CHAPTER 7

Taking stances on the Greek crisis
Evidence from Facebook interaction

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In this paper I explore informal conversations about the Greek crisis in the social network site of Facebook, drawing on Du Bois’ (2007) theory on stance, as well as on methods of discourse-centred online ethnography and corpus linguistics. I closely analyse a particular discursive episode between three Greek Facebook users (two male students of International and European Studies and one female Law student) and investigate how they take stances towards austerity and towards one another. Focusing on two interactional stance-taking activities, positioning and (dis)alignment, I argue that while the participants express divergent stances, they also show heightened awareness and criticality of both the crisis context and Facebook’s generic context.

Keywords: alignment, collocation analysis, ethnography, Facebook, stance

1. Introduction

(1) Χρησιμοποιώ πολλές φορές το facebook για να εκφράσω πολιτικές απόψεις, έμμεσα ή άμεσα, αυτό βεβαίως επισύρει κριτική, η οποία είναι καλοδεχούμενη.
‘I often use Facebook to express political views, indirectly or directly, this of course draws criticism, which is welcome.’

This quote is excerpted from an online interview I held with Gabriel (pseudonym), a Greek Facebook user whose Facebook activities I have been studying for almost three years. A major asset of Facebook, as is suggested by Gabriel, is that it offers its participants the unique opportunity not only to express personal political opinions, but also to engage in the process of structuring and developing arguments in favour of or against these opinions. Within the contemporary social media landscape characterised by perpetual user-produced and user-consumed content, stances, namely expressions of emotions, thoughts, opinions and assessments, are
incessantly articulated in status updates, comments, “Likes”, tweets and retweets, patchworks of texts, videos and images. Such stances are unbridled, public or semi-public, innovative and for the most part uncensored. It could be argued that social media encourage self-expression in miscellaneous ways, outclassing other domains of externalisation in people’s daily interactions (see also Seargeant and Tagg 2014).

Since it erupted in 2009, the Greek debt crisis opened many serious wounds in Greek society: unemployment, brain drain, deteriorating labour conditions, suffocation of small and medium-sized enterprises, insufficient health care services, poverty, homelessness, suicides, rise of fascism and violence. In the maelstrom of these volatile and uneasy times, Greeks have been experiencing – both at a socio-political and a personal level – a new reality defined by a mélange of conflicting sentiments: shock, fear, uncertainty, insecurity, disappointment, disorientation, pessimism, nativism, pressure, anxiety, depression, despair, exhaustion, feeling of being suspended, inability to produce any concrete projections for the future, indignity, rage, resignation, menacing misanthropy, racism and pain (Papailias 2011a; Varoufakis 2013). Against this backdrop, the term crisis within the Greek context is not restricted to the economic – financial and fiscal – crisis but encompasses a multiple sense of crisis as political, social, moral, emotional, ideological and humanitarian, as well.

Individual stances (i.e. evaluation and expressiveness) as well as socio-cultural stances (i.e. general beliefs and knowledge Greeks share as members of the Greek community) about the crisis have been ubiquitous in both offline and online discourses, with their producers illustrating a wide range of stance-taking modes (see, for example, Georgalou 2014b). Viewing social media as “increasingly important and meaningful sociocultural and communicative niches” (Leppänen and Kytölä forthcoming), this paper seeks to address lay perceptions of the Greek crisis through citizens’ informal conversations about it in the social network site of Facebook.

The paper is organised in the following manner. Section 2 taps into the implications of the crisis on the present study. Section 3 introduces the concept of stance. Section 4 elaborates on how Facebook affordances mobilise stance-taking. Section 5 lays out specific information about the dataset of the study as well as the approach used to explore stance-taking on Facebook, that is a synergy between discourse analysis, online ethnography and corpus linguistics. Section 6 zooms in on a particular discursive episode from Gabriel’s Facebook profile. The analysis examines specific stance-taking strategies and how they enable Facebook participants to position themselves towards the austerity measures and towards one another, especially when they disagree. Section 7 summarises and reflects upon the key findings.
2. Crisis, discourse and reflexivity

The findings presented herein are part of a larger study on constructions of identity on Facebook, which draws on data collected from 2010 to 2013 (Georgalou 2014a). When I started garnering my data back in May 2010, the first austerity measures had already been put forth (introducing pensions frozen, cap on civil servant pay, changes to employment regulation, VAT increase, alcohol, cigarette and fuel tax increase), citizens were demonstrating en masse and social unrest was growing all over Greece. Such a dire predicament did not leave Greek Facebook participants unaffected. These events constituted a recurrent theme in my informants’ Facebook posts.

My discussion on crisis-related data in Section 6 has been guided by two lines of argument. First, the crisis is enacted and represented in discourse (De Rycker and Mohd Don 2013; Wodak and Angouri 2014). Hay (1996: 255) weaves the interrelationship between crisis and discourse by writing that crisis is not just “some objective condition or property of a system defining the contours for subsequent ideological contestation” but is also “subjectively perceived and hence brought into existence through narrative and discourse”. Away from the rigidness of mainstream media and political speeches, the Greek crisis is “vernacularized” (Georgakopoulou 2014), i.e. it is discursively represented bottom-up, outside institutions, by ordinary people. Vernacularisations of the crisis can be seen in live streaming of citizens’ assemblies in the squares, independent web-based news media outlets, amateur photographs and videos from demonstrations, street graffiti, documentaries, political satire, critical blog posts in English and other languages to reach international audiences, memes, tweets, hashtags, and – for what concerns us here – Facebook posts and comments (see also Boubari 2011; Papailias 2011b).

Second, Facebook, as an outlet for crisis discourse representations, gives ample room for the process of reflexivity (Archer 2007), namely people’s ability to critically view themselves in relation to their social context. This is illustrated in the following two examples from my dataset:

(2) Dear politicians, I’m fed up with your dilemmas! The only dilemma I have in 18 degrees sunshine is: coffee break from work in Exarcheia or Monastiraki?  
[original in English]

1. Georgakopoulou draws on what Androutsopoulos (2010) has termed vernacular spectacles, that is multimedia content produced outside media institutions and uploaded, displayed and discussed on media-sharing websites.
Example (2) is a Facebook status update, which tackles in a humorous way the governmental instability in Greece during the crisis. Example (3) below is a Facebook comment, abstracted from a longer interaction, which functions as a piece of advice on how to deal with the crisis.

(3) Είναι πολύ άσχημο και δεν το περίμενε κανείς μας. Όμως τι θα κάνεις; Θα μεμψιμοιρείς όλη μέρα ή θα προσπαθήσεις με όσα σου μένουν να έχεις καλή διάθεση ή έστω προδιάθεση και να περνάς όσο πιο όμορφα μπορείς τις μέρες και τις στιγμές σου; Ναι, δεν είναι ό,τι καλύτερο να ανακόπτεται τα σχέδιά σου και οι προσπάθειες χρόνων αλλά αφού αυτό είναι κάτι που δυστυχώς συμβαίνει, προσπάθησε να κάνεις ότι καλύτερο μπορείς με όσα έχεις.

‘It’s very awful and none of us expected it. But what are you going to do? Are you going to whinge all day or are you going to try with all that’s left to you to have a good disposition or even predisposition and enjoy as much as you can your days and your moments? Yes, it’s not the best thing to have your plans and lasting efforts thwarted but since this is something which is unfortunately happening, try and do as best you can with what you’ve got.’

These two lines of argument – that crisis is enacted in discourse and that it leads to reflexivity – combined together lay the bedrock upon which this chapter’s empirical analysis is grounded.

3. Stance

One of the most vital things people do with words is taking a stance (Du Bois 2007). The term *stance* refers to the expression, whether by overt assertion or by inference, of a writer’s or speaker’s personal attitudes, feelings, beliefs, evaluations, judgements or commitment towards a precise target (Biber and Finegan 1989; Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007). This target can be an interlocutor, a person represented in the discourse, ideas represented in the discourse or other texts (Kiesling 2011). Stance, therefore, is an umbrella term underneath which various linguistic features can be gathered like modality, evaluation, evidentiality, hedging, politeness, appraisal, and metadiscourse (Lampropoulou and Myers 2012).²

Yet, stance, as Du Bois (2007: 163) has pithily remarked, is both a linguistic and a social act:

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2. For a panorama of the development of stance as an emerging subject in divergent linguistic strands, see Thompson and Hunston (2000: 1–27) and Damari (2010: 610–613). A concise summary of the various terms used in the literature to describe different types of stance-taking can be found in Jaffe (2009: 6).
Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field.

So, in any given stance statement, there are four major components: (a) the person expressing the stance (the stance-taker); (b) the topic under discussion (the stance-object); (c) the resources being drawn upon (e.g. evaluative lexis, modal verbs, punctuation, typography, different languages); and (d) the addressee (the reader or the hearer in any stance-taking situation) (Barton and Lee 2013: 87).

A central notion pertinent to stance-taking is that of alignment (or disalignment) (Du Bois 2007), namely our lining up (or not lining up) with others’ attitudinal assessments, beliefs and assumptions. As Martin and White (2005: 95) have contended, when people take stances:

they not only self-expressively ‘speak their own mind’, but simultaneously invite others to endorse and to share with them the feelings, tastes or normative assessments they are announcing. Thus declarations of attitude are dialogically directed towards aligning the addressee into a community of shared value and belief.

Stance thus is always an act of self-presentation and social judgement via which we express something not only about ourselves but also about others (as being or not being like us) and in this fashion we inevitably say something about our view of the world (Thurlow and Jaworski 2011: 245).

The springboard for my discussion is Jaffe’s (2009: 10) argument that “linguistic stance can be read as a more or less direct sign of a position, identity, or role with which an individual wishes to be associated”. Being an advocate of stance as a performative notion, I concur with Jaffe that from a stance-based angle identity is seen “as discursively constructed rather than fixed” (ibid.: 11). Understanding stance-taking acts is vital in understanding how identities are constructed on Facebook (cf. Barton and Lee 2013: 31). But before this, it is indispensable to explore the facilities that Facebook offers to that purpose.

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3. It should be noted that the notion of alignment is not synonymous with agreement. Rather, alignment “becomes a subtly nuanced domain of social action, in which speakers negotiate along a continuous scale the precise nature of the relation between their presently realized stance and a prior stance, whether overtly expressed or left implicit by another” (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen 2012: 440).
4. Facebook affordances and stance-taking

Facebook made its debut in February 2004 in the USA, originally aiming to facilitate communication within the niche communities of Harvard, Stanford, Columbia and Yale college students. As of September 2006, when registration was expanded so that anyone could join, Facebook became an immensely popular social network site (a type of social medium) worldwide, namely a networked communication platform, in which:

- participants (1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data;
- can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and
- (3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site. (Ellison and Boyd 2013: 158)

The mobilisation of stances on Facebook is triggered by its built-in features: (a) the prompt “What’s on your mind”, (b) the system of comments, and (c) the “Like” button. The vast majority of stance instances are obviously found in the user’s status update, i.e. his/her answer to “What's on your mind” in the publisher box. The removal of the original prompt “What are you doing right now?” and the obligatory “is”, and its replacement by “What’s on your mind” in July 2008 has allowed greater linguistic flexibility to the participants as the sentence structures have become much more varied, longer and creative (Lee 2011: 111). So, Facebook itself urges users to write about, reflect upon and share their intimate feelings, responses to their life experiences and/or views of the world.

Apart from the prompt modification, the whole Facebook experience was further enhanced by the addition of the comment function and the “Like” button, in February 2009. These template changes have been conducive to the evolution of attitudinal styles in Facebook establishing it as a site for fostering “affective talk” and hypersociality, enunciating views, emotions, and projecting social connections (Page 2012: 66ff).

Akin to all Web 2.0 spaces, Facebook offers a commenting system via which users can interact writing comments about each other’s uploaded content (Barton and Lee 2013: 10). Comments underneath a post appear in chronological order, starting with the oldest one, and participants have the facility to “Like” a comment (see below). Comments can be understood as indicators of attention to and engagement with a post, as well as a way to provide background information and engage in identity debates triggered by the given post (Androutsopoulos 2010: 210). Commenting, as we will see in the analysis, is a major site for stance-taking, since stances are not only taken by a single user, but are constantly created, expressed, discussed, negotiated and renegotiated collaboratively by a networked public
(Barton and Lee 2013: 31, 88). It is these shared evaluations that bring Facebook posters and audiences together.

The Facebook “Like” button is an image displaying a thumbs-up symbol accompanied by the word “Like”, either in English or in the language in which users have customised their profiles. Users can like status updates, comments, photos, links shared by friends, pages and adverts by clicking the “Like” button at the bottom of the content. The button displays the number of users that liked a particular content and shows a list of them. Clicking the “Like” button is a social activity, which indicates alignment with views and preferences amongst Facebook friends. To enhance the expression of feelings towards a post, Facebook introduced in February 2016 its “Reactions” feature, a palette of new buttons, which along with the famous thumb, the icons now include a heart, a laughing face, a surprised face, a tearing face and an angry face.

In juxtaposition to other social media, Facebook has been found to deal in the main with physical friendships and acquaintances that are initiated offline and then transferred online (Tagg and Seargeant forthcoming). This is a crucial parameter for the nature of stance-taking on Facebook, as I will discuss later on. The effect would not be the same on Twitter or Instagram, for example, where users do not necessarily know who is “following” them, while many remain anonymous. Shared background knowledge and experiences influence profoundly how participants take stances and form their alignment and/or disalignment on certain issues.

5. Data and methods

As already mentioned, the data for this paper are singled out from a larger study on the discursive construction of identities on Facebook, conducted from May 2010 to April 2013 (Georgalou 2014a). Methodologically, my study is situated within the discourse-centred online ethnographic paradigm (Androutsopoulos 2008), which coalesces online ethnography with discourse analysis of log data. Such an approach takes on two dimensions, a screen-based and a participant-based one. The former centres on systematic, longitudinal and repeated observation of online discourse (Facebook profiles in my study), while the latter relies on direct (face-to-face and/or mediated) engagement with the producers of this online discourse (Facebook profile owners in my study).

My participants, five Greek users (two females: Carla and Helen; three males: Romanos, Gabriel and Alkis; total mean age = 28 years), were recruited via convenience sampling (i.e. they were friends of friends). Initially, they were sent a message in which I explained the purposes of my study, asking them to fill in a “warm up” online questionnaire, which would help me to formulate a first inkling
of how they experience the mechanics of social media. Following this, the participants were invited to have their Facebook profiles painstakingly observed and to participate in a series of semi-structured online interviews (via email, instant messaging and/or Facebook messages) on the basis of my observation. Conducting these interviews enabled me to acquire an emic, more holistic and solidified understanding of my participants’ discourse practices. My dataset comprised Facebook profile information, status updates, comments, video and article links, photos my informants had taken themselves or had found elsewhere on the internet, interview excerpts, survey and field notes, as well as my informants’ comments on drafts of my analyses. All data were manually collected and hand-coded. Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form in which they were assured that their material would remain confidential and would be used for academic purposes only. Consent was also sought for comments written by third parties in my informants’ Facebook profiles. Throughout my data corpus I have preserved pseudonymity for my informants (they were welcome to choose their own fictive names) and anonymity for their Facebook friends.

This paper draws on data from one of my most active informants as regards postings about the crisis, Gabriel. He was born in 1990 and originally comes from Athens, Greece. He holds a BA in International and European Studies from the University of Piraeus. In 2012 he moved to the USA to pursue an MA in European and International Economics. He speaks Greek (native), English, French and Spanish. He was recruited for my research in July 2010. He has maintained a Facebook account since 27 November 2008, primarily to stay in contact with people he already knows offline. His Facebook friends list included 665 people by the end of 2012.

In the next section, I look at a single episode from Gabriel’s data (see Appendix). Although similar episodes, where Gabriel discusses with other Facebook participants the political and financial repercussions of the crisis, were garnered, the particular one was coded as having yielded the lengthiest and richest in stance comments from my whole five informants’ dataset. When I sent a draft of the analysis to Gabriel, he acknowledged himself that this episode was one of the most interesting discussions that had taken place on his Facebook Wall (i.e. the site where each Facebook user’s content is posted and displayed). The episode consists of an article link and 15 comments produced by three main participants, FBU1

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4. The acronym FBU is used for my informants’ Facebook friends and stands for Facebook User. Different Facebook participants are numbered for ease of reference (e.g. FBU1, FBU2 etc.). All textual data are rendered intact including the use of Greeklish, i.e. a romanized version of the Greek alphabet, stress omissions (in Greek), spelling and typos, multiple punctuation, absence of or extra spacing between words, incomplete meanings and unconventional usages.
(female; Law student), FBU3 (male; International and European Studies student) and Gabriel. All three were 22 years old when this conversation was held and were living in Athens. The link that Gabriel posted – without any opening accompanying remarks – leads to the article “Ιδανικοί αυτόχειρες. Γιατί;” (‘Ideal suicides. Why?’) from the Greek political and social commentary site Protagon (Figure 1), written by Giorgos Karelias. The comments cover the time span 10–15 February 2012 (on 12 February 2012 the Second Memorandum was voted in the Greek Parliament sparking violent protests in Athens) and amount to 2,005 words drawn from a 10,226-word corpus (in Greek) of textual information from Gabriel’s profile.

Figure 1. The article posted by Gabriel. [“Ideal suicides. Why?” by Giorgos Karelias]

In the analysis, I present and discuss particular extracts from the episode that aptly illustrate certain interpretative issues germane to stance-taking. The extracts are numbered for ease of reference while reference to the respective comment from which they are abstracted is also given. Instead of presenting these extracts in the order in which they were produced, I have grouped them into two main categories, positioning (Section 6.1) and (dis)alignment (Section 6.2), based on Du Bois’ (2007) definition of stance (see Section 3). Such a categorisation, however, should not be taken as exhaustive, but as an endeavour to provide a coherent account in terms of presentation and argumentation. The specific features under examination have been underlined in the examples, so as to draw attention to the items being discussed.

Acknowledging the great potential of corpus linguistics methods in bolstering discourse analysis in general (Baker 2006) and social media discourse analysis in particular (Zappavigna 2012; Page et al. 2014), my discussion is supported by a small scale corpus linguistic analysis (Section 6.4). My objective is to identify any salient linguistic patterns in all of the data collected from Gabriel’s Facebook
profile, focusing on those words that may indicate stances. To do so, I examined the frequency and collocates of keywords, namely the words which occur “statistically more frequently in one file or corpus when compared against another comparable or reference corpus” (Baker 2010: 104). I used WordSmith Tools 6.0 (Scott 2012) as the concordancing software and ran a keyword test comparing the whole corpus of data collected from Gabriel’s profile (counting 10,226 words) with the reference corpus of Facebook data from another Greek user I had recruited, Alkis (counting 15,000 words). The quantity of Alkis’s data was considered more suitable to be compared to Gabriel’s data. Helen’s and Romanos’s data counted less than 10,000 each, whereas Carla’s data counted more than 15,000 as she maintained two profiles on Facebook (personal and professional). Moreover, Alkis was found to employ a wide range of devices to express his stances towards songs and artists. Alkis was born in 1981 and lives in Athens. He has a BA in Translation and Interpreting (Ionian University) and an MSc in Services Management (Athens University of Economics and Business). He has worked as a freelance translator, a project manager and a real estate agent. He speaks Greek (native), English, French and Italian.

6. Analysis

Gabriel’s act of posting the Protagon article link onto Facebook is in itself already an act of stance-taking. Even without providing any opening comments to accompany his post, Gabriel positions himself as someone who keeps up with current crisis-related developments, e.g. the voting for the Second Memorandum in the case at hand. The writer of the article maintains that the new suite of measures included in the Second Memorandum will lead to poverty, which is unavoidable even if Greek politicians refuse to sign it. The three main stance-takers in the thread, FBU1, Gabriel and FBU3, recognise the harshness of the measures characterising them as αγρια and υφεσιακα (‘ruthless’ and ‘recessionary’; FBU1, comment 4), τόσο σκληρά (‘such strict’; Gabriel, comment 6) and τόσο επαχθή (‘so onerous’; FBU3, comment 9). However, each one of them conceptualises the consequences of these measures in a different way. FBU1 holds that the (widely circulated, government-promoted) dilemma “austerity measures vs. default” is essentially a pseudo-dilemma as either option leads to exactly the same negative result: poverty and the potential exit of Greece from the Eurozone monetary union. Gabriel’s main approach is that the situation would have been much better if the measures dictated by the First Memorandum had been correctly implemented. FBU3 asserts that the austerity policy will impinge not only on Greece’s future but on the euro by and large. Let us have a closer look at the linguistic strategies they employ to articulate their stances.
6.1 Positioning

This section deals with positioning and, more particularly, with how the participants indicate their epistemic stance, namely how they present what they know (or do not know) about the crisis and austerity. Gabriel, FBU1 and FBU3 offer themselves as having expertise relevant to the Greek crisis. They are entitled to have opinions on it because of their academic training in European and international relations, economics and law, as well as because of their first-hand experience of the Greek reality as Greek citizens. I will focus on three facets of expertise: expression of beliefs, calls on others’ expertise, and claims to ignorance.

6.1.1 Expressing beliefs

Social media encourage the expression of personal views, so a great deal of statements found in these environments are explicitly matters of belief, i.e. modes of knowing, which are unsupported by any evidence (Myers 2010b: 118). In extract (4), Gabriel signals his belief with the mental verb θεωρώ ‘consider’, ‘believe’ (lit. ‘view’), relying on some kind of inner certainty:

(4) Θεωρώ ότι αν είχαν ακολουθηθεί οι διαρθρωτικές αλλαγές που είχαν προταθεί με το πρώτο μνημόνιο, με εμφάση στην αποκρατικοποίηση των ζημιογόνων Δ.Ε.Κ.Ο και στον εξορθολογισμό του φοροεισπαρακτικού μηχανισμού θα είμασταν σε καλύτερη μέτα τόσο σκληρά μέτρα.

‘I consider that if the structural changes put forward in the first memorandum, with emphasis on the privatisation of loss-making public utilities and the rationalisation of the tax collection mechanism had been implemented we would have been in a better situation and possibly in Memorandum 2 there would have been no need to take such strict measures.’ [Gabriel, comment 6]

It is practically impossible to know what exactly would have happened if the First Memorandum had been applied. Gabriel obviously realises that, hence the use of the modal adverb ‘possibly’, which leaves open doubts about his statement.

As appears from extracts (5) and (6), the expression of beliefs does not necessarily entail marking one’s personal commitment to it through specific verbs and adverbs, but also by means of phrasally-formed markers:

(5) Το ζήτημα είναι σε τί βάθος χρόνου θα επεκταθεί η κρίση, όχι αν βραχυπρόθεσμα θα πέσει το βιωτικό επίπεδο.

‘The issue is how far into the future the crisis will be protracted, not whether in the short term living standards will decline.’ [Gabriel, comment 2]
With the formulations ‘the issue is’ and ‘the meaning of’, Gabriel frames his stances as unquestionable facts, based on rational thinking and the knowledge he has acquired as part of his studies.

An interesting resource in Gabriel’s stance-taking is that of entertaining, a type of dialogistic positioning that concerns the wordings via which he indicates that his position is one of a number of possible positions, making space for these alternative dialogic possibilities (Martin and White 2005: 98, 104–111). Consider extracts (7) to (9):

(7) Δεν παραγνωρίζω την ανάγκη για προώθηση της ανταγωνιστικότητας και της ανάπτυξης μέσω φοροαπαλλαγών και μείωση της γραφειοκρατίας που θα έπρεπε να είχαν γίνει και εκτός Μνημονίου (αν και προτάθηκαν απ’ αυτό).
‘I don’t underestimate the need to promote competitiveness and development via tax exemptions and bureaucracy curbing which should have been done irrespective of the Memorandum (although proposed by it).’

[Gabriel, comment 6]

(8) Τώρα δεν νομίζω ότι μας οδηγεί η ψήφιση της Μνημονιακής Σύμβασης μας οδηγεί εκτός ευρώ.
‘Now I don’t think the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding would lead us would lead us [sic] out of the euro.’

[Gabriel, comment 6]

(9) Δεν λέω ότι δεν υπάρχουν δυνατότητες βελτίωσης, δεν είμαι καθόλου απόλυτως, λέω απλά ότι σημαντικό μέρος των πολιτικών που εφαρμόζονται είναι μάλλον στο σωστό δρόμο, αν και τελικά συμπεράσματα θα βγάλουμε σε λίγα χρόνια!
‘I’m not saying there’s no room for improvement, I’m not at all rigid, I’m just saying that a great part of the applied policies are probably on the right track, although we will draw final conclusions in a few years!’

[Gabriel, comment 13]

Gabriel entertains or invokes these dialogic alternatives via negative verb projections (Δεν παραγνωρίζω ‘I don’t underestimate’, Δεν νομίζω ‘I don’t think’, Δεν λέω ‘I’m not saying’) and low modality adverbs (μάλλον ‘probably’, απλά ‘just’). By dint of these low intensity linguistic options, Gabriel does not sound assertive, making room for alternative voices of opposition. He even provides self-acknowledgement for this (δεν είμαι καθόλου απόλυτως ‘I’m not at all rigid’).
6.1.2 Invoking sources of knowledge

Apart from signalling beliefs, certainty or doubt, epistemic stance can also indicate the source of knowledge or the perspective from which the information is given (cf. Polymenas, this volume). Throughout the thread, FBU3 is the only one who supports his claims through references to accredited sources. Some examples are given below:

(10) Και αυτό δεν το λέω εγώ. Το ίδιο το ΔΝΤ [Διεθνές Νομισματικό Ταμείο] το επισημαίνει στην πρόσφατη κριτική που άκρισε στις ευρωπαϊκές ηγεσίες (χώρις τους τόσους οικονομολόγους που το «φωνάζουν» αρόνια τώρα).

‘And it’s not me saying that. The IMF [International Monetary Fund] itself highlights this in the recent criticism it levelled at European governments (not to mention all those economists “shouting” about it for 2 years now).’

[FBU3, comment 9]

(11) Ενδεικτικό είναι ότι όλα αυτά (μαζί με πολλούς άλλους) τα λέει ακόμα και ο Economist εδώ και καιρό, το οποίο είναι ένα έντυπο που ανήκει φανερά στο πλαίσιο της κοινωνίας της ελεύθερης αγοράς.

‘It is indicative that (amongst many others) even The Economist has been saying all this for a while, which is a publication that openly belongs to a free market society framework.’

[FBU3, comment 9]

FBU3 invokes an international organisation (IMF), professionals (economists) and specialised mainstream media (The Economist) to contend that austerity leads to recession. For him, the fact that The Economist talks about recession in Greece attaches considerable weight to his argument (notice the emphasis placed by ‘even’), since it is a prestigious magazine which takes a stance of classical and economic liberalism, targeting highly educated readers (FBU3 is in all likelihood one of them), including many executives and policy-makers.

Nevertheless, FBU3’s references to other experts are not always that clear-cut, as is illustrated in extract (12):

(12) Ειδικά αυτό έχει επισημανθεί από πάρα πολλούς, δηλ η αδυναμία της ΕΚΤ [Ευρωπαϊκή Κεντρική Τράπεζα] να επέμβει αποφασιστικά και να δώσει τέλος σε προβλήματα ρευστότητας.

‘This especially has been highlighted by many, namely the ECB’s [European Central Bank] inability to intervene decisively and put an end to cash flow problems.’

[FBU3, comment 12]

In this case, FBU3 does not draw on an authority figure but his evidence is vaguely attributed to ‘many’. Perhaps they are too many for him to enumerate or to recall or his invocation is just a rhetorical device to strengthen his point of view.
In (13) FBU3 provides a specific link to an article from *The Economist* as a source, entitled “How to save the euro”, inviting Gabriel to read it:

(13) Δες εδώ για παράδειγμα http://www.economist.com/node/21529049
    ‘See here for example http://www.economist.com/node/21529049’
    [FBU3, comment 12]

The link here is not a mere addition to the linking text, but is vital in supporting FBU3’s stance, affording it credibility. What FBU3 does is to leave the arguing to the linking text (see also Myers 2010b: 39).

**6.1.3 Claiming ignorance**

Epistemic stance also refers to the ways in which the interlocutors mark limitations to the status of their knowledge as shown in (14) and (15).

(14) Δεν αρνούμαι ότι πιθανόν να ήταν πιο αποδοτικές με μία διαφορετική δημοσιονομική διαχείριση αλλά βάσει της τωρινής κατάστασης των δημόσιων οικονομικών δεν ξέρω αν κάτι τέτοιο είναι εφικτό.
    ‘I don’t deny they might be more effective with a different financial management but on the basis of the current state of public finances I don’t know if something like that is feasible.’
    [Gabriel, comment 13]

(15) δεν ξέρω αν η χρεωκοπία ή το Μνημόνιο οδηγεί την Ελλάδα στην έξοδο από το ευρώ, ξέρω όμως ότι η συνέχιση αυτής της πορείας καθιστά το μέλλον του ίδιου του ευρώ δυσοίων.
    ‘I don’t know whether a default or the Memorandum would lead Greece out of the euro. I know, though, that continuing along this path renders bleak the future of the euro itself.’
    [FBU3, comment 9]

Gabriel in (14) combines his entertaining positioning (‘I don’t deny’) (see 7–9 above) with a forthright claim to ignorance (‘I don’t know’). Conversely, FBU3 in (15) deploys a different strategy of claiming ignorance, which Michael (1996) has termed *division of labour*. Firstly, FBU3 admits what he does not know and then, on the basis of his internal, personal disposition, compensates for his absence of knowledge (‘I know, though’).

**6.2 (Dis)alignment**

Building on the previous discussion, this section explores (dis)alignment, namely the types of convergent and (mostly) divergent positions that participants take in relation to one another. More specifically, I examine instances of direct and indirect challenging of other’s claims, delaying of criticism, making denials and recycling linguistic elements.
6.2.1 Direct challenging

The most straightforward way of challenging one’s claim is using second person pronouns that highlight the contrast between the opposing views (i.e., “what I say vs. what you say”). This is exemplified below:

(16) φτάνω στο αντίθετο συμπέρασμα από εκείνο που καταλήγεις εσύ στην τελευταία πρότασή: ότι δηλ κατά τη γνώμη μου οι ασκούμενες πολιτικές βρίσκονται στο λάθος δρόμο (χωρίς, όπως είπα, να τις απορρίπτω τα πάντα, αλλά μιλώ για τη γενικότερη κατεύθυνσή τους).

‘I’ve reached the opposite conclusion than the one you’ve arrived at in your last sentence: namely that in my opinion the applied policies are on the wrong track (without, as I said, rejecting everything about them, I’m just talking about their general direction).’

[FBU3, comment 15]

(17) Νομίζω το κύριο πρόβλημα είναι η πολιτική που ασκείται, η οποία μάλιστα αντίθετα με όσα λες είναι υφεσιακή και δε χρειάζεται να περιμένουμε «μετά το πέρας της κρίσης» να το καταλάβουμε.

‘I think the main problem is the policy applied, which of course – contrary to what you’re saying – is recessionary and we needn’t wait until “after the end of the crisis” to realise this.’

[FBU3, comment 9]

In (16) FBU3 overtly projects his disagreement with Gabriel. For him, the policies adopted in accordance with the Memorandum still seem incorrect (unlike what Gabriel believes), although he does not reject them in their entirety. In a similar vein, in (17) FBU3 refers directly to Gabriel (αντίθετα με όσα λες ‘contrary to what you’re saying’). Interestingly, FBU3’s countering stands out stylistically by being enclosed in dashes. I will return to this example further down.

Gabriel, on the other hand, adopts a more aggressive stance towards FBU3 in extract (18):

(18) (1) οι πολιτικές του Μνημονίου απομονωμένες και ανεξάρτητε σε μακροοικονομικό επίπεδο φέρνουν ύφεση, γι’αυτό υπάρχουν τα διαρθρωτικά μέτρα ώστε να προωθήσουν την έξοδο από την ύφεση και τις παρεπόμενες αναπτυξιακές πιέσεις που φέρνει η πολιτική λιτότητας-αλλά αυτά τα μέτρα τα αγνοείς παντελώς βλέπω. Επίσης αγνοείς βασικά μόντελα που περιγράφουν την ύφεση σε οικονομικούς κύκλους (εξού και το σχόλιό μου για την φάση της κρίσης και τις πρόωρες εκτιμήσεις). (2) Αυτό που προτείνεις απλοϊκά για απεριόριστη ρευστότητα δύναται να οδηγήσει σε στασιμοπληθωρισμό, λόγω της δομής της ελληνικής οικονομίας-άσε που δεν λαμβάνει υπόψη την λογική με την οποία τα κράτη συμμετέχουν στους Ευρωπαϊκούς θεσμούς… […] Αυτή σου η υποροχία περί λάθος και σωστού την ώρα που αυτές οι εκτιμήσεις είναι αντικείμενο ερώτα για πολύ πιο καταρτισμένους αρμόδιους φορείς με ξεπερνά.

In (18), Gabriel directly addresses FBU3, criticizing the assumed separation of policies and their lack of coordination. He also challenges the supposed imminent economic recovery and warns about the potential for stagflation due to the structure of the Greek economy. He concludes by questioning the appropriateness of FBU3’s comments about the timing of the crisis and its assessment.
'Memorandum policies when isolated and [taken] independently on a macroeconomic level bring recession, that’s why structural measures exist to facilitate exit from recession and the consequential developmental pressures that the austerity policy brings – but I see that you totally disregard these measures. You also disregard basic models that describe recession in economic cycles (hence my comment about the crisis phase and the premature evaluations). (2) What you simplistically propose for limitless cash flow may lead to stagflation, due to the structure of the Greek economy- not to mention that it does not even remotely take into account the logic by which states participate in the European institutions… [...] This arrogance of yours about what is right and wrong at a time when these evaluations are a subject of contention for much more knowledgeable responsible bodies is beyond me.'

Gabriel goes on accusing FBU3 of overlooking the structural measures that will pull the country out of recession as well as the relevant economic models. His reaction against FBU3 is intensified through the repetition of the verb disregard (augmented by adverbs: αγνοείς παντελώς ‘you totally disregard’ and Επίσης αγνοείς ‘You also disregard’). The downscaling of FBU3’s proposal for limitless cash flow is realised by απλοϊκά ‘simplistically’ and ούτε στο ελάχιστο ‘not even remotely’. Gabriel openly attacks FBU3’s opinions (Αυτή σου η υπεροψία … με ξεπερνά ‘This arrogance of yours … is beyond me’) while also undervaluing him for not being qualified to talk about these issues (αυτές οι εκτιμήσεις είναι αντικείμενο έριδας για πολύ πιο καταρτισμένους αρμόδιους φορείς ‘these evaluations are a subject of contention for much more knowledgeable responsible bodies’).

FBU3 responds to the challenge by pointing to Gabriel’s confusion (extract 19) and mistakes (extract 20):

(19) Στο πρώτο σημείο σου νομίζω υπάρχει αρκετή σύγχυση.
‘I think there’s quite a bit of confusion in your first point.’

[FBU3, comment 12]

(20) Γράφεις «Αυτό που προτείνεις απλοϊκά για απεριόριστη ρευστότητα δύναται να οδηγήσει σε στασιμόπληθωρισμό», ήτοι κάλλος εννοείς πληθωρισμό.
‘You write “What you simplistically propose for limitless cash flow may lead to stagflation”. You probably mean inflation.’

[FBU3, comment 12]

Notably, and in stark contrast to Gabriel, FBU3 downgrades his interlocutor’s statements via hedging (‘I think’, ‘quite a bit’, ‘probably’). It is useful to recall at this point that FBU3 is the one who comments on Gabriel’s Wall. In other words, he is hosted in someone else’s Facebook space to express his opinions. Hence, FBU3’s hedging can be seen as a politeness strategy of expressing disagreement in
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a discreet manner without directly attacking Gabriel’s face. At the same time, it “can be seen as part of the process of texturing self identity” (Fairclough 2003: 166). With this texturing, FBU3 also textures his uptake of Gabriel’s audience comprised of mutual friends and fellow students.

Another way of direct challenging is through questioning as is the case in (21) and (22):

(21) το πρόγραμμα που υιοθετείται 2 χρόνια τώρα πιστεύεις ότι θα βγαλει τη χώρα από την κρίση ή απλά το επίλεγες αναγκαστικά βασισμένος στο διπολο χρεωκοπία η μεταρ?

‘do you believe the programme adopted for 2 years now will get the country out of crisis or are you just forced to opt for it based on the bipole default or measures?’ [FBU1, comment 3]

(22) Βρε Γαβριήλ, πραγματικά πιστεύεις ότι για την κατάσταση στην οποία η Ελλάδα βρίσκεται τώρα φταίει το ότι δεν εφαρμόστηκε το πρώτο Μνημόνιο;

C’mon [Vre] Gabriel, do you really believe Greece is in this situation now because the first Memorandum wasn’t implemented? [FBU3, comment 9]

These are rhetorical questions. Both FBU1 and FBU3 do not really expect Gabriel to provide an answer. Their intention is to show that they hold a different stance and to point out weaknesses in Gabriel’s argumentation.

Questions are also formulated as requests for additional information:

(23) από ποιο και έως ποιοι ακόμη διαφορετικές αλλαγές οδηγούν σε έξοδο από την ύφεση, όπως λες; Και γιατί ακόμη αυτές οι αλλαγές να μη συνοδεύονταν από διαφορετική πολιτική; Από την ύφεση δε σε βγάζουν οι διαφορετικές αλλαγές, αλλά οι αναπτυξιακές πολιτικές. Επίσης, τι εννοείς με τα «συγκεκριμένα μοντέλα που περιγράφουν την ύφεση σε οικονομικούς κύκλους»; Δηλ αυτά τα μοντέλα δε δέχονται την ύφεση και την εκτιμούν ας πούμε «μετά την πέρας της κρίσης»?

‘but how on Earth do these structural changes lead to exiting recession, as you say? And why shouldn’t these changes be accompanied by a different policy? It’s not structural changes that will get you out of recession, it’s development policies. Moreover, what do you mean by “particular models describing recession in economic cycles?” Do you mean these models don’t accept the existence of recession and assess it let’s say “after the end of the crisis?”’ [FBU3, comment 12]

What is exceptional here is that FBU3 provides the right – in his view – answer to his first two questions to disalign himself from Gabriel’s way of thinking concerning structural changes.
6.2.2 **Indirect challenging**

In the following examples, Gabriel opts for implicitly criticising FBU1:

(24) Τώρα επιχειρήματα του τύπου δεν σε πιάνει η κρίση ή "μία εικόνα ίσον χίλιες λέξεις” είναι ευχάριστα αλλά όχι χρήσιμα!

‘Now arguments of the sort “crisis will not affect you” or “one picture is worth a thousand words” are pleasant but not useful!’ [Gabriel, comment 2]

(25) Αρχικά δεν είναι και πολύ χρήσιμα “αυτά” δεδομένου ότι περιορίζονται σε ένα καταγγελτικό λόγο χωρίς θετικό όραμα και πλάνο. Αλλά αυτό είναι κάτι σχετικό δεδομένου ότι δεν ακούγεται καμία θετική ρεαλιστική πρόταση απο το λεγόμενο αντιμνημονιακό μέτωπο.

‘For a start, this “nuff” stuff isn’t that useful given that it’s limited to a denunciatory discourse without a positive vision and plan. But this is something relative given that no positive realistic proposal comes from the so-called anti-memorandum front.’ [Gabriel, comment 6]

(26) Τέλος είναι τουλάχιστον γενικόλογο και άτοπο να λέμε ότι είναι υφεσιακά τα μέτρα εφόσον έτσι και αλλίως η ελληνική οικονομία βρίσκεται στην αρχής της μέσης περιόδου της ύφεσης και επομένως δεν μπορούμε να κρίνουμε αν σίγουρα τα μέτρα έχουν υφεσιακό αποτέλεσμα (πιο ασαφαλές είναι να το κάνουμε μετά το πέρας της κρίσης).

‘Finally, it is at least vague and improper for us to say that the measures are recessionary since in any case the Greek economy is at the beginning of the mid-recession period and therefore we cannot judge whether the measures will definitely have a recessionary result (it’s safer we do that after the end of the crisis).’ [Gabriel, comment 6]

Avoiding the use of second person pronouns, Gabriel in (24) generically refers to επιχειρήματα του τύπου ‘arguments of the sort’ (instead of writing, for example, ‘your argument’) and criticises them as being just ευχάριστα ‘pleasant’ and όχι χρήσιμα ‘not useful’. In (25) he insists that FBU1’s arguments are still not useful, as she, in his opinion, denounces the situation without bringing to the table any visions and plans of how to face the crisis. He attributes her stance to the fact that this is the common tactic adopted by those who do not approve of the Memorandum. He judges her arguments in terms of the anti-memorandum front’s incapacity (Martin and White 2005: 52–56), i.e. its inability to perform effectively (καμία θετική ρεαλιστική πρόταση ‘no positive realistic proposal’), seeming slightly ironic as to whether any arguments at all are actually put forward by characterising it το λεγόμενο ‘the so called’). In (26), the use of the first person plural pronoun in the phrase είναι τουλάχιστον γενικόλογο και άτοπο να λέμε ‘it is at least vague and
improper for us to say’ is a case of ‘exclusive we’, where we stands for you. Gabriel once again does not directly attack FBU1 by writing, for instance, that ‘it is at least vague and improper for you’ (constructed example). The other two pronominal references in δεν μπορούμε να κρίνουμε ‘we cannot judge’, πιο ασαφαλές είναι να το κάνουμε μετά το πέρας της κρίσης ‘it’s safer we do that after the end of the crisis’ are we-inclusive. Gabriel here presents his personal perception as shared amongst his readership to fortify his argument.

With such kinds of impersonal formulations as those in (24)–(26), Gabriel refrains from a straight threat to FBU1’s face. As opposed to the aggressive tone in which he addressed FBU3, Gabriel adopts a milder attitude towards FBU1 (a fair surmise could be because FBU1 is female). Undoubtedly, the fact that FBU1 and FBU3 maintain close and strong ties with Gabriel offline plays a pivotal role here.

Another device of indirect challenging is the use of reported speech as occurs in (17), which was discussed earlier. I reproduce it here for convenience:

(17) Νομίζω το κύριο πρόβλημα είναι η πολιτική που ασκείται, η οποία μάλιστα – αντίθετα με όσα λες – είναι υφεσιακή και δε χρειάζεται να περιμένουμε το πέρας της κρίσης να το καταλάβουμε. ‘I think the main problem is the policy applied, which of course – contrary to what you’re saying – is recessionary and we needn’t wait until “after the end of the crisis” to realise this.’

In this instance, FBU3 repeats Gabriel’s exact words in the form of a direct quotation (‘after the end of the crisis’). In this fashion, on the one hand, he detracts from the seriousness of Gabriel’s statement, while, on the other, he detaches himself from these words (see also Myers 2004: 134–156), maintaining that the country has already been hit by recession.

6.2.3 Delaying criticism

In (27) and (28) below both FBU1 and FBU3 delay their expression of criticism by prefacing their disalignments:

(27) εσυ λες ότι αν δεν παρουμε τα μετρα θα χρεωκοπησουμε και εγω σου λεω ότι τα μετρα εκτος απο αγρια ειναι και υφεσιακα και μας φερνουν πιο κοντα στη εξοδο απο το ευρο και στη χρεωκοπια ‘you say that if we don’t take the measures we’ll go into default. what I’m actually saying to you is that the measures apart from ruthless are also recessionary and are bringing us closer to euro exit and to default.’

[FBU1, comments 3–4]
‘OK, I absolutely agree with any criticism you level at Greek politicians and, yes, if some things dictated by the first memorandum had been implemented, the measures wouldn’t have been so onerous. But this is of secondary if not of tertiary importance.’

In (27) FBU1 reformulates Gabriel’s stance only to counter it, while in (28) FBU3 prefaces his disalignment with alignment indexed via Ok, θα με βρεις απόλυτα σύμφωνο ‘Ok, I will absolutely agree’, and σύμφωνοι ‘yes’. It is the concession Αλλά αυτό είναι δευτερεύον… ‘But this is of secondary…’, which introduces his discord. With these constructions FBU1 and FBU3 show that they have taken on board Gabriel’s interpretations of the default, the politicians’ responsibility and the necessity for measures, and have then developed their own view.

As Barton and Lee (2013: 89) point out, Facebook’s “Like” button serves a number of pragmatic functions, including agreeing or aligning with the stance of the status/comment poster and expressing a positive stance (i.e. literally like something), but not wishing to leave a written comment (see also Section 4). Notably, FBU3 below invokes the affordance of “Like” to align with and then disalign from FBU1’s stance. Note that FBU3 did not click the “Like” button on either comment by FBU1.

FBU3 feels that the action of clicking the “Like” button does not signal his actual intended stance. The resolution to this constraint occurs with him spelling out in words what exactly he dislikes in FBU1’s comment, namely her claim that the new measures entail Greece’s exit from the euro and default.

6.2.4 Making denials
The participants express their disalignment by producing direct denials to what their interlocutor has said. Consider, for example, (30):

(30) FBU3 (το βρε είναι υποτιμητικό και δεν μου αρέσει καθόλου)
    ‘FBU3 (C’mon [vre] is derogatory and I don’t like it at all)’
In turn, FBU3 responds to Gabriel’s denial with a further denial:

(31) προφανώς και το “βρε” δεν το εννοούσα υποτιμητικά – αντίθετα με το πώς το εξέλαβες.
    ‘no way did I mean “vre” in a derogatory way – contrary to how you perceived it.’  [FBU3, comment 12]

Gabriel in (30) vocalises his distaste for being addressed with βρε taking it as an offence. βρε (which has many variants including ρε and μωρέ) is a very common interjection in Greek used to address someone, attract his/her attention, add emphasis, express astonishment, mark friendly disagreement or hurl an insult (Karachaliou 2015). It is very colloquial and used mostly among intimates, but considered rude and inappropriate in formal contexts or with people you do not know very well. Its closest English equivalent in this context could be C’mon Gabriel functioning as an index of both friendliness and slightly ironic incredulity. The treatment of this discourse marker by both Gabriel and FBU3 is of particular interest. Gabriel draws on the polysemy of the marker to show grudge, focusing selectively only on its negative dimension. Conversely, FBU3 deploys it in multiple ways. On the one hand, as shown previously in (22), he uses it slightly provocatively – expressing rapport at the same time – to suggest that Gabriel’s view is so unrealistic that even he himself cannot believe it despite holding it. This usage of βρε is in line with Angouri and Tseliga (2010: 77), who found in their study of online fora that the deployment of ρε + name in a prefacing position typically introduces postings of conflictual disagreement often followed by a strong oppositional stance. On the other hand, in (31) FBU3 makes a disclaim, by clarifying that βρε was not intended as an insult following the dash-style also found in (17).

In (32) to (34), FBU3 produces denials as a strategy to counter Gabriel’s criticism:

(32) Προφανώς και δεν αγνοώ τον – υπερτιμημένο – κίνδυνο του πληθωρισμού και το moral hazard
    ‘Of course I don’t disregard the – overestimated – risk of inflation and the moral hazard.’  [FBU3, comment 12]

(33) Δεν αγνοώ το πώς τα κράτη συμμετέχουν στους ευρωπαϊκούς θεσμούς -αντίθετα με αυτό που λες- και για αυτό λέω πως το υπάρχον πλαίσιο δυσχεραίνει την κατάσταση (και) επ’ αυτού.
    ‘I don’t disregard how states participate in European institutions – contrary to what you’re saying – and that’s why I’m saying that the existing framework complicates the situation (also) concerning this.’  [FBU3, comment 12]
FBU3 twice denies being ignorant (32 and 34). Moreover, he refuses to accept the ‘arrogant’ label, as he does not reason from an expert position but draws from sources (e.g. *The Economist*) and connoisseurs and thus should not be characterised as ‘dogmatic’ and ‘absolute’. Interestingly, in (33) and (34) FBU3’s stance is conveyed not so much by the denial itself, but by the fact that he provides extra argumentative material (Ford 2002) to support his denial (‘that’s why I’m saying’, ‘that’s exactly why I say what I say’), construing in this way Gabriel and the rest of their Facebook audience as possibly still needing to be persuaded.

6.2.5 Recycling linguistic elements

An engrossing instance of alignment found at the end of this lengthy commentary is the recycling of linguistic forms (Du Bois 2014):

(35) **YT: Εκτιμώ πάρα πολύ το ότι περιόρισες των μήκων των comments σου- για τα
dικά σου μέτρα πάντα!!**

‘P.S: I really appreciate your reducing the length of your comments – by your own standards anyway!!’ [Gabriel, comment 14]

(36) **YT: Εγώ εκτιμώ που επιμήκυνες τα comments σου. Πλησιάζουμε στο σημείο
σύγκλισης -τουλάχιστον σε αυτό!

‘PS: I myself appreciate your lengthening your comments. We’re approaching a point of convergence – at least on this!’ [FBU3, comment 15]

Gabriel finishes off his argumentation in (35) with a witty postscript in which he solidifies his critical attitude towards FBU3’s verbosity. While closing, in (36), FBU3 imitates Gabriel’s style by writing a postscript, in which he praises Gabriel for doing the exact opposite of what he used to do, namely now writing longer comments. The structure of the postscript together with certain words invoked by Gabriel (‘appreciate’, ‘length’, ‘your comments’) are recycled by FBU3. By this selective reproduction (Du Bois 2014), FBU3 brings the two utterances into close relation to each other. This kind of linguistic and stylistic mirroring is seen as a means of managing social relationships within disagreement (Norrby and Wirdenäs 2003: 266–267), which can calibrate alignment and consensus between the two stance-takers.
6.3 Conclusions on stance-taking strategies

The analysis of this successive commentary manifests that highly complex stance manoeuvring is possible on the social network of Facebook. The co-constructive character of stance is also evident in this context. By taking stances, the three participants galvanised their identities as *experts*, who manipulated specific economic jargon, as *opinionators*, who strived to show the distinctiveness of their position on the issue, though without suppressing alternative positions, as well as *contradictors*, who challenged and disclaimed other opinions (cf. Norrby and Wirdenäs 2003: 256). Appreciably, not only did they actuate these identities but also constantly alternated between them. Rather than sticking to a single stance throughout the thread, they shifted stances and thus identities, depending on the topic, the situation and the participants. The whole dialogue gives the impression of a simulation of a high-level public interest negotiation, with participants appropriating the roles of opposite-party representatives, as if training for a potentially future role (cf. comment 7 in the Appendix, where FBU2 offers Gabriel the compliment ‘we should make you a politician one day’, acknowledging his rhetorical ability and argumentation skills).

6.4 Stance-taking patterns

Keeping in mind the stance-taking strategies described above, I shift my focus here on the entirety of Facebook posts and comments produced by Gabriel and his friends during my online ethnography with the aim of exploring any discursive patterns in their stance-taking. As explained in Section 5, a list of keywords was produced with the help of Wordsmith Tools 6.0, also indicating the degree of significance, or “keyness”, for each item in comparison to the reference corpus consisting of Facebook data from another informant of mine, Alkis. Table 1 presents the top ten keywords in Gabriel’s corpus.

As can be seen from Table 1, apart from Gabriel’s name and surname (not given for ethical reasons), the conjunction και (‘and’) and the particle dn (a Greeklish abbreviated version of δεν ‘not’) prominently figure in the list of keywords. At first blush, these function words “are devoid of separate meaning” (Mautner 2010: 126). My hypothesis, however, in consonance with Hunston (2007: 45), is that, although these are not explicitly evaluative lexical items, their embedding in phraseologies can co-occur with stance.

So my next step has been to locate these two terms in context carrying out a collocation analysis that could provide instances as well as insights into stance-taking.\(^5\) After some experimentation with the corpus and due to limitations of

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5. By *collocate* here I refer to a word that “occurs within the neighbourhood of another word” (Baker et al. 2006: 36).
space, I have decided to centre only on ‘not’ and not on ‘and’. Taking into account that Gabriel and his friends often write in both Greek and Greeklish, in my collocation analysis I included six different variants of ‘not’: dn, den, de, δν, δεν, δε. I then searched all the concordances (101 in total) to further investigate the statuses and comments in which ‘not’ (in all its variants) appeared. The most interesting set of collocates of ‘not’ included stance verbs that indicated cognitive states. Working inductively, I divided the ‘not + cognitive verb’ instances into four categories.

First were denials that indicated explicit disalignment with some third party, be that an ideology or policy:

(37) profanos kai dn pistevo oti o koummounismos einai lisi!

‘Of course I don’t believe communism is the solution!’

[from a comment by Gabriel]

(38) dn ensternizomai tpt,i koinopoihsh […] dn apotelei kai pliri tautisi me to nomosxedio!

‘I don’t embrace anything, the posting […] doesn’t mean full alignment with the bill!’

[from a comment by Gabriel]

Second, ‘not’ is used to signal epistemic uncertainty:

(39) parathreitai logw krishs mia tash pollwn ellhnwn na parapempoun se tritoklassata arthra apo to exwteriko, ta opoia me gkaimpelistiko tropo propagandizoun thn “aspilh eurwph” kai tous “tempelhdes palioellhnes pou mas anakatwnoun”. den xerw na to ekshghsw me vash thn episthmh ths psxuologias gt sumvainei afo.

‘Due to the crisis a tendency can be observed of many Greeks to cite third-string articles from abroad, which in a Goebbelsian way propagandise for “pure Europe” and “the damn lazy Greeks who get us all in a shambles”. I don’t know how to explain why this is happening based on the science of psychology.’

[from a comment posted on Gabriel’s Wall by a male Facebook friend]
Third, there were references to negative cognitive capacity:

(40) οπα δεν μπορω να καταλαβω γιατι να συνεχιστει η ιδια συνταγη

‘therefore I can’t understand why carry on with the same recipe’

[comment posted on Gabriel’s Wall by FBU1; see Appendix]

Finally, statements of non-authoritative epistemic stance (cf. instances of entertainment in 7–9 and 14 above) were identified such as:

(41) δεν διαφωνω ότι δεν μας φέρονται me to ganti ekso-gegonos pou en merei ofeiletai kai se oikeia aveltiria

‘I don’t disagree that they don’t treat us with kid gloves abroad-partly due to our own indolence’

[from a comment by Gabriel]

(42) δεν exo sovares enstaseis me ta parapano kai entopizo to provlima sto xrimatopistotiko sistima kirios

‘I don’t have serious objections to the above and I locate the problem mainly in the financial system’

[from a comment by Gabriel]

The high frequency of ‘not’, both in the study corpus and vis-à-vis the reference corpus, along with its role as a strong collocate of stance verbs, suggests its significance in Gabriel’s postings and interactions. Its function is found to be both dialogically contractive and dialogically expansive (Martin and White 2005: 102–104). In the first case, statements with ‘not’ challenge, fend off or restrict the scope of alternative positions (e.g. I don’t believe). In the second case, they open up the dialogic space for alternative positions and voices (e.g. I don’t know, I don’t disagree). In terms of absolute frequency, the challenging/restricting phenomenon occurs 22 times while the opening up phenomenon occurs 24 times. This almost even distribution shows that, despite their expressed ideological polarisations (including pro-memorandum vs anti-memorandum ones) found in the corpus, the participants appear to still be engaging in cooperative and constructive dialogue. Their usage of ‘not’ attests to the “heterogeneity” and “polyvocality” of the corpus (Myers 2010a: 266) – heterogeneity in that it includes many writers (Gabriel and his Facebook friends) and polyvocality in that each one can select one or more of an array of possible stances, as we also witnessed earlier in the analysis of the comments. Within the context of Facebook, such pluralism is not about reaching a consensus but about democracy affording space where conflict, as the outcome of the right to express different stances, can take place (Mouffe 2000; Papacharissi 2014).

6. Cf. the notion of discourse-driven quantification proposed in Goutsos and Hatzidaki, this volume.
7. Conclusion

Stance is “the primary discursive mechanism” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009: 220) via which we communicate how we feel, what we think, what we like or dislike. Zooming in on Facebook’s “stance-rich” environment (Barton and Lee 2013: 31) and being informed by Du Bois’ theory on stance, as well as by methods of discourse-centred online ethnography and corpus linguistics, this paper investigated two interactional stance-taking activities – positioning and (dis)alignment – produced by three Greek Facebook users discussing the economic repercussions of the crisis. In terms of positioning, it was shown how the participants claimed expertise on the issue, by expressing beliefs, invoking other’s expertise and pleading ignorance. Their (dis)alignment, on the other hand, was constructed by both direct and indirect challenges to others’ claims, postponements in criticisms, denials and recycling of linguistic forms.

Recent research has demonstrated how citizens have exploited social media in times of crisis to co-ordinate demonstrations (e.g. Fuchs 2014; Gerbaudo 2012; Tsaliki 2012), to humorously transpose crisis news stories across different platforms (e.g. Georgakopoulou 2014), to learn the latest news objecting to the biased mainstream media (e.g. Gomez-O’Cadiz 2014), to parody and satirise politicians (e.g. Häkkinen and Leppänen 2014), to narrate crisis-related stories and exercise citizen journalism (e.g. Georgalou 2015) and to extend their political communication repertoires (e.g. Hepp et al. 2016).

Corroborative to the aforementioned, the work reported here shows how young and educated citizens perceive and talk about the crisis, i.e. how they vernacularise it, in their informal Facebook conversations. In so doing, they also display reflexivity (see Section 2), namely heightened awareness and criticality of their position within both the crisis context and Facebook’s generic context. This reflexivity is manifested in the topic under discussion, the appropriation of Facebook for the purposes of the discussion, the consideration of Facebook’s semi-public nature, and the civil manner in which their stances are formulated.

In the public debates and discourses, Facebook, like most social media, is often criticised for being superficial and light-hearted, incubating the users’ angst to look attractive and show that they lead an interesting, enviable life. Anchoring in my ethnographic observation and interviews with Gabriel, he often shares links pertaining to the crisis, seeing Facebook as a personal space where he can express socio-political and socio-economic views (see also example 1). The very fact that Gabriel and the other participants discuss the topic of austerity on Facebook is a matter of conscious stance-taking towards both the ongoing situation and the medium of Facebook. The maturity that is distilled from their discussion cannot go unnoticed, especially if we take into account their young age (22 years old). As soon as they finish their studies, they will either strive to find a place in the Greek
labour market, which is affected by an ever-increasing youth unemployment rate, or migrate abroad. What is going on has/will have a considerable impact on their future, so it is reasonably plausible that crisis-related topics saturate their Facebook conversations. The examples presented in the collocation analysis also attest to this.

Facebook’s generic context promotes a good sense of social connection among users (Page 2012: 73). As such, it brings out the interpersonal nature of stance-taking, allowing the untangling of identity claims and relations to other people. The participants shared their thoughts and opinions, externalising their objection to, or espousal of, the austerity policy, as well as their disagreement with one another. What is crucial for the development of their stances is that the conversation is conducted semi-publicly (Gabriel has customised his privacy settings so that only people included in his Friends list can access his content) and not privately (e.g. via Facebook Messenger). The fact that Gabriel, FBU1 and FBU3 also know each other offline adds to this dimension. Their stances do not fall into the void but are displayed so as to be perceived, endorsed, challenged, judged, justified, negotiated, contested or rejected by Facebook audience members. It is a bi-directional process to influence, validate, claim or disclaim and all this without the slightest need to reach an agreement.

From Gabriel’s conversation with his Facebook friends, it appears that, despite all the dialectic, ultimately no convergence whatsoever is reached; thus, the whole exchange seems futile at first sight. Their argumentation and stance-expressing techniques appear to be dictated by their most fundamental/global (crisis-related polarised) stance, namely pro-memorandum vs. anti-memorandum, which they constantly strive to invest with valid (co-constructed) arguments and from which, in the end, they refuse to budge. FBU3’s Πλησιάζουμε στο σημείο σύγκλισης -τουλάχιστον σε αυτό! (‘We’re approaching a point of convergence -at least on this!’) in (36) provides some form of compensation, which, in the face of the total divergence of views on the burning issue of the crisis, restores what is mentioned by Page (2012: 73) as “social connection”.

For the most part, the participants’ stances were not restricted to laconic statements, but were rather choreographed in extremely lengthy comments with complex structure. Although Facebook models interaction through its infrastructure, the users stretched the possibilities of available affordances (comments in the case at hand) to their own ends. Gabriel and FBU3 moulded Facebook’s environment turning it into a conversational platform. Echoing Adami and Kress (2010: 185), the participants actively appropriated Facebook to take stances, “make meaning” and “shape their identities”, probably in ways the designer had not even thought of.

As social media have been “domesticated” (Barton and Lee 2013: 138), that is they have taken a central role in our everyday lives, instances of online aggression (e.g. flaming, trolling, online bullying) amongst users constitute a frequent phenomenon (Tagg 2015: 84). Despite the fact that in the data presented in this paper
the users in essence disagree with one another, their contributions are governed by civility. This civility is displayed in the use of devices that mitigate face threats such as hedging (e.g. by adding modals, verbs of cognition, or markers that signal lack of full commitment to a claim) and concessions as well as in the adoption of a conversational style in argumentation (e.g. by asking questions). By these devices the participants show that they are rational and co-operative contributors (see also Myers 2010b: 151–154), an observation which is also substantiated by the even distribution of ‘not’ collocations in Gabriel’s corpus. Civility was also enabled by the asynchronous nature of Facebook (the comments cover an extended time span), which gives them time to think and compose their comments accordingly.

This paper dealt with the Greek case. Nonetheless, crises tantalise economies and societies in the European South and elsewhere in the world. How and why are people using social media venues to represent and talk about crises? Cross-cultural and cross-social media research would give valuable, more holistic and solidified perspectives to the subject. As shown in the present study, the concept of stance proves to be a significant linchpin for the operationalisation of crisis-related data, since, as Jousmäki (2011: 55) points out, “it offers common ground for researchers interested in the connections between linguistic instances and socio-cultural realities”.

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Chapter 7. Taking stances on the Greek crisis on Facebook


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Appendix

Facebook interaction [original]
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Taking stances on the Greek crisis on Facebook

4 FBU1 Κοντά στην έξοδο από το ευρώ και στη χρεωκοπία, αυτά τα χρήματα καθολου ευχαρίστησα. 11 February 2012 at 15:17 Like

5 FBU1 (σου για τα 2 comment, πατηθήσε το enter κατά λαθός 😁 ) 11 February 2012 at 15:21 Like

6 Gabriel Αρχικά δεν είναι και πολύ χρήσιμα "αυτά," δεδομένου ότι περιορίζονται σε ένα καταγγελτικό λόγο χωρίς θετικό δράμα και πλάνα. Άλλωστε αυτό είναι κάτι σχετικά δεδομένο ότι δεν ακούγεται καμία θετική πρακτική πράττει από το λεγόμενο αντιμητηριακό μέτωπο. Θεωρώ ότι αν είχαν ακολουθήσει οι διαθρητικές αλλαγές που είχαν προταθεί με το πρώτο μηνύμα, με εμφάνιση στην αποκρατικοποίηση των ζημιών οχημάτων ΔΕΚΟ και στον εξορθολογισμό του φοροεπιπλακτικού μηχανισμού θα είχαμε σε καλύτερη μορφή και πιθανότερο στο Μηνύμα 2 να μην χρεωκοπήσει να ληφθούν τόσο σκληρά μέτρα. Βεβαίως εδώ η ευθύνη βαρύνει την κυβέρνηση που είχε επιφεύγει να το εφαρμόσει και όχι το μίγμα οικονομικών μέτρων που προτείνονταν στον Μηνύμα. Δεν παραγωγούσε την ανάγκη για προώθηση της ανταγωνιστικότητας και της ανάπτυξης μέσω φοροεπιπλακτών και μείωση της γραπτοκρατίας που θα έπρεπε να είχαν γίνει και εκτός Μηνύματος (αν και προθέτηκαν από αυτό). Δεδομένου λοιπόν των παραπάνω το βασικό πρόβλημα είναι η χρηματοπιστωτικής απαραίτητης μέτρων (τα οποία ακούγεται και αν δεν υπήρχε Μηνύμα δεν έχουν αν θα μπορούσαν να είναι και πολύ διαφορετικά, δεδομένης της ευρωζώνης διαφορετικής και ελληνικής οικονομικής). Όπως και όταν σύμφωνα της ψήφισης της Μηνύματος Σύμβουλος μας οδήγησε εκτός ευρώ. Πίστωση χρόνου μας δίνει.

13 February 2012 at 23:08 Like

7 FBU2 Όταν λέω εγώ ότι πρέπει να σε κάνουμε πολιτικά κάποια σημαντικά μέτρα κάτι ξέρω. 13 February 2012 at 23:14 Like

8 Gabriel δεδομένων (χ2), ασφαλείς 13 February 2012 at 23:19 Like

9 FBU3 Like στο σχόλιο της πώς που δεν είμαι σίγουρος, αν και πιεί στην έξω προσωπικά.

Βραδεύοντας, πραγματικά πιστεύω ότι για την κατάσταση στην οποία η Ελλάδα βρίσκεται τώρα φτάνει το πότε η εφαρμόστηκε το πρώτο Μηνύμα. Οκ, θα μοιράζεται απόλυτα σύμφωνο στα οποία κριτική κάνεις στους έλληνες πολιτικούς και, σύμφωνα, είχαν εφαρμοστεί κάποια πράγματα που επέβαλε το πρώτο μηνύμα τώρα περίπου τα μέτρα να μην ήταν τόσο επικίνητες. Άλλωστε αυτό είναι δευτερεύον, για να μην πω τριτεύον. 2 πράγματα:

1) Νομίζω το κύριο πρόβλημα είναι η πολιτική που ακολουθεί, η οποία μάλιστα αντιθέτησε με όσα λές-είναι υφεσιακή και δε χρειάζεται να περιμένουμε "μετά το πέρας της κρίσης" για να το καταλάβουμε. Είναι θεμελιώδης αρχή πώς όταν αυτές περιοριστικές δημοσιονομικές πολιτικές έκπληξη τη μείωση των ελλειμμάτων και των οικονομικών προβλημάτων (δέον με λόγο) σε πρόβλημα κρίσης ήχει ύφεση. Και αυτό δεν το λέω εγώ. Το ιδίο η ΔΝΤ το επισημαίνει στην πρόσφατη κρίση που άσκησε στις ευρωπαϊκές χώρες (κύρια τους τόσους οικονομικές που το "ψωμίζουν" 2 χρόνια τώρα).
2) Κάτι ακόμα: ακόμα και να μην υπήρχε αναφέρση της υφιστάμενης πολιτικής, δε φαίνεται να υπάρχει ζώνα καιρίας ανησυχίας για το απαραίτητο της αλλαγής των δομών του ευρώ (για την ακριβία υπάρχουν πολλές ανησυχίες και προτάσεις, αλλά το Βερολίνο δε θέλει να ακούει για αυτές). Αναφέρομαι σε αλλαγές που έχουν προτεθεί προκειμένου η ευρωζώνη να καταπετάξει προς μια ενότητα που θα της επιτρέπει να αντιμετωπίσει την κρίση. Ως μια πρόταση για τη λειτουργία της κεντρικής τράπεζας της ευρωζώνης ή τις εκλογές των ΗΠΑ (Fed) (ήμως με παρουσία απεριόριστης ρευστότητας κατά τη μέρα) ή τα ευρωπαϊκά. 

Ενδεικτικό είναι ότι όλα αυτά (οι μικρές παλέτες μάλλον) τα λέει ακόμα και ο Economist είδω και καιρό, το οποίο είναι ένας ένας που ανηκεί υπερασπείται στην πλαίσιο της κοινωνίας της ελευθερίας παραθύρων. Στο λευ δείχνει για να δείξει πως ακόμα και ένας ένας το οποίο δεν ανηκεί σε ένα «αριστερό» ιδεολογικό πλαίσιο (σημαντικά μιλά όμως αλλά καταλαβαίνει το εννοεί, επικρίνει τις πολιτικές που ακούνται έως τώρα και τις αποδοκίμασε ως συνιστάδες. Ως λόγω διαφορετικής πολιτικής αναφοράς, αλλά λόγω συνειδητοποίησης που η ακολουθεί η λάθος πολιτική.

Σε συνέχεια του παραπάνω και να κλείσω, δεν ξέρω αν η χρεωκοπία ή το Μνημόνιο οδηγεί την Ελλάδα στην έξοδο από το ευρώ, ξέρω όμως ότι η έναρξη αυτής της περιοχής καθιστά το μέλλον του ίδιου του ευρώ δυσοπτικό.

14 February 2012 at 21:02 · Like

Gabriel I (ο βρείς είναι υποστηρίζει και δεν μου αρέσει καθόλου)

1) Οι πολιτικές του Μνημονίου απομονωμένες και ανεξάρτητα σε μικροοικονομικό επίπεδο φέρουν ύφεση η αυτόπτιση των διαφορετικών μέτρα ώστε να προωθούν την έξοδο από την ύφεση και τις παραπάνω αναπτυξιακές πείθεις που φέρνει η πολιτική λιτότητας-αλλά αυτά τα μέτρα τα ανησυχίες παντελώς βλέπει. Επίσης ανησυχεί θεωρώ πως πετρέωσε την ύφεση σε οικονομικούς κύκλους (ξεκινώ και το σχέδιο μου για την φάση της κρίσης και τις πρόοδες εκτιμήσεις). 2) Αυτό που προτείνει απλά μπορεί να απειλείται με στατιστικής πληροφορίες, λόγω της δομής της ελληνικής ικανότητας που δεν λαμβάνει ύποπτο για τον έλεγχο της πληροφορίας και τις πρόοδες εκτιμήσεις.

14 February 2012 at 12:03 · Like

FBU3 (ελπίζει με να είναι ένας φανερός είδως, δεν υποστηρίζει ότι το Μνημόνιο πρέπει από την πολιτική και φτάνει για όλα τα βασικά της χώρας χρήμα παραγωγικότητας τις συγκριτικές διαφορές και ιδιαιτερότητες της Ελλάδας εποχικά, τις ιδιαίτερες θεωρίες εξερευνητικής ισχύς για να καταλάβουμε τι συμβαίνει. Αλλά, επειδή η κρίση δεν είναι ελληνική και η Ελλάδα αποτελεί μέρος της ευρωζώνης, θεωρώ βασικά να δουμε μικροοικονομικά και να εξετάσουμε τις πολιτικές που δρομολογούνται κεντρικά και το κατά πόσον συμβάλουν ή όχι στην έξοδο της έξοδος της οικονομίας - κατά επίκαιρη ακρίβεια της Ελλάδας- από την κρίση.)

14 February 2012 at 23:06 · Like
Chapter 7. Taking stances on the Greek crisis on Facebook

2) Γράφες «Αυτό που προτείνεις απλοίκα για απεριόριστη ρευστότητα δεναι να οδηγήσει σε στασιμοπλήθωρισμό». Μάλλον εννοείς πληθωρισμό.
Ετσισμοπλήθωρισμός (stagflation) είναι κάτι πολύ διαφορετικό και αναφέρεται στην παυτόρονη ύπαρξη ανεργίας και πληθωρισμού, γιαπέρα που παρατηρήθηκε τη δεκαετία του '70 και επέφερε την αλλαγή του κυρίαρχου έως τότε κεντρικού οικονομικού μοντέλου για να ζεταραστεί. Προφανώς και δεν αγωνίστανο τον -υπερηφανέρων- κίνδυνο του πληθωρισμού και το moral hazard, αλλά το σχόλιο μου αναφερόταν στο ότι ένας τέτοιος ρόλος της EKT (δηλ. παρόμοιοι με εκείνου της FED) θα ήταν ενδεικτικό από τα πολλά, δηλ. η αδιάμερη της EKT να επέμβαινε αποφασιστικά και να δώσει τέλος σε προβλήματα ρευστότητας. Δεν άκυρωσε το πώς τα κράτη συμμετέχουν στους ευρωπαϊκούς θεσμούς -αντίθετα με αυτό που λέει και για αυτό λέω πως το υπάρχου πλαίσιο δυσχεραινεί την κατάσταση (και επί αυτού). Δεδομένων της παραδείγματος http://www.economist.com/node/21529049

Τα υπόλοιπα περί της επιστήμης μου τα είπα στο προηγούμενο σχόλιο μου αποτέλεσμα ότι δεν έχω να προσθέσω κάτι -αν και, αναγκαστικά αποθέων μια στιγμή από τη θέση μου και περιορίζεται στα τοιχογράμματα της οικονομίας.

Και 2 σημαντικά τελευταία σημεία: πρώτον, και επομένως δεν έχω (ενδείκτικα σε θέματα που δεν είναι αυτά με τα οποία ασχολούμε περισσότερο) και ακριβώς για αυτό λέω τα αυτά λέω με αναφορές σε έντυπο/εντύπωμα και όχι δομικά και απόλοιπα. Και δεύτερον, προφανώς και το "βριλ" δεν το εννοούσα υποτιμητικά -αντιθέτα με το πώς το εξελίχθηκε.

How to save the euro
SO GRAVE, so menacing, so unstoppable has the euro crisis become that even rescue talk only fuels ever-rising...
15 February 2012 at 09:45 - Like

Gabriel 13

15 February 2012 at 17:24 - Like

Gabriel 14

Y.G: Εκτιμήτε τα πόλεμα το τι περιορίσεις των μήκων των comments σου για τα δικά μέτρα πάντα!!
15 February 2012 at 17:24 - Like
Facebook interaction [translation]

(1) **FBU1**: you know what all this reminds me of? a comic strip which says “what will happen if we go into default?” “you’ll starve” “and what should I do so we don’t go into default?” “starve”. in other words pseudo-dilemma.

(2) **Gabriel**: The issue is how far into the future the crisis will be protracted, not whether in the short term living standards will decline. The meaning of avoiding default is that a country will be able to retain some credibility in international money markets in order to be able in the future to borrow at lower interest rates and thus save money for structural payments. Moreover a default has in the short term significant consequences for inflation and for a country’s deficit due to the high cost of covering import expenses. Now arguments of the sort ‘crisis will not affect you’ or ‘one picture is worth a thousand words’ are pleasant but not useful!

(3) **FBU1**: fine. let’s go to the useful stuff. do you believe the programme adopted for 2 years now will get the country out of crisis or are you just forced to opt for it based on the bipolar default or measures? second those who say that if we don’t take the measures we’ll default are the same ones who used to say that if we take the measures of the first memorandum we will enter the markets in 2012 and have developing rates. Obviously nothing of the sort has happened so I can’t understand why carry on with the same recipe. Third you say that if we don’t take the measures we’ll go into default. what I’m actually saying to you is that the measures apart from ruthless are also recessionary and are bringing us

(4) **FBU1**: closer to euro exit and to default. nuff said. of useful stuff. not at all pleasant.

(5) **FBU1**: sorry for the 2 comments. Enter was pressed by mistake :) )

(6) **Gabriel**: For a start, this ‘nuff’ stuff isn’t that useful given that it’s limited to a denunciatory discourse without a positive vision and plan. But this is something relative given that no positive realistic proposal comes from the so-called anti-memorandum front. I consider that if the structural changes put forward in the first memorandum, with emphasis on the privatisation of loss-making public utilities and the rationalisation of the tax collection mechanism had been implemented we would have been in a better situation and possibly in Memorandum 2 there would have been no need to take such
strict measures. Of course in this case responsibility lies with the government which was charged with implementing it and not with the mixture of economic measures proposed in the Memorandum. I don’t underestimate the need to promote competitiveness and development via tax exemptions and bureaucracy curbing which should have been done irrespective of the Memorandum (although proposed by it). So on account of the above the basic problem is the non-implementation of the necessary measures (which even if there was no Memorandum I don’t know if they could have been a lot different given the broader structural weaknesses of the Greek economy) and not their very nature... Finally, it is at least vague and improper for us to say that the measures are recessionary since in any case the Greek economy is at the beginning of the mid-recession period and therefore we cannot judge whether the measures will definitely have a recessionary result (it’s safer we do that after the end of the crisis). Now I don’t think the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding would lead us [sic] out of the euro. It just buys us time.

(7) FBU2: When I say that we should make you a politician one day, I know a thing or two...

(8) Gabriel: [Gabriel corrects some typo mistakes in comment 6]

(9) FBU3: Like to FBU1’s comment (apart from the last sentence, for which I’m not sure), although I don’t know her personally.

C’mon [Vre] Gabriel, do you really believe Greece is in this situation now because the first Memorandum wasn’t implemented? OK, I absolutely agree with any criticism you level at Greek politicians and, yes, if some things dictated by the first memorandum had been implemented, the measures wouldn’t have been so onerous. But this is of secondary if not of tertiary importance. Two things:

1) I think the main problem is the policy applied, which of course -contrary to what you’re saying- is recessionary and we needn’t wait until “after the end of the crisis” to realise this. It’s a fundamental principle that when you apply a restrictive financial policy with a view to reducing deficits and balancing budgets (call me austerity) in a period of crisis, you have recession. And it’s not me saying that. The IMF itself highlights this in the recent criticism it levelled at European governments (not to mention all those economists “shouting” about it for 2 years now).

2) One more thing: even if there was no withdrawal of the existing policy, there seem to be no worries so far about the necessity of changing the structures of the euro (to be precise there are many worries and suggestions, but Berlin does not want to hear about them). I’m referring to changes proposed in order for the eurozone to head towards a unity which will allow it to deal with crisis. See the proposal for a central eurozone bank like that of the USA (Fed) (namely via the provision of limitless cash flow to member states) or the eurobonds.

It is indicative that (amongst many others) even the Economist has been saying all this for a while, which is a publication that openly belongs to a free market society framework. I’m saying this to you so you see that even a publication which does not belong to a “left-wing” ideological framework (I’m talking schematically now but you know what I mean), criticises the policies applied so far and dismisses them as deadlocked. Not because of a different theoretical reference, but due to the realisation that the wrong policy is being implemented.
In continuation to the above and to finish off, I don’t know whether a default or the Memorandum would lead Greece out of the euro. I know, though, that continuing along this path renders bleak the future of the euro itself.

(10) **FBU3:** (I hope it’s obvious that here I’m not claiming that the Memorandum came from nowhere and is responsible for all the country’s maladies neither do I underestimate Greece’s relative differences and specificities historically, which I consider extremely important so we understand what is going on. However, because crisis is not Greek and Greece is part of the eurozone, I consider it fundamental to look at macroscopically and to examine the policies launched and the extent to which they are conducive to the eurozone’s -and consequently Greece’s- exit from the crisis.)

(11) **Gabriel:** FBU3 (C’mon [vre] is derogatory and I don’t like it at all)

1) Memorandum policies when isolated and [taken] independently on a macroeconomic level bring recession, that’s why structural measures exist to facilitate exit from recession and the consequential developmental pressures that the austerity policy brings – but I see that you totally disregard these measures. You also disregard basic models that describe recession in economic cycles (hence my comment about the crisis phase and the premature evaluations). 2) What you simplistically propose for limitless cash flow may lead to stagflation, due to the structure of the Greek economy- not to mention that it does not even remotely take into account the logic by which states participate in the European institutions... the issue with Greece is to proceed to structural readjustments of its economy until it comes out of crisis... the issue also relates to the structure of the eurozone but we are not discussing this. This arrogance of yours about what is right and wrong at a time when these evaluations are a subject of contention for much more knowledgeable responsible bodies is beyond me.

(12) **FBU3:** 1) I think there’s quite a bit of confusion in your first point. I said something clear in my comment with respect to the fact that the measures taken precipitate recession. I do not disapprove of some structural changes, but how on Earth do these structural changes lead to exiting recession, as you say? And why shouldn’t these changes be accompanied by a different policy? It’s not structural changes that will get you out of recession, it’s development policies. Moreover, what do you mean by “particular models describing recession in economic cycles?” Do you mean these models don’t accept the existence of recession and assess it let’s say “after the end of the crisis?”

2) You write “What you simplistically propose for limitless cash flow may lead to stagflation”. You probably mean inflation. Stagflation is something very different and refers to the simultaneous existence of unemployment and inflation, a phenomenon which was observed in the 70s and triggered the change of the up until then prevalent Keynesian economic model so it could be surpassed. Of course I don’t disregard the – overestimated- risk of inflation and the moral hazard. But my comment was referring to the fact that such a role by the ECB (namely a similar one to that of FED) would help in many areas. This especially has been highlighted by many, namely the ECB’s inability to intervene decisively and put an end to cash flow problems. I don’t disregard how states participate in European institutions -contrary to what you’re saying- and that’s why I’m
saying that the existing framework complicates the situation (also) concerning this. See here for example http://www.economist.com/node/21529049

All the rest about my view I have said in my previous comment therefore I’ve got nothing to add –although I’m forced not to touch upon a series of issues and confine myself to those concerning the economy.

And two important final points: first, I’m not at all arrogant (especially re issues that are not particularly my department) and that’s exactly why I say what I say with pointers to sources/people and not dogmatically and rigidly. And second, no way did I mean “vre” in a derogatory way – contrary to how you perceived it.

(13) Gabriel: Structural changes lead to and are part of development policies. For example, reducing the cost and bureaucracy of launching a new business lies in a context of policies aiming at creating a framework of development and are considered structural changes. I don’t deny they might be more effective with a different financial management but on the basis of the current state of public finances I don’t know if something like that is feasible. The models I mention postulate that depending on the phase of crisis the policies adopted are not always easy to evaluate, as, especially at the peak of crisis, recession is so widespread that renders all sectors of the economy problematic (I’m saying this a bit simplistically here due to space and the inability to show you the relevant curve). I’m talking about stagflation caused by cash flow entry into the market and the concomitant lack of interest in investments (for psychological reasons in our case) and more generally the diffusion of cash flow available to the real economy. Beyond that yes it can cause unemployment too. Moreover I consider that the moral hazard you mention in a structure of mutual benefits with collaborative structures is really important and hard to sacrifice. Lastly, I agree that ECB’s obsession with low inflation is out of touch with reality at this moment in time. I’m not saying that there’s no room for improvement, I’m not at all rigid, I’m just saying that a great part of the applied policies are probably on the right track, although we will draw final conclusions in a few years!

(14) Gabriel: P.S: I really appreciate your reducing the length of your comments –by your own standards anyway!!

(15) FBU3: You expounded previous positions of yours that I had already commented on, therefore I think I have nothing more to add. The economic policy applied, recession, ECB’s role along with the risks this might have (inflation, moral hazard) I have already referred to in my previous comments. I’m just pointing out that as it turns out (on the basis of what I have briefly said during this conversation) I’ve reached the opposite conclusion than the one you’ve arrived at in your last sentence: namely that in my opinion the applied policies are on the wrong track (without, as I said, rejecting everything about them, I’m just talking about their general direction).

PS: I myself appreciate your lengthening your comments. We’re approaching a point of convergence– at least on this!