without the former approval of the 'institutions' (Pitty, 2014: 125-126, 132-140).

International (predominantly European) officials intervened—in many cases directly—during all the crisis pre-electoral periods (between 2012 and 2015), especially since the May 2012 elections, when the left-wing party SYRIZA emerged as a potential government. These interventions were expressed in many cases through threats of a 'Grexit', the expulsion of Greece from the Eurozone or direct verbal attacks against the Greek citizens' attitude and mentality, re-affirming the dichotomy between 'winners' and 'losers' of globalisation (Tsatsanis, Freire & Tsirbas, 2014: 521).

Recently, several cleavages have emerged, either related to Greek citizens, i.e. 'lazy Greeks' vs 'hardworking German taxpayers' (Mylonas, 2012: 663; Ntampoudi, 2014; Kutter, 2014; Schmidt, 2014), or presenting Greece as a negative case study, due to the crisis, i.e. the European 'north vs south' or 'central European vs periphery countries' (Cotta, 2014: 75; Kriesi et al., 2008: 11; Ntampoudi, 2014; Wodak & Angouri, 2014).

In a nutshell, the EU political discourse is marked by a dichotomy between successful and failed member states (Mylonas, 2012), where member states from Southern Europe—the famous PIIGS countries (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain)—are assumed to be the main cause of the Eurozone crisis (Weeks, 2011; Ntampoudi, 2014; Kutter, 2014), Greece being the most prominent example among them. That dichotomy emerged as a prevalent euro crisis narrative, which aimed at promoting austerity measures, strict fiscal controls and structural reforms as the sole solution. As Matthijs and McNamara (2015) argue, that perception was mainly created through a well-established network of social structures and social logics (within economic, societal, political and cultural levels), which promoted specific proposals and solutions, with social divisions between 'Northern Saints' and 'Southern Sinners' being the main interpretive model. According to the authors, those structures included an extensive framework of relations and interactions between actors—mainly from Germany—such as academics, bankers, politicians and investors, which made the aforementioned solution the prevalent one—initially in Germany and then

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<sup>1</sup> From 2015 onwards, the 'troika' was renamed to 'Institutions' with the addition of the European Parliament.

to several EU institutions and other EU member states. This condition was presented by the press as a 'blame game', which was expressed through a conflicting discourse between the European officials, for example between Greek and German political elites (Ntampoudi, 2014; Wodak & Angouri, 2014).

This rationale caused the dissatisfaction of the Greek political elites in terms of the representation of Greek interests in the EU (Tsirbas & Sotiropoulos, 2015: 15-16). The creation of a quasi-institution like 'troika' and the decision-making process followed (enhanced role of Eurogroup) for the adoption of policies (MoU and Medium-Term Fiscal Strategies [MTFS]), signified the obligation of the Greek governments to negotiate with a wide range of international elites (elite sectors), economic (IMF and ECB), political (i.e., Ministers of Finance) and bureaucratic ones (Commission).

As stemming from several pieces of research and indices, crisis conditions and the pressures for reform in Greece had a negative impact on the operation of democracy, such as in the case of decision-making process and parliamentary procedures, e.g. downgrade of the role of the committees through the 'Very Urgent Procedure' of Article 109 of the Standing Order of the Hellenic Parliament or through the process of 'Legislative Content Act' (Karoulas & Poulakidakos, 2016: 3-4). On the contrary, in several cases, a further deterioration of already limited functions, i.e. democratic accountability, is evident (Danopoulos, 2015: 111-112). As derived from the related data of the Eurobarometer, the overall satisfaction (very and fairly satisfied) of the citizens on 'how democracy works in Greece' has diminished from 65% in October 2004 to 15% in May 2016. Furthermore, during the crisis period, Greece's index of democracy according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (Economist Intelligence Unit Report 2017) has diminished from 8,13 during 2006 to 7,29 in 2017, which resulted in a loss of 16 places in the specific list worldwide, since from the 22nd place in 2006 dropped into the 38th place in 2017 and the 39th in 2018 and 2019 (Economist Intelligence Unit Report 2018 and 2019), classifying Greece as a 'Flawed democracy', instead of a 'full democracy'.

The international elites criticised civic participation in Greece as well. Both the declared referenda in 2011 and 2015 caused rather furious interventions and statements on behalf of international officials. In particular, the declaration of the 2011 referendum resulted in the collapse of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) government (Papadimitriou et al., 2018), the emergence of a wide consensus between most of the prevalent political parties (PASOK, New Democracy [ND], People's Orthodox Rally [LAOS]) and the emergence of the technocratic government of Loukas Papadimos. The abovementioned evolutions resulted in the rejection of the party system and the Greek traditional political elites on behalf of a significant part of Greek society, a condition that tends to characterise crisis periods (King & Seligman, 1976; Cotta & Verzichelli, 2007: 463).

The 'rejection' of the Greek political elites on behalf of the Greek people was expressed through two distinguishable, yet interrelated, instances. The first was the abstention percentages in the elections that were conducted during the crisis period, which had been increased by more than 20% compared to the 2004 elections (from 76.5% in the elections of 2004, the electoral participation has been down to 56.6% during the elections of September 2015). The second was the emergence of the far-right neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn, which had gained considerable electoral power (between 6–7%), being the third party during the elections of January and September 2015 (Linz, Mir & Ortega, 2007: 317-318). Although contemporary Euroscepticism in Greece differs from the Euroscepticism of the 1980s (Verney, 2011), what seems unquestionable was the emergence of an anti-European stance among the Greek electorate, which was consolidated in the results of the July 2015 referendum.

The aforementioned examples demonstrate that during crisis periods, the role of national elites is further diminished in favour of international ones. The emergence of the anti-memorandum Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA) as a leading party verified the predictions of Kevin Featherstone back in 2013 that the election of SYRIZA will be followed by 'chaos' and 'huge instability and uncertainty on international financial markets and frenzy [among EU leaders]' (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014: 120), a condition realised until the summer of 2015.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW

Based on our theoretical background, which is focused on the interventions of international elites in Greek political procedures, our main research question is to what extent and in what ways have international officials intervened through their statements to the democratic procedures of the Greek state. Our main research question, based on our theoretical background, can be further analysed in several additional research questions:

- Q1.** Is the tendency of the Greek electorate to replace the traditional political elites, as well as the declarations of the newly emerged political elites to question the role of international agreements and enhance democratic participation, reflected in negative evaluations on behalf of international elites of Greece as a country, the Greek government and the Greek people?
- Q2.** Do the statements of international officials support the 'need to carry on with the already agreed reforms'?
- Q3.** Since representatives of IOs undertake the task of representing elites at an international level, is there an overall positive evaluation of the role of 'troika'/'Institutions' (or alternatively of technocrats representing the specific institutions) in the statements of foreign officials?

**Q4.** Can specific cleavages, e.g. European countries/Greece, pro/anti-memorandum, pro/anti-Europeanism, Euro/Drachma, north/south, centre/periphery, be traced in the statements of foreign officials?

**Q5.** Do the international officials utilise specific threats, i.e. Grexit, 'freezing' of new loans, to influence the Greek electorate and political elites?

For the scope of the current paper, we focus on the statements of international officials in Greek political and civic activity. To evaluate the level and content of interventions of international elites in the Greek political procedures, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of the statements of international officials focused on Greek elections and the Greek referendum of 2015.

Content analysis transforms material of a mainly qualitative nature into forms of either qualitative or quantitative data. It can be defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative or qualitative analysis of the characteristics of various messages (Neuerdorf, 2002: 1). It is related to the analysis of written and oral discourse in the media domain, although it can be implemented in any form of communication (Berelson, 1952; Kyriazi, 2001). It is a systematic reproducible method of compression—transformation of the words of a text into fewer categories of content, based on specific coding rules (Berelson, 1952; Stemler, 2001; Miller & Brewer, 2003), allowing researchers to analyse big chunks of data with a systematic methodology. Through the statistical elaboration of the data, one can reveal statistical correlations, based on which the researchers control the theoretical hypotheses of the research or come up with new theoretical approaches for the social issues under scrutiny (Kyriazi, 2001: 84-85).

Since pre-electoral or pre-referendum periods constitute periods of heated political debates—especially in the crisis context—our research focuses on the pre-electoral periods of June 2012 (between the 2nd and 17th of June 2012), January 2015 (between the 10th and the 25th of January 2015) and the period between the declaration of the 2015 referendum (28th of June) and the Eurogroup conference of July 12, which resulted in the agreement of a new bailout programme. The referendum period is further divided into the pre- and post-referendum sub-periods. The first one started on June 28th with the call for a referendum by the Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras and ended on July 5th (referendum day). The second sub-period started on July 6 and lasted until July 12, when the Eurogroup conference took place.

The current research focuses on the statements of international officials (i.e. non-Greek officials representing EU institutions, IOs or foreign governments), shown in the Greek nationwide TV news bulletins of ALPHA (private, most popular TV station in terms of ratings) and Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT/NERIT) (public) during the aforementioned periods<sup>2</sup>. Our unit of analysis is the

<sup>2</sup> We used two TV channels as sources to have access to as many statements as possible and at their most extensive versions.

statement concerning the Greek crisis. Different versions of the same statement count as one statement. We examined a total of 398 unique statements derived from 131 non-Greek officials. The majority of these statements (290) were made during the referendum and post-referendum periods, while the rest of the statements were almost equally divided between June 2012 (53) and January 2015 (55) pre-electoral periods.

To conduct a comparative examination of the foreign officials' statements, we have used two independent (control) variables, which provide us with a more detailed picture of the similarities and differences within the discourse of the foreign elites' members concerning the Greek political functions in the context of the crisis. First, we have divided the political elites' representatives into six categories to ascertain both the intra- and extra-EU statements' context. Due to their protagonist role in the management of the Greek crisis at a European level, we have grouped the representatives of the German government, the representatives of the French government (as dominant countries within the EU) and the ones from the countries of the European south (Italy, Spain, Portugal, as countries facing 'similar' crisis conditions with Greece), in three discrete categories. The variable is complemented by three more categories: the representatives of the rest EU member states, the representatives of European and global institutions involved in the Greek crisis (predominantly ECB, European Parliament, European Commission, Eurogroup, IMF<sup>3</sup>), and representatives of non-EU governments<sup>4</sup>. The second variable defined the periods of the statements. Hence, it is divided into four different periods: the June 2012 pre-electoral period, the January 2015 pre-electoral period, the pre-referendum period (June 28–July 5) and the post-referendum period until the Eurogroup conference of July 12 (6–12 of July 2015).

The statistical test used to measure the (in)dependence between the dependent and independent variables is the chi-square test, using the 95% significance level ( $p$ -value = 0.05) and in each graph the number in parentheses is the number of statements. Finally, in order for the researchers to have a common perception and evaluation of the statements, as well as to identify potential weaknesses of the coding protocol, a pilot research was conducted that covered 10% of the sample. After the completion of the pilot research, the protocol was finalised, while a common interpretation regarding statements' evaluation between the researchers was assured. This common interpretation of the variables and their categories was further tested using Cohen's  $K$  (Field, 2013). The minimum agreement percentage for the variables presented in the current paper was 65%.

<sup>3</sup> Although representatives of IMF, as in the remaining institutions, were monitored independently they are included in a general category given the limited frequency of their presence (in total 20 statements).

<sup>4</sup> That category mainly includes representatives from USA (the most frequent country), Russia, Turkey and Central or Latin American countries, e.g. Cuba, Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela.

## 5. RESULTS

Our first hypothesis refers to the negativism on behalf of the non-Greek officials towards Greece as a country, the Greek government(s) and the Greek people. We have included generic references to Greece as a country as well, since several foreign representatives have chosen to express an opinion concerning Greece's political and social context in that 'indirect' and more 'diplomatic' way, rather than directly referring to the government, the political parties or the citizens.

As Table 1 shows, the Greek governments gather the majority of the negative comments<sup>5</sup> on behalf of the foreign elite members, especially of the German (62.5%) and Institution (61.8%) representatives. On the contrary, Greek citizens appear to gather the sympathy of the foreign elites, since they gather mostly positive comments from all different elite categories. More modest appears to be the positivism towards Greece as a country since French (43.3%) and non-EU countries (41.7%) representatives appear to be the most positive ones.

**Table 1: Positive and negative comments on Greece, Greek governments and Greek people per talking head status<sup>6</sup>**

	Positive opinions			Negative opinions		
	For Greece	For the government	For the citizens	For Greece	For the government	For the citizens
<b>Germany</b>	25.0%	7.5%	<b>45.2%</b>	<b>33.9%</b>	<b>62.5%</b>	16.1%
<b>France</b>	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>53.3%</b>	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>EU south</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	23.5%	<b>66.7%</b>	20.5%	<b>41.2%</b>	11.1%
<b>Rest EU member states</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	7.4%	<b>53.8%</b>	23.1%	<b>59.3%</b>	30.8%
<b>Institutions (European and global)</b>	18.6%	5.9%	<b>57.1%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>61.8%</b>	20.0%
<b>Non-EU countries</b>	<b>41.7%</b>	12.5%	<b>71.4%</b>	4.2%	12.5%	0.0%

<sup>5</sup> As negative comments were categorized those presenting a clear negative statement on behalf of the international elites. For example, according to the president of the European Parliament M. Schulz regarding the implementation of the referendum '...if Greek citizens vote for YES than elections should take place in Greece, Mr. Tsipras is unpredictable and he always manipulates Greek citizens.' In the same vein, Chancellor Merkel clarified that '...we cannot discuss with the Greek government unless it postpones the referendum'. While Oli Ren before the elections of January 2015 mentioned that '...it is necessary to avoid second elections at any cost. 2012 was a lost year for Greece due to the elections'. Finally, based on Vice-Chancellor of Germany Z. Gabriel '... for the crisis conditions in Greece, we should not blame the EU or the Greek citizens, but the social democrat and conservative governments of the previous decades'.

<sup>6</sup> From the table we have deliberately omitted the neutral opinions to underline the proportion between the positive and negative opinions. In order the reader to have a more thorough view the percentages for neutral opinions for Greece, government and citizens are 48.8%, 35.6%, 30% respectively. The chi-square tests p values for each one of the three cross-tabulations (Greece, government, citizens) are 0.022, 0.008 and 0.358 respectively.

Quite similar appears to be the assessment of the three different 'aspects' of Greece (country, government, citizens) through the statements of foreign elites' representatives in the different periods of our study. On one hand, once again, the Greek government(s) gathered the majority of the negative comments, especially since the call for the referendum at the end of June 2015 (75%). This specific period stands out as the hallmark of negativism against the Greek government of SYRIZA, which decided to conduct the referendum against the prevalent rationale of the EU institutions. On the other hand, the citizens gathered the majority of the positive comments (Table 2).

**Table 2: Positive and negative comments on Greece, Greek governments and Greek people per period.<sup>7</sup>**

	Positive opinions			Negative opinions		
	For Greece	For the government	For the citizens	For Greece	For the government	For the citizens
<b>Elections June 2012</b>	20.6%	0.0%	<b>55.0%</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	15.0%
<b>Elections January 2015</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	25.0%	<b>56.3%</b>	20.0%	<b>33.3%</b>	0.0%
<b>Pre-Referendum period 2015</b>	<b>27.0%</b>	6.3%	<b>48.5%</b>	25.4%	<b>75.0%</b>	15.2%
<b>Post-referendum period 2015</b>	<b>33.6%</b>	11.8%	<b>58.5%</b>	17.6%	<b>48.2%</b>	22.0%

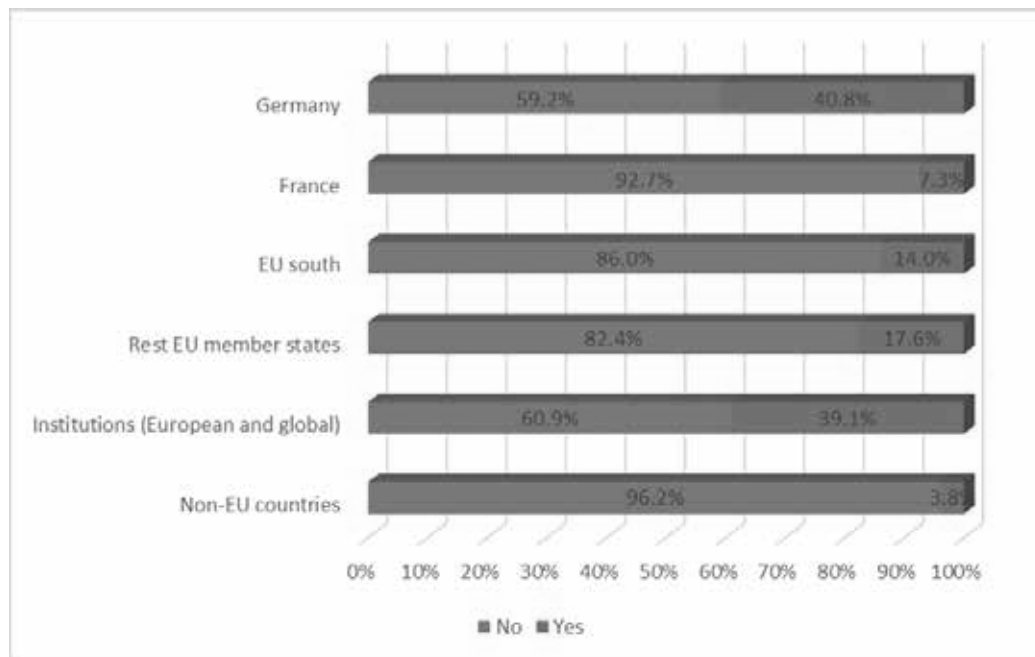
Based on the abovementioned results, the foreign officials appear to be judgemental towards the Greek government(s), but not towards the Greek citizens. In the cases when the officials refer to 'Greece' in general, they also appear to be less condemnatory, exercising a rather modest critique, at least in quantitative terms.

Among the most important characteristics of the international elites is their need to reproduce the dominant status quo, i.e. themselves, and reassure their power through the continuation of already established policies. Under this scope, we researched relevant references in the elites' discourse concerning the Greek crisis. As shown in Graph 1, the German representatives appear to be the ones to include

<sup>7</sup> We have deliberately omitted the neutral opinions to underline the proportion between the positive and negative opinions. The chi-square tests p-values for each one of the three crosstabulations (Greece, government, citizens) are 0.699, 0.330 and 0.077, respectively.

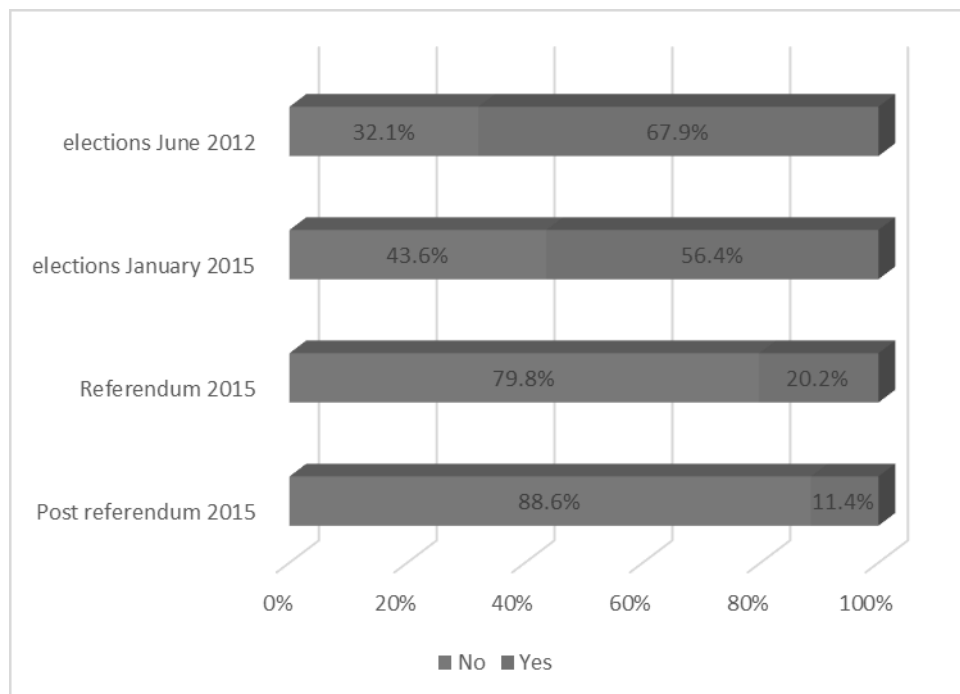
in almost half of their statements (40.8%) the need to keep up with the already agreed plans for overcoming the crisis. The Germans are closely followed by the institutions' representatives (39.1%). All other representatives appear to incorporate this parameter in their discourse in far fewer cases (the third-largest percentage is the 17.6% of the rest of the EU member states countries).

**Graph 1: Reference to the need to keep up with the already agreed decisions per elite member status (chi-square p-value = 0.000)**



Quite significant differences were discernible between the different periods included in our research. The statements appearing to include references of the need to keep up with the already agreed policies to overcome the crisis appear during the June 2012 pre-electoral period, when SYRIZA emerged as a potential governing party, and the January 2015 pre-electoral period, when SYRIZA was considered the favourite to win the elections. During these two 'turning points' of the political scene in Greece, with the emergence of a leftist party disseminating a predominantly anti-memorandum discourse, the international elites—both political and financial ones—sought to make it clear which would be the strategy for tackling the Greek crisis (Graph 2).

**Graph 2: Reference to the need to keep up with the already agreed decisions per period (chi-square p-value = 0.000)**



In the same vein, we monitored the references of international officials regarding the conduction of the referendum and elections. Out of 87 references, 77 of them referred to the referendum or post-referendum period, mainly coming from the Institutions' representatives (28), German representatives (21) and representatives of the rest of the EU member states (14). In most cases, the conduction of referendum—mainly—and elections in Greece cause negative (36) or neutral (24) statements on behalf of international officials and reveal a rather cautious approach to civic participation. These findings show the existence of statements underlying the need to keep up with the already agreed policies concerning the crisis and the rejection of 'disruptive' initiatives (e.g. referendum, elections), as a means used by the elites to reproduce an already 'existing status quo'.

Regarding the persistence of the elites to underline the financial aims of the bailout agreements and policies implemented for Greece, we traced only a limited number of references in the statements of our study (44 out of 398 statements). Among them, the members of the Institutions focused on that parameter in 22 statements, while all other officials referred much less to specific financial aims. In temporal terms, the period right after the Greek referendum appears to be the 'richest' in references to specific financial aims (21 times). Hence, we reject our third research hypothesis on the rather extensive reference of specific financial aims.

In terms of the (positive) references to the role of 'troika' and the 'Institutions', out of the total number of 398, we found only 46 references to the role of 'troika', most of them on behalf of the German officials and the Institutions' representatives, during the (post)-referendum period and most of them (30) positive. In the same vein, only a few references (24) focus on the significance of the role of the 'Institutions' and the appointment of technocrats (5) for the implementation of specific measures.

The existence of cleavages in the statements of the foreign officials appears to be rather limited, since we found it in 58 cases out of the total number of 398. Within those 58 cases, the German officials followed that discursive strategy in 22 cases, while the Institutions' representatives used it in 14 cases. In temporal terms, the 'cleavage' discourse is concentrated during the Greek referendum period (from June 28 to July 12), when one can find 52 out of the total 58 references.

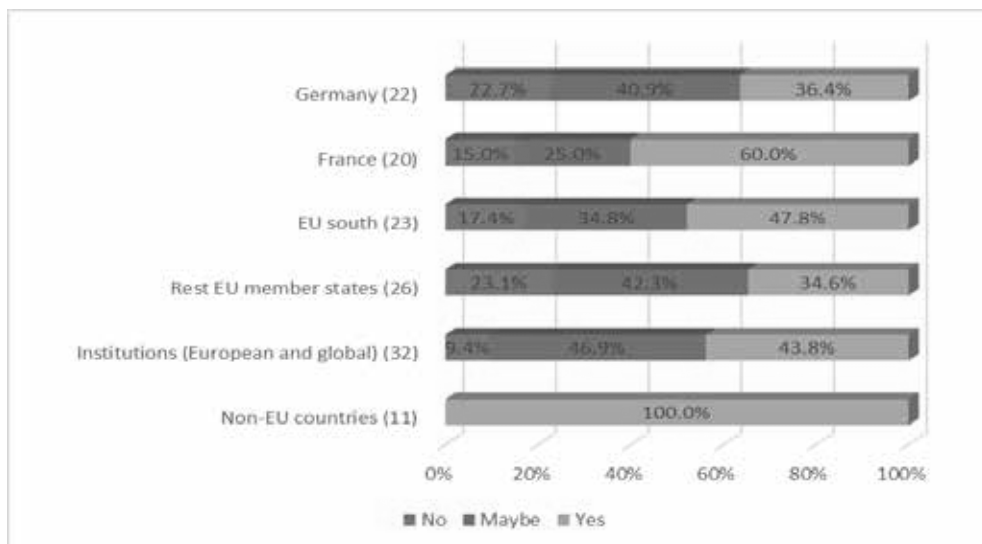
However, one should note that referenda have an a priori divisive nature. The fact that referenda are planned in order to 'ratify the position favoured by the referendum's sponsor as well as to influence political outcomes' (Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2000), makes the creation of cleavages unavoidable, not only between citizens but also between conflicting sides.

Among the possible threats on behalf of international elites, under the rationale of their prevalence in the globalised political context, we focused on two different aspects. First, the reference of possible sanctions in case the pre-determined measures fail to produce the desired results (e.g. additional austerity measures, delayed payments to Greece) and second, the possibility that Greece would exit the Eurozone.

According to our findings, the references to possible sanctions on behalf of the officials were rather limited. Out of 56 statements with possible sanctions, 23 of them belong to Institution officials. The vast majority of the possible sanctions are also mentioned during the referendum and post-referendum periods (49 statements in total, 28 and 21 for each sub-period of the referendum days).

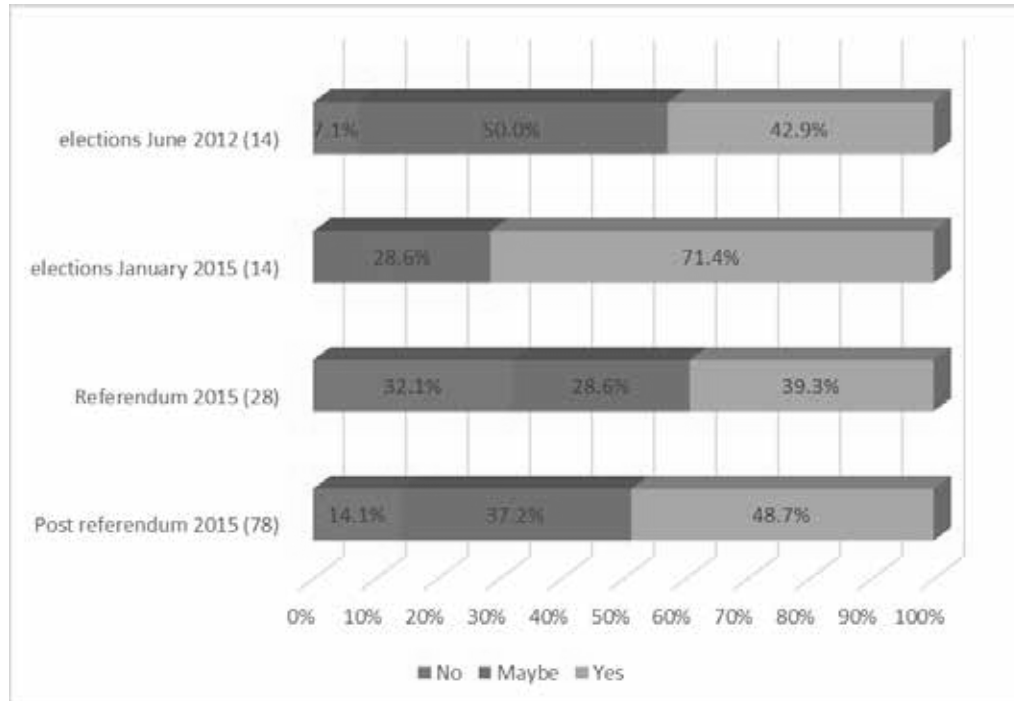
Though the references to sanctions were rather limited, that was not the case in the debate around the necessity of Greece being a member of the Eurozone, since we found 134 references regarding this issue. Several officials considered Greece's presence in the Eurozone either not at all necessary (rest of the EU member states 23.1%, Germans 22.7%), or provisional (Institutions' representatives 46.9%, the rest of the EU member states 42.3%) (Graph 3).

**Graph 3: Should Greece stay in the Eurozone? (per country of the elite member)**  
 (chi-square p-value = 0.043)



The contestation of the necessity of Greece being a Eurozone member escalated mainly during the pre- and post-referendum periods, when more than half of the foreign officials (60.7% until the referendum day and 51.3% right afterwards, until the Eurogroup conference of July 12, 2015) contested the necessity of the membership of Greece in the Eurozone. Quite interesting is the fact that a similar rationale permeates the statements of foreign officials during the June 2012 pre-electoral period as well, when half of them considered the participation of Greece in the Eurozone as 'provisionary' (Graph 4). However, what has to be clarified here is that 'provisional' answers, though they do not refer clearly to the participation or not of Greece in the Eurozone, have a rather negative connotation, since in most cases they relate to the adoption and implementation of specific policies posed within a European framework.

**Graph 4: Should Greece stay in the Eurozone? (per period) (chi-square p-value = 0.078)**



## 6. DISCUSSION

Our analysis illuminates some interesting aspects of the rationale of international elites regarding the management of the Greek crisis. According to our results, a break of bonds (Pitty, 2014; Papadimitriou et al., 2018) between the Greek and international elites is more than evident in the statements under scrutiny. Throughout our research period, there were a significant number of negative evaluations regarding the Greek governments. This negativism escalated particularly after the declaration of the referendum, as well as during the post-referendum period. Although a specific division can be detected between international elites and more precisely between Germany and the Institutions from the one part and France and non-EU countries from the other, it is more than evident that the most 'influential' factors in the Greek crisis management, e.g. Germany, IMF, ECB, Commission, adopted an overall negative position.

According to our results, the most intense—in terms of negative comments to the Greek government—period appears to be the referendum period, in June–July 2015. The enhanced criticism signifies an increase in the democratic deficit, taking place especially in crisis periods (Putnam, 1976) and a further shift of power from national to international elites (Keller, 1963; Magone, 2015;

Schmidt 2014). After all, reality itself proved to be far less democratic than the people of Greece hoped for when they voted 'No' in the referendum regarding the implementation of new austerity policies, an agreement finally signed by the Greek government only a few days later. On top of that, it appears to be typical during the crisis period, especially the SYRIZA administration, that the most influential policies were negotiated at an international level (Cotta, 2014). As evident from the references to a possible Grexit or the imposition of specific financial sanctions, international elites and organisations had specific tools to impose policies based exclusively on financial aims (Pitty, 2014).

Though power is exercised at an international level, both politically and discursively, the political discourse of different international officials included several dichotomies as well. One can divide, after our results, the international officials of our research into two different sides: first, the German officials and Institutions' representatives along with other (non-Southern) European countries and second, the French officials and non-European officials along with South European officials. These two vaguely formed discursive 'coalitions' appear to 'duel' through their statements over the remaining or not of Greece in the Eurozone or even the EU, the implementation of additional austerity measures and so on. Even in the case of the—predominantly addressed in positive terms—Greek citizens, there were several sceptical statements as well. 'We respect the opinion of Greek citizens on the referendum...' but '...there are also 18 more countries that have a different opinion on the Greek crisis' (Angela Merkel), or '...the result on the referendum didn't change anything actually' (Michel Sapin), or '...the result enhances the gap between Greece and the other countries' (Valdis Dombrovskis).

Finally, one could argue that after Best's (2014) model, the discursive management of the Greek crisis demonstrated three different 'rationales' for facing the crisis, namely intergovernmentalism, multilevel governance, and multilateralism. From all different parts involved in the Greek crisis—foreign governments and institutions, the Greek government, citizens—only the 'two thirds' appear to be actively involved in the negotiation-resolution process. The omission of the citizens formulates a new dimension of Putnam's two-level game (Putnam, 1988), where the civic pressure posed on the elites at a national level is not 'represented' at an international level. The longer this game lasts, the bigger the gap between the elites and their voters will become. History itself, though, (even contemporary reality) has demonstrated that big gaps, in the best cases, are being filled with political 'material' of 'dubious' quality.

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