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Climate Politics: Analysing the discourse concerning climate change at the Greek Parliament, 2000-2007

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Paper prepared for the ECPR 5th General Conference, Section “Green Politics”, Panel “The Politics of Climate Change 1”, September 10-12, 2009, Potsdam, Germany

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ABSTRACT

The present paper presents some initial quantitative findings about the Greek political parties' discourse concerning climate change (CC). The data come from the Greek parliament's minutes for the period 2000-2007. We test a number of hypotheses concerning the "politicization" of climate change by the different parties. Our results suggest that it has been the minor oppositional parties which were more engaged in the CC discourse and in particular the Greek 'new left' party (SYN). Ruling parties (the Conservatives and the Socialists) demonstrated similar –and much lower- levels of engagement in the discourse while we find no substantial differences as parties moved from government to opposition and vice versa.

Introduction

In recent years we have seen a number of studies analyzing the politics of climate change both at the national and at the international level. Yet most of these studies are concerned with the latter stages of the policy-making cycle, namely *policy implementation* and *policy assessment*. Little emphasis is usually given to prior –and arguably more controversial- stages such as *agenda setting* and *political decision making*. In other words, available research is more oriented on what national governments do for climate change and how well they do it rather on how they get to the point of choosing to do the one or the other thing in the first place. Yet, before any issue receives the policy-makers' attention it needs to be defined and perceived as a 'problem' requiring some action(s) to be taken. And this is even more the case for climate change, a highly complex issue entangled in a great level of scientific uncertainty.

We therefore think it is important, before moving to assessing and analyzing policies, to investigate in greater detail the ideational and legitimizing background of these policy choices. One way of doing so is through discourse analysis. According to Hajer (1995:44), a discourse is 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that is produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities'. Discourses are not mere discussions: they define the issue in hand, they set a particular framework for understanding and reasoning it, they suggest specific options for action. In other words, a specific discourse 'frames' an issue in a particular way.

'Frames' are another important concept in social sciences research and they deal again with creation of meaning and understanding: they are "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life space and the world at large' (Snow et al. 1986:464).

As a matter of fact, analyses along the previous lines are quite common when of climate change is investigated as a topic of the 'public agenda' (Cobb, Ross, & Ross 1976). Researchers have time and again used newspapers' data and employed content and/or discourse analysis techniques to demonstrate how 'climate change' has been perceived, constructed and addressed [to name but a few (Billett 2009; Boykoff 2008; Brossard, Shanahan, & McComas 2004; Carvalho 2007; Carvalho & Burgess 2005; Doulton & Brown 2009; Grundmann 2007)]. On the other hand, very few studies have employed these insights for the analysis of the workings of the 'institutional agenda', the policy making process itself. This is particularly regrettable since discourse analysis, as recently pointed out in a review paper, has the 'capacity to reveal the role of language in politics, [...] to reveal the embeddedness of language in practices and [...] to answer 'how' questions and to illuminate mechanisms' (Hajer & Versteeg 2005). Worth-mentioning exceptions to this general rule include Carvalho's (2005) portrayal of British governments' discursive strategies concerning climate change as reported in the press; Hovden & Lindseth's (2004) discourse analysis of the Norwegian climate policy; Stevenson's (2008) analysis of the Australian Liberal-National coalition government's framing of climate change¹; and, Weingart et al.'s (2000) discourse analysis of climate change in the German parliament.

The present paper reports on the initial findings of a research project modelled along the lines of Weingart et al.'s one for Germany, aiming to analyze how the discourse concerning climate change in the Greek parliament has developed through the years. Herein we present only some initial quantitative findings of our ongoing research. These data offer an overview of the parliamentary debate concerning climate change in Greece. Furthermore, they allow us to test a number of hypotheses concerning the Greek parties' "politicization" of climate change.

Greek parties' politicization of climate change

¹ Based on an analysis of parliamentary transcripts, media releases, speech and interview transcripts, and official government publications

We take out cues from Carter's (2006) analysis of the British parties' "politicization of the environment". The hypotheses Carter suggested and tested were as follows. First it was hypothesized that since the environment is a 'valence issue' (i.e. an issue on which there is a broad public agreement of desired outcomes) all parties would wish to appear 'pro-environmental'. Furthermore, they would 'pursue a strategy of preference-accommodation with limited party competition over environmental issues' (op.cit. 750). Thus, one would expect to find limited party competition over the environment. On the contrary, the second hypothesis, based on party competition literature, suggests that opposition parties will be more likely to emphasize environmental issues (p.751). An accompanying hypothesis is that especially parties with fewer resources, and thus less access to the media, as well as fewer links to established economic interest will be the ones placing a stronger emphasis on environmental issues (ibid.). Finally, the last hypothesis, based on the 'new politic' theory, anticipates that 'new left' parties will exhibit the strongest concern (op.cit. 751-752).

Based on the previous discussion we can re-formulate Carter's hypotheses for the Greek case. For the period under investigation (2000-2007) four parties had been represented to the Greek Parliament. The Socialists (PASOK- Panhellenic Socialist Movement) was the ruling party for the period 2000-2004. Established shortly after the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, PASOK developed from the anti-system, anti-EU, anti-NATO left party of the early eighties into a centre-left party which led Greece into the European Monetary Union (EMU) in the early 2000s. Under the leadership of Kostas Simitis, party leader and premier since 1996, PASOK espoused a 'Modernising' stance, promoting a centrist (if not liberal) economic and social agenda. It thus moved very close to its arch-rival, the Conservatives' party (*New Democracy*). Similarly established in 1974, ND has moved away both from its right (and rather ultra-conservative) profile of the early eighties as well as from its neo-liberal inclinations of the early nineties, into a centre-right position. It won the 2004 election after eight years in opposition and repeated the feat in the early election on 2007.

These two parties have alternatively ruled Greece ever since the establishment of the Third Hellenic Republic in 1974, with a brief break in 1989-1990 when coalition governments were formed. Between themselves they have traditionally shared over 80% of the vote. The two major opposition parties have been *KKE*, the

Greek Communist Party still adhering to the Soviet orthodoxy, and *SYN/SYRIZA* (The Coalition of the Radical Left, established in 2004). This last party is considered the Greek equivalent of a ‘new left’ party: more importantly for our analysis, *SYN* (the Coalitions’ largest partner) has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on environmental issues. To that extent in 2003 the party renamed itself into ‘Coalition of the Left, of Social Movements and the Ecology’.

Accordingly then, the previous hypotheses will be re-formulated as follows for the Greek case:

H1. *There will be no significant differences concerning references to climate change amongst Greek political parties*

H2. *Opposition parties will place more emphasis on climate change. Thus:*

H2a: *ND’s references will be higher for the 2000-2004 (when the party was in opposition) to the 2004-2007 period (when the party was in government), and;*

H2b: *PASOK’s references will be higher for the 2004-2007 (when the party was in opposition) to the 2000-2004 period (when the party was in government).*

H3. *KKE and SYN/SYRIZA –being lesser parties- will place more emphasis on climate change than the two governmental parties.*

H4a. *SYN/SYRIZA –being a new left party- will place more emphasis on climate change than all other parties.*

H4b. *KKE –being a party with a strong productivist tradition and strong links with labour interests- will place the least emphasis on climate change than all other parties.*

Methods and data

Our data originates from the minutes of the Greek parliament sessions for the period 2000-2007, available on line. We performed a key-word search of these documents. The key words used (in various wild-card formats) were: ‘greenhouse’; ‘climate change’; ‘Kyoto’, ‘renewable’, ‘wind’, ‘solar’ and ‘lignite’². Cleaning the data returned 22 texts for the 2000-2004 and 57 texts for the 2004-2007 periods

² The last being the major fuel used for energy/electricity production in Greece and thus mainly responsible for the country’s greenhouse emissions (Botetzagias 2008)

respectively. In each of these texts more than one MP usually address the issue of climate change, each one producing a distinct discourse consisting of a various mix of ‘analytical’, ‘evaluative’ and ‘positional/relational’ components (Carvalho 2005:8-9). These elements serve different discursive aims: the ‘analytical’ deals with what it is or what it is about; the ‘evaluative’ utterances make judgements, attribute importance and/or judge quality; finally, the ‘positional/’ discourse component ‘[...] describe how the speaker attributes particular positions, roles, or places to other social actors. [While] Relational strategies are equivalent, but centred upon the speaker – how s/he constitutes her/himself into particular relations with others (be it social actors, issues, or other subjects)’ (ibid.).

In this paper we will not differentiate between the three components but will report the total results of all MPs’ deliveries concerning climate change. Furthermore, in order to take into account the variable sizes of the party parliamentary groups, all raw party scores were divided by the number of MPs each party had for the given parliamentary session. The parties’ relative strength is shown in Table 1.

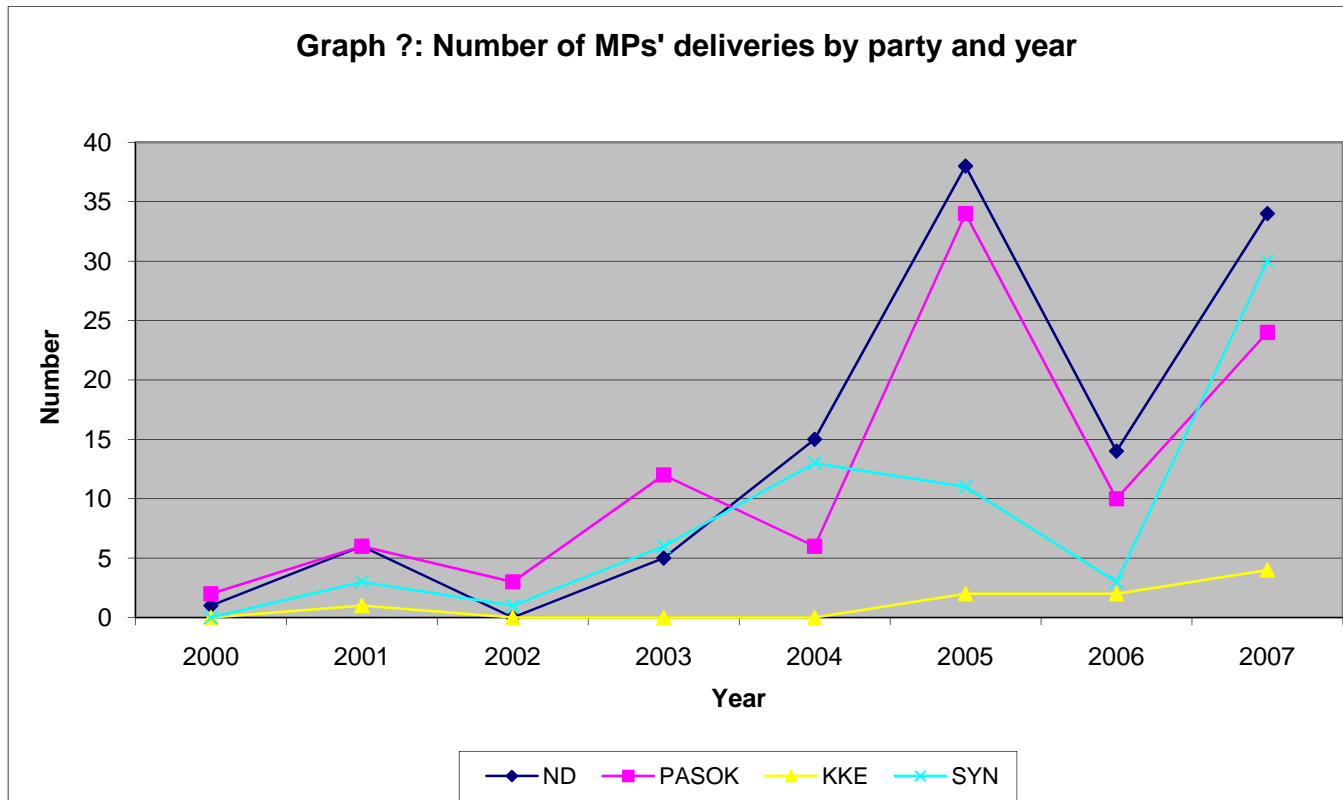
Table 1: Greek parties’ parliamentary strength (2000-2007)

<i>Party</i>	2000-2004		2004-2007	
	% of vote	Number of MPs	% of vote	Number of MPs
ND (<i>Conservatives</i>)	43.74	125	45.36	166
PASOK (<i>Socialists</i>)	43.79	158	40.55	116
KKE (<i>Communists</i>)	5.52	11	5.9	12
SYN/SYRIZA (<i>New Left</i>)	3.2	6	3.26	6

Results

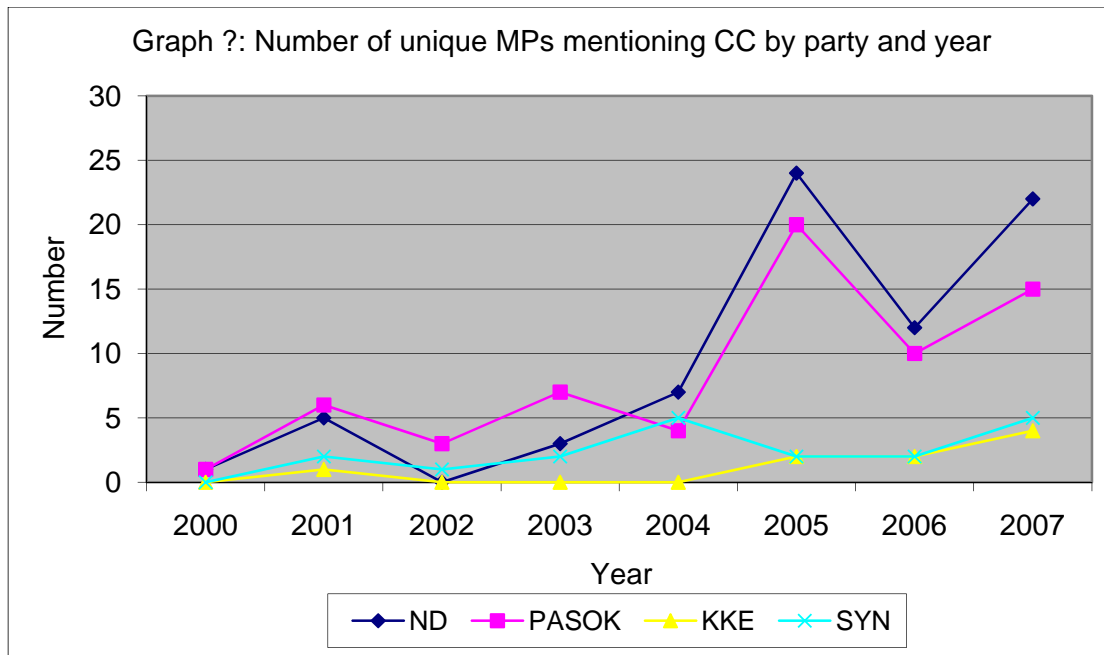
Graphs 1 and 2 reports the development of the climate change related discussion in the Greek Parliament. Over the years we see a sustained increase of both the number of deliveries given by MPs mentioning climate change as well as of the number of individual MPs who referred to climate change issues. This of course is hardly surprising since over time climate change has gained prominence –and has

commanded attention- both internationally and domestically³. In Graph 1 we report the number of deliveries including reference to climate change made by MPs. The accompanying Graph 2 takes into account the fact that these deliveries could have been given but by a handful of very active –and environmentally minded!- individuals. Thus Graph 2 reports on the number of *unique* MPs addressing climate change for a given year⁴.



³ Thus the peaks for years 2005 and 2007 in these Graphs are largely due to the fact that it was then that the draft laws concerning the (further) energy sector's privatization and energy planning were debated.

⁴ i.e. each MP was counted only once per year no matter how many deliveries s/he had made.



Yet the above figures have to be standardized against each party's relative strength. The resulting scores are shown in Tables 2 & 3. In Table 2 the number of deliveries by each party MPs per year (i.e. the scores in Graph 1) is divided by the number of MPs the party had⁵: the higher the score reported in a cell, the more references to climate change made that party's delegation for the specific year. Similarly, in Table 3, the number of unique MPs making a delivery (i.e. i.e. the scores in Graph 2) is divided by the party's strength and the percentage is reported. Again, the higher the percentage reported in each cell, the more of that party's MPs referred to CC for that particular year.

⁵ And further multiplied by 100 since the scores are too small to report.

Table 2: MPs' deliveries per year divided by the party's strength

<i>Year</i>	ND	PASOK	KKE	SYN/SYRIZA
2000	0.80	1.27	0.00	0.00
2001	4.80	3.80	9.09	50.00
2002	0.00	1.90	0.00	16.67
2003	4.00	7.59	0.00	100.00
2004	9.04	5.17	0.00	216.67
2005	22.89	29.31	16.67	183.33
2006	8.43	8.62	16.67	50.00
2007	20.48	20.69	33.33	500.00
<i>Average 2000-2004⁶</i>	2.40	3.64	2.27	191.67
<i>Average 2004-2007</i>	15.21	15.95	118.75	1000.00

Table 3: Unique MPs mentioning climate change divided by the party's strength

<i>Year</i>	ND	PASOK	KKE	SYN/SYRIZA
2000	0.8	0.6	0.0	0.0
2001	4.0	3.8	9.1	33.3
2002	0.0	1.9	0.0	16.7
2003	2.4	4.4	0.0	33.3
2004	4.2	3.4	0.0	83.3
2005	14.5	17.2	16.7	33.3
2006	7.2	8.6	16.7	33.3
2007	13.3	12.9	33.3	83.3
<i>2000-2004⁷</i>	6.40	8.23	9.09	66.67
<i>2004-2007</i>	27.71	29.31	41.67	100.00

Both the previous Tables seem to tell a similar story. They were the two minor oppositional parties which placed a stronger emphasis on climate change. Taking the parties relative strength into account it is obvious that the two Greek left parties outperformed both the Socialists and the Conservatives, with SYN/SYRIZA doing more tellingly so. For example, for the 2004-2007 period, SYN/SYRIZA delegation's deliveries were almost tenfold more than KKE's (and over 6000 times the governing Conservatives' deliveries). Similarly, *all* SYN/SYRIZA MPs addressed climate change in some way throughout that period (indicating -in our understanding- a party-wide concern) as compared to one third for the two major parties' MPs (Conservatives and Socialists).

⁶ Sum of all deliveries for the given period, divided by the number of years (=4) and the party delegation's strength, and then multiplied by 100

⁷ Unique MPs addressing climate change for the whole of the given period divided by the delegation's strength

This (tentative) conclusion is further substantiated if we focus on the number of times that party leaders referred to climate change in Parliament (Table 4). One could argue that the more times the leader of a party refers to a specific topic the more emphasis the party places on that topic. Again, SYN/SYRIZA’s predominance is evident.

Table 4: Number of times party leaders mentioned climate change in Parliament

<i>Year</i>	ND	PASOK	KKE	SYN/SYRIZA
<i>2000</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>2001</i>	1	0	0	0
<i>2002</i>	0	0	0	1
<i>2003</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>2004</i>	0	0	0	2
<i>2005</i>	2	0	0	0
<i>2006</i>	0	0	0	2
<i>2007</i>	3	2	1	8
<i>TOTAL</i>	6	2	1	13

A final hint is offered by an overview of the party discourses concerning climate change, presented in Table 5. In this Table we report the sums of all discursive elements (‘analytical’, ‘evaluative’ and ‘positional/relational’) for the two parliamentary sessions. All references were grouped together –irrespectively of the discursive category they might belong- save one type: namely, references made the speaker concerning his/her party’s policies concerning climate change while it was in government. Including such references –usually of a self-congratulatory character- in our analysis would introduce a systematic bias against the minor oppositional parties which had not been in government and thus could not boast of any ‘achievements’. Thus they are not included in our analysis.

Table 5: Total number of all discursive components divided by all deliveries

	ND	PASOK	KKE	SYN/SYRIZA
<i>2000-2004</i>	1.92	1.48	2.00	2.10
<i>2004-2007</i>	0.71	1.09	1.87	1.68

Table 5 shows that while *all* opposition parties outperformed the incumbent –a fact which could be attributed a confrontational oppositional stance- it was the *minor*

oppositional parties’ discourse about climate change which included more discursive components on average. In other words, the smaller parties’ discourses on climate change had been more comprehensive/extensive.

Discussion

This paper presented some initial quantitative findings and set to check a number of hypotheses concerning the ‘politicization’ of the climate change discourse in the Greek Parliament for the 2000-2007. These hypotheses were tested against data collected from the online minutes of the parliamentary sessions. The following Table 6 summarizes how well each hypothesis fared, based on the data already presented.

Table 6: Hypotheses concerning the ‘politicization’ of the climate change discourse

Hypothesis	Confirmed or otherwise
No significant differences amongst parties	<i>Rejected</i>
While in opposition parties will place stronger emphasis on CC than while in government	<i>Not confirmed</i>
Minor parties will place greater emphasis on CC than governmental ones	<i>Rather confirmed</i>
SYN –being a ‘new Left’ party- will place the most emphasis on CC	<i>Confirmed</i>
KKE- being an ‘old left’ party will place the least emphasis on CC	<i>Not confirmed</i>

It is obvious that we find important differences between the parties. As anticipated, the ‘new left’ party of SYN/SYRIZA turned out to be the most active in the parliamentary debates about climate change: its MPs made the most deliveries and their clear majority got at some point involved to the discussions. Furthermore this party’s leaders (N. Konstantopoulos and Al. Alavanos for the 2000-2004 & 2004-2007 period respectively) were the most vociferous of all party leaders.

Our hypothesis for the Greek Communist Party was confirmed only for the period up to 2004. Back then the Greek Communists’ performance paled and/or underscored the two major parties. Yet the situation changed drastically after 2004.

While still trailing SYN/SYRIZA, KKE had clearly distinguished itself from the two major political parties: thus, overall, our hypothesis cannot be considered confirmed.

Thus, over time we can see a clear dividing line emerging between the two major governmental parties (the Conservatives and the Socialists) and the two minor left parties. In the 2004-2007 period we see a clear split between KKE & SYN on one side and ND & PASOK at the other side. Furthermore, the magnitude of these two camps' difference increased manifold for that same period.

Finally, concerning the change of stance as a party passes from government into opposition, our results offer no definite conclusions. The Socialists did outperform the Conservatives while in opposition (2004-2007). But they had done so even when they were in government (2000-2004). One could argue that this might suggest that the Socialists have traditionally been more CC-concerned. While substantiating such a claim would require further and more detailed research, a closer reading of the figures suggests that these two parties not differed that much. Put it in another way, there seems to be a small (quantitative) ditch separating PASOK from ND –yet there lies an abyss between those two and the Greek Left.

As a final note, we would like to alert the reader to the fact that these are but the preliminary results of an ongoing research project and thus they should be treated with the appropriate caution. Numbers do not lie –but they rarely tell a story either. The fact that a given party scored higher than others on the indices we present means simply that this party's MPs had referred to climate change *more times* in Parliament. It does *not* mean that this party is 'greener' than the rest neither that it advocated a more aggressive and/or proactive climate change policy for Greece. To reach such conclusions a qualitative analysis of the parties' discourses is needed –and we hope that it will be the topic of a follow-up paper.

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