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<ct>Political Rhetoric in the Refugee Crisis in Greece

<au>Yiannis Karayiannis and Anthoula Malkopoulou

<no.in>A growing concern about the ongoing refugee crisis in the Mediterranean lies at the heart of current public discussions and controversies in Europe. It is estimated that over a million people arrived to Europe by sea in 2015 alone, while many hundreds lost their lives attempting to do so.<sup>1</sup> The impact of massive arrivals on the economic, social, and cultural life of EU nation-states often has been interpreted negatively, giving rise to xenophobic and anti-immigrant political attitudes. Exploiting these attitudes, far-right parties and extreme political movements have soared across the EU countries, embodying a serious threat for democratic viability.<sup>2</sup> Under these circumstances, the EU has been struggling to manage the crisis in a manner that is effective and compatible with its political values. But so far the refugee crisis has exposed the difficulties of EU consolidation, and the union's limited ability to play a leading role in a rapidly changing global order.

<normal>If we add to the huge numbers of refugees the difficult domestic economic situation in the main receiving states like Greece and Italy, divisions and inequalities among EU member-states are intensified. Especially regarding Greece, the refugee crisis constitutes “a crisis within the crisis,” as it has been aptly noted,<sup>3</sup> since it hit during a deep financial depression that entered

its eighth consecutive year in 2016. The urgent need to address the financial crisis simultaneously with the refugee crisis was exacerbated by the “entrapment” of a significant number of refugees in Greek territory.<sup>4</sup> According to data from the Greek police, in 2015 no less than 911,471 arrests of undocumented immigrants were recorded, an extremely high number compared to previous years (77,163 in 2014).<sup>5</sup> Very fast the refugee/migrant issue has become a political one,<sup>6</sup> which parties frame either in a manner that favors the social integration of immigrants or in a manner that encourages xenophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes.

Following the general increase in research on anti-immigration attitudes, these issues have been systematically explored also in Greece.<sup>7</sup> Some of these studies have focused on Greek immigration discourse, including parliamentary and media discourse.<sup>8</sup> However, little attention has been paid to *how* political party discourse and speeches by party leaders frame this issue, especially in the midst of the ongoing crisis. In other words, what is missing is a comprehensive account of Greek political leaders’ rhetoric on the refugee/migrant crisis, which shapes domestic policies and public attitudes and promotes specific perceptions, evaluations, and judgments. Our aim is to fill this gap by studying the ongoing refugee/migrant crisis in Greece from the point of view of “rhetorical political analysis,” that is, how political discourse forms arguments and shapes meanings concerning this issue, in order to justify and promote specific goals.<sup>9</sup>

We will pay special attention to metaphors, which are a key rhetorical device used in order to establish specific meanings. In their seminal work George Lakoff and Mark Johnson underline that metaphors do not primarily constitute properties of language but rather of thought.<sup>10</sup> According to Lakoff and Johnson, “Metaphors . . . are conceptual in nature. They are among our principal vehicles for understanding. And they play a central role in the construction of social and political reality.”<sup>11</sup> The metaphorical association of an abstract notion with a concrete thing establishes specific meanings about it, by highlighting some aspects and hiding others. For example, the metaphorical definition of politics as “power struggle” highlights the contentious character of politics at the expense of the collaborative one. In that sense, metaphors may function strategically, as tools of persuasion, since they favor specific views and understandings; as such, they can also enhance partisan ties and feelings of belonging.<sup>13</sup> Especially, so-called discourse metaphors<sup>14</sup> decisively frame issues and the language used in connection to them, and function as keys to broader patterns of thinking. In sum, metaphors perform multiple cognitive,

emotional, and ideological functions and are an integral part of political discourse,<sup>15</sup> which is why our analysis pays special attention to them.

The chapter proceeds as follows: First, we offer a brief overview of Greek political culture and immigration policy that serves as a background to understand recent developments. This part includes also a short description of rhetorical differences between the main political actors. Second, we concentrate on the immigration and refugee rhetoric of two main political parties in the current historical conjuncture, that is, Nea Dimokratia (New Democracy, ND) and Synaspismos Rizospastikes Aristeras (Coalition of the Radical Left, SYRIZA).<sup>16</sup> During the ongoing refugee/migrant crisis these two political parties have been the main players in government and opposition respectively; most importantly, they express diametrically opposed views regarding the nature and solutions of this crisis. We examine speeches of their political leaders (namely Alexis Tsipras for SYRIZA and Antonis Samaras for ND) that were given in different contexts and moments in the lifetime of the crisis. In the conclusion, we outline and compare the main metaphors and rhetorical descriptions used in these speeches and sketch the general contours of the current refugee/immigration rhetoric in Greece.

## <h1>An Overview of Greek Asylum and Immigration Politics

<no.in>The Greek state favors a strictly defined national, religious, and linguistic identity. Based on the conservative principle of *jus sanguinis*, Greek citizenship law is one of the least generous in the European continent: it requires seven years of residency for adult foreigners (it was 10 years before 2010) and had until recently denied citizenship to children of noncitizens born, raised and schooled in Greece.<sup>17</sup> The Greek Orthodox Church is per the constitution recognized as the country's official creed and enjoys extensive institutional privileges. Further, despite a continuous presence of traditional non-Greek speakers, the Greek state has never recognized the presence of linguistic minorities on Greek soil. In other words, through these policies, Greece is neither very welcoming nor accommodating as a receiving state for foreigners.

<normal>Indeed, the immigration policies in Greece have been haphazard and ill disposed. In 2011, the foreign population amounted to roughly 11 percent of the overall population, including coethnic, legal and illegal immigrants at roughly equal proportions. The first category comprised Greek co-ethnics, who arrived in the 1990s from the dismantled Soviet Union and were granted

citizenship almost automatically; co-ethnics from Albania were also granted special status after 2007. The second category, legal immigrants, also came mostly from Albania—the ethnicity that makes up 60 percent of the foreign population in Greece (in 2011)—as well as other Balkan and southern Asia countries. Despite the growing number of legal arrivals through the 2000s, however, the country did not develop a comprehensive program of immigration management and integration. Regulations were ad hoc, reacting to actual migration flows through regularization programs; or instrumental, aimed at creating a cheap and temporary labor force.<sup>18</sup> Stay permits, granted mostly to seasonal workers, were short and hard to obtain. Social, cultural, and political marginalization was the norm. As a final blow, the economic crisis that hit the country in 2008 has seriously aggravated the state of insecurity and unemployment of Greece’s migrant stock.<sup>19</sup>

After 2007, the stark increase of arrivals at its eastern land and sea border forced Greece to change its policy and redirect resources and targeted EU funds to the management of illegal migration. Border controls were given priority, and the number of apprehensions became overwhelming, as Greece became by far the main entry point for unauthorized entry to the EU.<sup>20</sup> The joint European force Frontex reinforced policing resources, and a 10 km fence was built at the Evros land border with Turkey. Despite these changes the pressure continued, not least because of the Dublin II Regulation that assigned responsibility for examining EU asylum applications to the country of entry of the applicants. This led to an extensive use of detention in notoriously overcrowded facilities with appalling living conditions (such as the Amygdaleza center). Detention policy was complemented with a feeble program of forced and voluntary returns.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the EU adapted its asylum policy to the urgent realities. Screening and first reception centers were set up in main spots of entry into Greece after 2013. Asylum services were also bolstered, and several EU countries unilaterally suspended implementation of the Dublin II regulation, thus offering some relief to Greek authorities. In response to the dramatic increase of Syrian refugees and smuggled migrants arriving to Greece by sea in 2015, the EU reached an infamous agreement with Turkey on March 18, 2016: illegal immigrants would be readmitted to Turkey and Syrian refugees from Turkey resettled directly to EU countries.<sup>22</sup> In reality, however, the category of persons to be returned was defined in a manner that could include refugees and

asylum seekers; further, considering political turmoil in Turkey, the success of this new policy is in question.<sup>23</sup>

Although Greece's refugee/migrant policy is to a large extent determined by EU decisions, political parties are key actors in shaping public opinion. Immigration rhetoric is therefore best understood in connection to the national political context. Greece is a multiparty, parliamentary democracy, with an electoral system of reinforced proportionality that allocates one-sixth of seats as a bonus to the party receiving the largest number of votes. This creates a majoritarian government-opposition effect, parallel to the presence of smaller parties. Following the elections of September 2015, the Greek parliament featured eight parties. The leading government party is democratic socialist Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), and the leading opposition party is the liberal conservative New Democracy (ND). Together they hold 219 out of 300 seats in the parliament. Among the six minor parties that share the remaining 81 seats, one is communist, one social democratic, two liberal/centrist, one national conservative, and one ultranationalist.<sup>24</sup> Altogether, Greek parties represent a broad array of immigration-related ideological viewpoints that range from ethnic nationalism and racism to inclusive humanitarianism.

Is anti-immigration rhetoric prevalent in Greece? Despite the significant migration flows in the country from the 1990s onward, the issue of immigration had not caused intensive political debates and new party cleavages as in other European countries before the late 2000s. Anti-immigration rhetoric was first used by LAOS, a minor ultranationalist party present in the Greek parliament only from 2007 until 2012. Xenophobic talk was then taken over by ultranationalist Golden Dawn (GD), which embraces biological racism and violence and describes foreigners as "subhuman carriers of disease."<sup>25</sup> It has had a steady 7 percent electoral support since 2012, despite the trial of its leader and many of its MPs and party members on grave criminal charges (ongoing as of early 2019). Another nationalist actor is the Independent Greeks (ANEL), currently a minor government coalition partner.<sup>26</sup> In addition to them, the main conservative party New Democracy (ND) is also highly critical of immigration, as this paper aims to show. To give a picture of the general scope of anti-immigration party attitudes in Greece, these three parties voted against granting citizenship to second-generation immigrant children in July 2015: New Democracy, the Independent Greeks, and Golden Dawn.<sup>27</sup>

In what follows, we will present an overview and analysis of the political rhetoric pertaining to immigration used by the leaders of the two dominant Greek parties, SYRIZA and ND. One can discern a clear and qualitative differentiation between the two parties in terms of ideology, rhetoric, and policy. Antonis Samaras, ND prime minister from 2012 until 2015, has in general favored a tough stance against immigration, justified through appeals to security and public order. On the other hand, the subsequent prime minister since 2015 and leader of SYRIZA since 2009, Alexis Tsipras, has promoted a paradigm of humanitarian solidarity and inclusion, often posited against a parsimonious EU policy on asylum and immigration. The presentation of Greek political rhetoric through the perspective of two political parties may strike the reader as a binary construction that overlooks gray zones and more nuanced perspectives. Despite such appearances, our goal is not to present the rhetorical playing field as black and white, but simply to narrow the scope of analysis. By focusing on two diametrically opposed descriptions of the refugee/migrant crisis, we hope to allow for a more in-depth understanding of the qualitative divide between government and opposition on this policy field and the discourse that surrounds it.

## <h1>New Democracy’s “Security” Rhetoric

<no.in>As mentioned earlier, the main conservative party, New Democracy (ND), is very skeptical of immigration, and, as a result, immigrants figure in its rhetoric in a mostly negative light. Most of the time, the refugee/migrant crisis is approached in terms of “smuggled immigration” (*lathrometanastefsi*), rather than a question of refugees and asylum seekers. The unlawful activity of “smuggled immigrants” is conceived as a threat to national security, social cohesion, and the national economy. It is argued that Greece’s society and economy have no capacity to integrate a high number of immigrants, only a (minor) part of them who legally enter the country.

<normal>This line of argument was first adopted by the previous leader of the ND Konstantinos Karamanlis (1997–2009) and was significantly expanded by Antonis Samaras, who succeeded the former in the party leadership (2009–2015). Samaras called more attention than before to the question of immigration, which he *tout court* associated with illegal smuggling, a move that deliberately neglects distinctions between legal immigrants, illegal immigrants and refugees

entitled to international protection. “The issue is not whether you would call it illegal immigration or smuggled immigration,” he said. “Whatever you call it, it is something that we must address immediately.”<sup>28</sup>

According to Samaras, “smuggled immigration” has a serious negative impact on national economy, which becomes more acute due to the financial crisis. As he argued, “Today, when the country cannot cover the basic needs of its own taxpayers, they [SYRIZA] promise to millions of illegal smuggled immigrants unemployment benefits.”<sup>29</sup> In addition, “smuggled immigrants” are involved in the “black economy” and “black trade,” which “kills,” as he asserted, the legal trade and the economy.<sup>30</sup>

<bl>Smuggled immigrants export currency from Greece to countries outside the Euro. This cannot continue. They cannot legally export currency from illegal work! This will be checked. And will be taxed. We cannot chase those working legally for the last euro, while illegals are completely unchecked.”<sup>31</sup>

<normal>By conflating all immigrants with illegal immigrants and, more importantly, by juxtaposing them to legally working nationals, he articulated the common topos “immigrants are stealing our jobs,” which underlies most anti-immigrant populist rhetoric today.

In addition to being associated with illegal economic activities, “smuggled immigrants” are also claimed to threaten social security and public order since the country has no capacity to integrate the entire number of immigrants. In Samaras’ words:

<bl>The . . . dilemma that we face . . . is between security and fear. Today, when criminality is rampant, they [SYRIZA] want to disarm the police! Today, when Greece is swarming with illegal smuggled immigrants they invite them to bring their . . . families too!<sup>32</sup>

<normal>And elsewhere he notes:

<bl>They [SYRIZA] never explained to us how social cohesion will be maintained if we give legalizing papers to all smuggled immigrants, if we disarm the police, if we hand out money that does not exist even to those who entered the country illegally.<sup>33</sup>



<normal>In this tone, the policy of “open borders” that is supported by SYRIZA is rejected on the grounds that it will cause significant problems in Greece’s relation with other EU countries. As Samaras stated, “SYRIZA wants an *internally broken* Greece, with millions of smuggled immigrants, now legal, together with their families. And *externally isolated*, with no international support.”<sup>34</sup> According to Samaras, addressing the problem of “smuggled immigration” implies a reform of the existing legal framework;<sup>35</sup> it also requires cooperation between EU countries since a single member state cannot sufficiently address it. As Samaras noted, “We are trying to repatriate them [the smuggled immigrants]. And this has already started. But to continue, it requires a common European policy and decisive support from Europe’s side.”<sup>36</sup>

The policy of “open borders” is denounced not only for its detrimental effects on the country, but also for nourishing political radicalism and far-right movements. Especially with reference to Greece, Samaras argues that this policy fuels the rise of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn. He states, “When their [SYRIZA’s] position is that we need to legalize all smuggled migrants, are they thus not serving the neo-Nazis?”<sup>37</sup>

All in all, immigrants themselves are described in very negative terms. Samaras’ presentation of the refugee/migrant crisis as primarily a matter of “smuggled immigration” that has terrible effects on Greek society and economy portrays immigrants as agents of danger and harm. Although it is at times recognized that “smuggled immigrants” are “desperate people” who risk their life for a better future, it is stressed that they do participate in and in essence serve an illegal and harmful activity. As Samaras stated,

<bl>[...] As you saw, human tragedies occur like a few fortnights ago with the shipwreck in Italy’s Lampedusa, where hundreds of lives of smuggled migrants were lost. Only if there are incentives and facilitations for mass repatriations will these “caravans of the desperate” stop. We must and can as Europe fully shield our borders [...] [and] give prospects and hope to these peoples to stay in their countries [...] Smuggled migration does not solve any problem. It merely allows—and we must be saying this straight—the most hideous trade to flourish: the human trade that is [properly] called slave trade! It

allows traffickers to make a fortune. And it transfers the unrest from the most destabilized regions to the rest of the world.<sup>38</sup>

<normal>With this line of argument, which presents immigrants as agents of harm, Samaras seeks to discourage immigration to Greece. It does so by associating immigration to aggression and illegality. In his own words,

<bl>Desperate people from various troubled areas are trying to get into Europe. They enter Greece because it is geographically possible. And then they get trapped in Greece, since no other European country accepts them. We look at these people with love and compassion. We understand [their] anxieties and despairs. But they cannot stay in our Country. Neither our society nor our economy can bear them. *Our cities cannot be under occupation anymore. Our citizens cannot abandon their neighborhoods and feel absolute insecurity* [emphasis added]. Greece cannot become a reception center for millions of smuggled immigrants from around the world! This is simply not possible. Make no mistake; this is not an issue of ideology or obsession. It simply cannot be done and we are not discussing it.<sup>39</sup>

<normal>Rhetorically, the conception of “smuggled immigration” as a threat to national security and social cohesion is highlighted through the use of certain metaphors. As has already been noted, the commonplace perception promoted is that of the limited capacity of the national economy and of the country to accept a large number of foreign citizens. The metaphor used to give this impression of limited capacity is that of a “container,” a box with restricted space and limited air inside, which is a common topos of anti-immigration rhetoric in Europe.<sup>40</sup> As Samaras argued, “Greece is *overflowing* with smuggled immigrants,” and “We are gradually clearing the neighborhoods that were *suffocating*. [emphasis added]”<sup>41</sup> These metaphors of spatial limits seek to support a specific view of immigration as intrusive, unwelcome, and eventually harmful, all the while promoting the idea of legitimate native residents versus illegitimate newcomers.

Further, “smuggled immigration” is given a negative signification by being designated as a threat. Metaphorically this is expressed with references to catastrophic events such as “floods” and “waves” that disturb the tranquility of the sea. As Samaras argued, “There is no Greek, or

any serious party, that objects to ending and reversing the *waves* of smuggled immigrants.”<sup>42</sup> In another occasion he stated: “Until a few years ago, my friends, the Country’s borders were full of holes from the *waves* of smuggled immigrants [...] [enabled by] the ones who want to *flood* the country with smuggled immigrants.”<sup>44</sup>

The rhetorical framing of “smuggled immigration” as a threat is not limited to the vocabulary of natural disaster. Precisely in order to reflect the immigrants’ agency in a process that undermines national security and the country’s social cohesion, the threat is represented metaphorically also in terms of a war situation. In this context, migrants are classified as “invaders” that need to be confronted. As Samaras stated:

<bl>In the last year we have done a lot! We stopped the influx of smuggled immigrants. And we have started slowly to limit them. In the domain of public safety we’ve done in the last year things that have not been done for many years. And we did all these in line with all preconditions of humane treatment. We do not shoot unarmed women and children at the borders, or sink boats with smuggled immigrants. We do not do such things. Yet, we cannot accept an “unarmed invasion”.<sup>45</sup>

<normal>The metaphorical representation of the immigration crisis with war terms was repeated on several occasions, for example in this statement: “My New Democracy brothers, in recent years our Country suffered an “unarmed invasion” of hundreds of thousands of smuggled immigrants. . . [...] And we cannot let the seismic waves of upheaval in our [regional] neighborhood dismantle the Country.”<sup>46</sup> In such warlike conditions, the proposed government policies are justified in order to restrain the enemy. This offers a chance to claim credit: “In the last two and a half years, we curbed the flow of smuggled immigrants,”<sup>47</sup> which is often done through the infamous bellicose motto of “recapturing” the cities from illegal immigrants:

<bl>We began a real campaign to strike a blow against illegal immigration systematically and at all levels. We have managed only the first steps so far. And the picture is changing everywhere, mainly in city centers, which have been occupied by smuggled immigrants and had surrendered to their illegal activities. The “recapturing” of our cities, which we had promised, began. When we took over, Greece was a country without a capital city! Today the law is in place and is applied in each square meter of downtown Athens.<sup>48</sup>

<normal> In addition to recapturing the inner cities, the image of “unarmed intruders” implies a need to defend the national territory from external attacks and threats. This rhetorical circumscription of the national land is made through the overused metaphor of an “unfenced vineyard” (*xefrigo ampeli*), a colloquial phrase that describes uncontrolled access to private property. As Samaras stated:

<bl>Greece is no longer an “unfenced vineyard.” . . . And the road is open also for the repatriation of smuggled immigrants and for the distribution of those who cannot be repatriated in all [European] Union countries, so they do not get trapped in Greece, which cannot accommodate more, and they cannot go elsewhere, and nobody else wants them.<sup>49</sup>

<normal> Similarly, Samaras accused the opposition party SYRIZA of wanting Greece to be an “unfenced vineyard.”<sup>50</sup> The interesting aspect to this metaphor is that it performs at least three functions. First, the complaint that Greece is reduced to an “unfenced vineyard” reinforces the identification of Greek nationals with their national territory, which should be closed to outsiders. Second, it emphasizes the importance of private property and ownership, which are high priorities and values for the liberal conservative party ND. Third, and perhaps more important, this specific metaphor familiarizes the public with the idea and the policy of actual fencing; this is an important bridge to the debate on the construction of a 10 km border fence in the Evros land border with Turkey. In other words, the description of Greece as an “unfenced vineyard” serves at once as a nationalist, neoliberal, and anti-immigrant argument.

In sum, Samaras’s use of metaphors and political rhetoric represents the general strategy of his party, ND, to securitize the immigration issue. Immigrants are portrayed as a threat equivalent to floods and wars or abusive intruders, which reinforces rhetorically the binary construction of “us”—the legitimate residents of the country under attack—and “them”—the ill-motivated criminal newcomers. The racist ideological construct underlying this classification will become clearer when compared with the opposite rhetorical strategy of solidarity and integration adopted by ND’s rival, SYRIZA.

<h1>The Solidarity-Humanitarian Argument

<no.in>As in the case of ND, SYRIZA's arguments for the refugee/migrant crisis are presented in several institutional contexts (parliament, election campaigns, party conventions, etc.), and remain consistent during the party's terms both in opposition and in government. Like ND, SYRIZA also considers the refugee/migrant crisis as a matter of utmost importance. But, unlike ND, it does so not because of security concerns but because it constitutes a major humanitarian problem and highlights the asymmetries within the EU.<sup>51</sup> It is "the most important issue threatening Europe today" and "one of the most serious regional and global challenges to be faced by the EU in years," threatening the very political credibility and identity of the EU.<sup>53</sup> In general, it "brings to the surface major questions with a deep ideological and humanistic content."<sup>54</sup>

<normal>According to SYRIZA, the refugee/migrant crisis is particularly acute in host countries such as Greece. As explained by PM Tsipras, the number of arrivals more than doubled between 2013 and 2015 and would continue to increase. Yet he noted that "over 80 percent of new arrivals are people with a refugee profile (Syrians at 60 percent, Afghans, Somalis, and Eritreans)." Nevertheless, he added, the amount of new arrivals "by far exceeds the capacity of our hosting infrastructure, especially in a period of deep economic and social crisis."<sup>55</sup>

There are several reasons why this large number of refugees and immigrants is difficult to control and accommodate successfully. One is the need to respect human rights, especially socioeconomic rights, which is difficult to do given the economic crisis that the country faces, but also the security crisis stemming from the political instability in the region.<sup>57</sup> But a key factor influencing how the refugee crisis is being dealt with, according to SYRIZA, is the deep division within the EU that is currently dominated by a political ideology alien to its proclaimed values. In these conditions, major coordination problems arise from the conflicting policies adopted to address the refugee crisis.<sup>58</sup> As Tsipras stated, "We need to manage a huge refugee crisis, which brings to the surface the great political conflicts that divide Europe from one end to the other, but also each country separately."<sup>59</sup>

It is argued that the prevailing EU policy on the refugee/migrant crisis is unable to tackle it effectively. As Tsipras stated, "A common Europe of peoples with a social orientation cannot exist as long as immigration is treated as a problem of external border security and as long as

police repression is prioritized.”<sup>60</sup> This handling of the refugee crisis clashes, according to SYRIZA, with the values and political ideals of the European Union. As Tsipras stated,

<bl>When the Mediterranean becomes a wet grave, when the Aegean is washing up dead children, then European civilization itself is in crisis, the very concept of a united Europe. Because when a united Europe has a respected set of rules involving fiscal discipline and does not have solidarity as a supreme value, leaving each member state alone in front of a major European crisis, then this Europe cannot have anything to do with the Europe of its founding values, nor can it even have a future.<sup>61</sup>

<normal>Likewise, he noted: “Our humanity is being tested, our effectiveness is being tested, Europe’s ability to share the burden and act as a real Union is being tested.”<sup>62</sup> To sum up, a large part of SYRIZA’s rhetoric goes to criticizing the EU for handling the refugee crisis in a nonhumanitarian manner.

Conversely, the party denounces the EU’s policy as a springboard for racist and xenophobic attitudes that facilitate the rise of far-right political parties.<sup>63</sup> In response, Europe “must show its open, humanitarian face against the crisis that has developed and close the door to the far right, racism, and xenophobia, which raise their head all over Europe.”<sup>64</sup> As Tsipras stated in another occasion:

<bl>Against the logic of fortresses, walls, and fences, against the logic that wants to turn European borders into a battlefield, we firmly believe that we must work hard to prove that humanity, solidarity, hospitality are not utopias of some romantics but are still the dominant values of the European edifice and can become political practice.<sup>65</sup>

<normal>In addition, the current EU policy is unable to tackle the refugee/migrant crisis effectively because it is based on an approach that does not correspond to the real causes that created it.<sup>66</sup> In Tsipras’s words, the vast majority of people who move to Europe via Greece are “refugees fleeing wars and conflicts [...] that we as a global community failed to manage and resolve effectively.”<sup>67</sup> It is a “global drama,” he concludes, “created by an erratic foreign policy and military interventions of the West.”<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere he states: “People who are stacked and die

at our borders are not immigrants but refugees. This means that Greece has an international and European obligation to secure human conditions of reception and living [for these people].”<sup>69</sup>

In other words, SYRIZA’s rhetoric constructs an identity of new arrivals as refugees rather than immigrants. It paints the picture of people whose lives are at risk, rather than people who greedily seek a better lifestyle. They are innocent victims who must be protected without exception, since “Protecting the refugee figure is a historical legacy of European civilization, and one of the most important issues at stake concerning the future of our societies.”<sup>70</sup> In sum, Tsipras builds the following narrative: the European Union and frontline countries like Greece are facing a refugee and not an immigration crisis; as a result, there is a need for a shared, pan-European response when dealing with global humanitarian emergencies. In response, SYRIZA claims to have launched appropriate policy initiatives and adopted special measures, and it has also communicated the problem to the EU, which has led to an adjustment of refugee management strategies.<sup>72</sup>

To change the mental representation of the crisis cultivated by ND rhetoric from a dangerous national threat to a humanitarian crisis, SYRIZA PM Tsipras deployed a different set of metaphors. First of all, the view of the refugee/migrant crisis as a problem caused by cruel wars and civil strife is metaphorically conveyed by the term “refugee flows” (*prosfygikes roes*). This term replaced the party’s own earlier references to refugee and immigration “waves” (*kymata*), or “undocumented immigration.”<sup>74</sup> The replacement was a strategic move by SYRIZA to change the terms of the debate set by ND and rid it of negative connotations of natural disaster and criminality that were alien to SYRIZA’s own approach to the refugee crisis.<sup>75</sup> In other words, the use of the new term “refugee flows” neutralizes the perceived impact of refugees on the domestic economy and society, as it creates an impression that new arrivals are temporary and transitioning (i.e., flowing) through Greece. At the same time, the reference to “refugee flows” makes the phenomenon impersonal, since it puts the emphasis on the products of a larger process and not on the individual agency of each refugee/immigrant. For SYRIZA, refugees are the innocent victims of wars and of the destructive policies of the West in various parts of the world, rather than agents of the problem they seem to cause.

Conversely, it is implied that the policy of closed borders is unnatural and inhuman and only serves to shape conditions of capture and death. As Tsipras argued:

<bl>Greece in recent years, due to policy choices that were not aimed at distributing responsibility—because Europe above all means solidarity—has unfortunately turned into a negative example of a warehouse of human souls, which of course suits those who want to criticize Greece, but this does not give any solutions to the problem.<sup>76</sup>

<normal>The closed-border policy is for SYRIZA a disgrace for European civilization. On the occasion of the much-reported drowning of a three-year-old Syrian refugee boy, washed up on a Turkish beach, Tsipras made a forceful statement: “The Aegean Sea yesterday washed ashore the European civilization on the coast of Bodrum.”<sup>77</sup> Trying to link this failure of European values to the rise of racist and far-right parties, he connected the unwillingness to address the refugee problem in a coordinated and humane way to memories from the deplorable European past of Nazi atrocities:

<bl>When every country is left alone to face what it cannot, then the trains of shame appear, the trains of the hunted, that Europe would like to have erased forever from its collective memory. Then even the most bigoted, the most dangerous far-right cries from the heart of Europe can be heard loudly.<sup>78</sup>

<normal>In sum, addressing the refugee crisis can be recapped, according to SYRIZA, in two opposing images of Europe and its values. On one side is the tendency to undermine the logic of solidarity between EU member states, to promote the “enclosing” of the European area and to adopt policies for containing refugees. On the other side is the logic of solidarity between member states, an attempt to do justice to European civilization and its values with immigrant integration policies and respect for human rights. The conflict between these two sets of policies is underlined by Tsipras in this statement:

<bl>Which is the Europe that we envisage? The Europe of the baker from Kos, who distributes his remaining bread to refugee children? Or the Europe of the Hungarian prime minister, who builds fences and distributes bullets? The Europe of poor [islands of] Lesvos and Kos, which despite the crisis hosted tens of thousands of refugees, or the



Europe of the wealthy state of Bavaria that, despite its prosperity, does not accept to host even thirty thousand of them? A fortress Europe that will have its eyes closed to the disasters that itself causes?<sup>79</sup>

SYRIZA is of course passionately supporting “the baker from Kos,” a figure of humanitarian sacrifice in support of the victims of war even in conditions of domestic poverty. This is a conscious choice from a left-wing party that stands in stark contrast to hostile language against refugees by right-wing governments at home and abroad. SYRIZA’s distinct political and ideological stance on the refugee/migrant crisis is represented not only through the very meaning of its arguments, but also through the rhetorical framing of these arguments. The party leader deliberately introduces keywords that are either neutral or positive toward refugees and migrants. In this way, Greece’s left party tries to change the terms through which the refugee/migrant crisis is debated and perceived in the national context.

## Conclusions

The analysis of recent Greek political rhetoric shows that the ongoing refugee/migrant crisis is not a matter locked into one “objective” perspective. Instead, it is a field of contentious politics and antagonistic meanings and interpretations attached to specific arguments. Indeed, apart from a few points of convergence, the two leading political parties under examination frame the refugee/migrant crisis in a completely different manner. These differences are connected to their broader disagreements about the European Union, economic development, and social cohesion; they also reflect two distinct value systems and political visions. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that the perception of this crisis is basically conditioned by various and often opposed ideological viewpoints.

The case of Greece demonstrates how political parties formulate their views about the refugee/migrant crisis into competing arguments based on their broader political and ideological beliefs. From the rhetorical point of view, these arguments involve distinctive metaphorical schemes, appeal to different commonplaces and acceptances, and are based on alternate types of reasoning. Through these arguments, political leaders seek to promote specific meanings and perceptions. They are also used to enhance partisan ties and mobilize the public toward specific political actions.

Despite the deep-seated antagonism between the two parties, they also share some common points. First, both political parties agree that the current unprecedented refugee/migrant crisis must be immediately and drastically addressed. This is the case especially for Greece, because it is a geographical entry point of refugees and migrants to the EU, and because it suffers from a deep financial recession that minimizes its capacity to integrate and support newcomers effectively. Second, both political parties acknowledge that Greece has no capacity to address this issue alone; instead, it needs the EU's contribution. Thus, the government must urgently put the issue at the top of the EU policy agenda.

However, these points of convergence are combined with a directly opposed set of proposed solutions. Moreover, both parties accuse the other of having policies that encourage extreme-right political movements and enhance xenophobic attitudes and anti-immigrant feelings. First of all, the two parties identify different causes for the emergence of the refugee/migrant crisis and, by extension, adopt different views about the identity of new arrivals. ND perceives the issue mainly as the result of illegal activity of immigrants and their smugglers. From this point of view, they argue that most new arrivals are “smuggled immigrants” (*lathrometanastes*) rather than refugees, a pejorative term that represents them as agents or willful participants in organized crime (smuggled immigration). On the contrary, for SYRIZA the new arrivals are mostly refugees, innocent victims fleeing wars and military interventions in several countries, unwillingly driven out of their homelands.

Second, the two parties detect different risks that arise from the influx of foreigners. For ND the illegal activity of traffickers and immigrants constitutes a threat to internal security and social cohesion. It has also a significant impact on economic development since these illegal activities undermine the national economy and discourage private investments. On the contrary, for SYRIZA the refugee/migrant crisis generates a very different concern. What is at stake, rather, are the political integrity of the EU—its ability to solve the problems it is confronted with in a manner that distributes the burden fairly among member-states and is in accordance to its commitment to human rights, humanitarian protection and international peace.

Third, the two parties adopt very different policy discourses regarding the refugee/migrant crisis. The proposed policies by ND focus on preventing refugees from coming to Greece and, by

synecdoche, to Europe. To this end, its political discourse is replete with proposals of punitive measures that block illegal immigration. On the contrary, in the political discourse of SYRIZA, proposed policies favor solidarity activities and actions that promote the social inclusion of refugees and by extension their social and economic development. Especially for host countries like Greece, this policy of “open borders” is acknowledged as necessary in order to prevent the entrapping of refugees against their will.

Fourth, the arguments we have mentioned imply a dissimilar narrative about the EU’s role and EU-Greek relations. For ND, the EU must protect its borders in order to safeguard its role as a key international player. The specific role of Greece is to ensure its national security, not only for Greece’s own benefit, but also because the borders of Greece are the (southeast) borders of the EU. On the contrary, for SYRIZA the refugee/migrant crisis is a chance for Europe to corroborate its values and political principles, that is, the spirit of solidarity and humanity. The same principles should also animate a new, alternative political approach to the financial and humanitarian crisis that resulted from the EU-condoned austerity measures in Greece. In other words, while ND sees Greece as the border guard of EU, SYRIZA sees it as the good ambassador and executor of EU’s humanitarian values.

These differences in the political rhetoric of the two parties are visible in the metaphors they use. ND’s metaphorical scheme of “unfenced vineyard” (*xefrago ampeli*) is a rhetorical configuration of “ownership” of national land that is at risk from external threats and must therefore be sealed off. Other metaphors used by the conservative party are those of the “country as a container” and of “immigration as a natural disaster.” To the contrary, in order to underline the crisis as a process of forced uprooting, the term used by SYRIZA, “refugee flows” (*prosfygikes roes*), turns attention to the systemic and structural factors that produce refugees rather than illegal immigrants. Thus, it neutralizes the negative connotations and eliminates any reference to the agency of the individuals concerned. Ultimately, the metaphors used by both parties function as key reflections of broader cultural and political worldviews.

In sum, the Greek experience indicates that refugee/immigration policy, like any other policy, is conditioned by disparate worldviews articulated by argumentative discourse, rather than by the unmediated application of rational solutions. Language is thus a tool that shapes power relations

and underlines important political and ideological differences between the main parties in this debate. This illuminates the importance of political rhetoric as an integral part of a political struggle that crucially affects the life of millions of displaced and migrating people, and to a lesser extent the life of people in the countries where they arrive.

#### <n1>Notes

<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Appeal 2016–2017*, unhcr.org. It is estimated that 3,771 refugees and migrants lost their lives trying to reach Europe in 2015, and almost as many in 2014 and in 2016. See also *Operational Portal, Refugee Situations: Mediterranean Situation*, unhcr.org.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted at this point that the so-called far-right parties are not necessarily identical to those with an anti-immigration stance. See Joost van Spanje, “The Wrong and the Right: A Comparative Analysis of ‘Anti-immigration’ and ‘Far Right’ Parties,” *Government and Opposition* 46, no. 3 (2011): 293–320.

<sup>3</sup> See Georgia Spyropoulou and Dimitris Christopoulos, *Refugee Issue: “Will We Succeed?”: A Management Review and Comprehensive Proposals* [Προσφυγικό: “Θα τα καταφέρουμε;”. Ένας απολογισμός διαχείρισης και προτάσεις διεξόδου] (Athens: Papazisis Publications, 2016), 18.

<sup>4</sup> Spyropoulou and Christopoulos, 14–15.

<sup>5</sup> Spyropoulou and Christopoulos, 19.

<sup>6</sup> We use the composite term “refugee/migrant” throughout the text to indicate that the crisis concerns neither refugees nor immigrants alone: among the thousands of daily arrivals to Greece there are both refugees (i.e., asylum seekers, mainly from war-torn Syria) and economic immigrants fleeing poverty and other hardships. This is why official political rhetoric also mixes the two terms “refugees” and “migrants.” Of course, this mixing can also be a deliberate political move to downplay the international obligations of a receiving country toward refugees, as we shall show in our analysis. Still, the two issues are closely interconnected from a rhetorical point of view, which is why we chose to use the composite term.

<sup>7</sup> Georgios Karyotis and Stratos Patrikios, “Religion, Securitization and Anti-immigration Attitudes: The Case of Greece,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 1 (2010): 43–57; Stefania Kalogeraki, “The Upsurge in Intolerance against Migrants during the Greek Recession,” *International Journal of Diverse Identities* 13 (2015): 1–16; Lia Figgou, Antonis Sapountzis, Nikos Bozatzis, Antonis Gardikiotis, and Pavlos Pantazis, “Constructing the Stereotype of Immigrants’ Criminality: Accounts of Fear and Risk in Talk about Immigration to Greece,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 21 (2011): 164–177.

<sup>8</sup> We primarily refer to the work by Anna Triandafyllidou and her colleagues. Anna Triandafyllidou, “The Political Discourse on Immigration in Southern Europe: A Critical Analysis,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 10 (2000): 373–389 (focusing on the discourse of NGOs, trade unions, and public employees); Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas, “Constructing Difference: The Mosque Debates in Greece,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 6 (2009): 957–975 (focusing on media and parliamentary debates); Thanos Maroukis, “Irregular Migration in Greece: Size and Features, Causes and Discourses,” in *Irregular Migration in Europe: Myths and Realities*, ed. Anna Triandafyllidou (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 93–113.

<sup>9</sup> James Martin, *Politics and Rhetoric. A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Allan Finlayson, “From Beliefs to Arguments: Interpretive Methodology and Rhetorical Political Analysis,” *Political Studies Association* 9, no. 4 (2007): 545–563.

<sup>10</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 159.

<sup>13</sup> Charteris-Black; Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Jörg Zinken, Lina Hellsten, and Brigitte Nerlich, “Discourse Metaphors,” in *Body, Language and Mind. Volume 2: Sociocultural Situatedness*, ed. Roslyn M. Frank, René Dirven, Tom Ziemke, and Enrique Bernárdez (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 363.

<sup>15</sup> Andreas Musolff, *Metaphor and Political Discourse: Analogical Reasoning in Debates about Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); Elena Semino, *Metaphor in Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Terrell Carver and Jernej Pikalo, eds., *Political Language and Metaphor: Interpreting and Changing the World* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> All translations of quotes to English are our own. Texts in the original Greek are available to readers upon request.

<sup>17</sup> After long political and legal struggles, the situation was partly alleviated by Law 4332/2015, which granted access to citizenship for second-generation immigrants.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Triandafyllidou, “Greek Immigration Policy at the Turn of the 21st Century: Lack of Political Will or Purposeful Mismanagement?,” *European Journal of Migration and Law* 11, no. 2 (2009): 159–178.

<sup>19</sup> Charalambos Kasimis, “Greece, Migration 1830s to Present,” in *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, ed. Immanuel Ness, vol. 3 (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 1602–1609.

<sup>20</sup> In 2010, 90 percent of all apprehensions for unauthorized entry in the EU were made in Greece. “Frontex Deploys Rapid Border Intervention Teams to Greece,” Frontex News Releases, October 25, 2010, [frontex.europa.eu](http://frontex.europa.eu).

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed account of Greece’s irregular immigration control policies, see Danai Angeli, Angeliki Dimitriadi, and Anna Triandafyllidou, *Assessing the Cost Effectiveness of Irregular Migration Control Policies in Greece*, Midas Report (Athens: ELIAMEP, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, “Fact Sheet: EU-Turkey Agreement: Questions and Answers,” [europa.eu](http://europa.eu).

<sup>23</sup> Laura Pitel and Jim Brunsten, “Blow for Migrant Deal as Turkey Rejects EU Terror Law Demands,” *Financial Times*, August 9, 2016, [ft.com](http://ft.com).

<sup>24</sup> We use these party-ideological labels with caution, on the basis of the parties' official self-identification, and not their actual rhetoric or policy lines.

<sup>25</sup> Antonis A. Ellinas, "The Rise of Golden Dawn: The New Face of the Far Right in Greece," *South European Society and Politics* 18, no. 4 (2013): 543–565.

<sup>26</sup> For many observers, it is surprising how a nationalist party (Independent Greeks) is in a stable government coalition with a humanist party (SYRIZA), considering how opposed the two parties are on immigration. Suffice it to say here that the coalition is sustained mainly by a joint opposition to austerity economics and a common populist language.

<sup>27</sup> "Greece Votes to Grant Citizenship to Immigrants' Children," *Daily Star* (Lebanon), June 24, 2015, [dailystar.com.lb](http://dailystar.com.lb).

<sup>28</sup> Response of the PM Antonis Samaras to the programmatic statements of the new government, July 8, 2012, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

<sup>29</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, June 15, 2012, [antilogos-gr.blogspot.com](http://antilogos-gr.blogspot.com).

<sup>30</sup> Response to the programmatic statements of the new government, see above n.28.

<sup>31</sup> Speech at the opening of Seventy-Seventh Thessaloniki International Fair, September 8, 2012, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

<sup>32</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, see above n.29.

<sup>33</sup> Speech at the opening of Seventy-Seventh Thessaloniki International Fair, see above n.31.

<sup>34</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, see above n.29. In another occasion he argues: "In the platform of the conference of parties involving the European Left, there is a position that you must abolish Frontex, which prevents free immigration in Europe. So, to let in all smuggled immigrants" (Speech in parliament on the occasion of SYRIZA's proposal for a vote of no confidence to government, November 10, 2013, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr)).

<sup>35</sup> Speech during the programmatic statements of the new government, July 7, 2012, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

- <sup>36</sup> Speech at the preparatory meeting for the Party Convention in Thessaloniki, June 9, 2013, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>37</sup> Speech at the preparatory meeting for the Party Convention in Thessaloniki, see above n.36.
- <sup>38</sup> Speech to the Political Committee of ND, October 12, 2013, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>39</sup> Speech at the Ninth Ordinary Convention of ND, June 28, 2013, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>40</sup> Jonathan Charteris-Black, "Britain as a Container: Immigration Metaphors in the 2005 Election Campaign," *Discourse & Society* 17, no. 5 (2006): 563–581.
- <sup>41</sup> Speech to the Political Committee of ND, see above n.38; our emphasis.
- <sup>42</sup> Speech at the Parliamentary Group of ND, July 24, 2012, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>44</sup> Speech at the opening of the Seventy-Ninth International Fair in Thessaloniki, September 6, 2013, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr). Speech in a campaign rally in Tripoli, May 20, 2013, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr); our emphasis.
- <sup>45</sup> Speech at the preparatory meeting for the Party Convention in Thessaloniki, see above n.36.
- <sup>46</sup> Speech at the Ninth Ordinary Convention of ND, see above n.39.
- <sup>47</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Komotini, January 5, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>48</sup> Speech at the Parliament Group of ND, November 4, 2012, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>49</sup> Speech at a party event on the occasion of forty years of ND, October 4, 2014, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>50</sup> Speech in parliament on the occasion of SYRIZA's proposal for a vote of no confidence to government, August 10, 2014, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).
- <sup>51</sup> Speech by Tsipras at the Parliament Group of SYRIZA, October 3, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).



<sup>53</sup> Comment by the president of SYRIZA for refugees, September 4, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).  
Speech by Tsipras at the EU Summit on Immigration, April 24, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

<sup>54</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, September 18, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

<sup>55</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, see above n.54.

<sup>57</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, see above n.54. We refer mainly to the unstable regimes that were put in place following the Arab revolution, the ISIS attacks across the Maghreb, but also the Turkish domestic troubles and its involvement in the Syrian war. Speech by Tsipras at the Summit for Immigration and Migration Flows, October 1, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

<sup>58</sup> Policy statements of government by Tsipras, February 8, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr). See also speech by Tsipras at the EU Summit on Immigration, April 24, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Policy statements of government by Tsipras, October 5, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

<sup>60</sup> Statements by Tsipras after meeting with European Commissioner for Immigration Dimitris Avramopoulos, April 7, 2015, [primeminister.gr](http://primeminister.gr).

<sup>61</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, see above n.54.

<sup>62</sup> Comment by Tsipras for refugees, September 4, 2015, [www.syriza.gr](http://www.syriza.gr).

<sup>63</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, see above n.54.

<sup>64</sup> Speech by Tsipras at the Parliament Group of SYRIZA, see above n.51.

<sup>65</sup> Policy statements of government by Tsipras, see above n.59.

<sup>66</sup> Speech by Tsipras at the SYRIZA Parliament Group, see above n.64.

<sup>67</sup> Speech by Tsipras in the Summit for Immigration and Refugee Flows, see above n.57.

<sup>68</sup> Comment by Tsipras for refugees, see above n.62.

<sup>69</sup> Comment by Tsipras for refugees, see above n.62.

<sup>70</sup> Speech by Tsipras at the EU Summit on Immigration, see above n.58.

<sup>72</sup> Policy statements of government by Tsipras, see above n.58. Comment by the president of SYRIZA for refugees, see above n.53. See also speech in a campaign rally in Levadia, September 4, 2015, syriza.gr.

<sup>74</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Korinthos, June 10, 2015, syriza.gr, and speech in a campaign rally in Kalamata, January 11, 2015, syriza.gr. Speech in a campaign rally in Komotini, January 13, 2015, syriza.gr.

<sup>75</sup> To be fair, we must note a shift in the type of arrivals at the Greek border, which became predominantly Syrian refugees only after SYRIZA came to power in January 2015.

<sup>76</sup> Statements by Tsipras after meeting with European Commissioner for Immigration Dimitris Avramopoulos, April 7, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Levadia, see above n.72.

<sup>78</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Levadia, see above n.72.

<sup>79</sup> Speech at a campaign rally in Athens, see above n.54.