

# In the traces of a crisis

An individual-level analysis of the impact of the European  
sovereign debt crisis on voter participation in the 2014  
European Parliament election

Aleksandar Sibinovic

*Dedicated to my family – to everyone who are here and to everyone who are no  
longer with us.  
Also dedicated to Karin, Daniel and Jonathan – your friendship is my blessing.*

# Abstract

Elections to the European Parliament have since they were introduced in 1979 been, as scholars define it, a “second-order” election. They are typically as such characterized through the losses for national government parties, surge of smaller parties, low interest from the public in general and most of all low levels of voter participation.

Expectations were therefore for once higher that the European Parliament elections in 2014 would prove to be different from previous experiences. One very important reason was the past years collective top-down experience in the European Union of going through and dealing with the European sovereign debt crisis. The aim for this thesis therefore became to perform an individual-level analysis using logistic regression to determine what impact the crisis had on voter participation in a group of EU member states (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain) that were particularly affected by the crisis.

The overall conclusion is that the crisis seems only to have had at best marginal positive effects on voter participation in these countries and that national political circumstances still determine much of the contents of these elections and the context under which they are held and conducted.

*Key words:* voter participation, European Parliament elections, EU, European sovereign debt crisis, economic voting

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# Table of contents

|          |   |           |
|----------|---|-----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Introduction.....</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>2</b> | <b>The European sovereign debt crisis, the situation in 2014 and theoretical implications for the analysis.....</b> | <b>3</b>  |
| 2.1      | Greece and the debt crisis.....   | 3         |
| 2.2      | Ireland and the debt crisis.....  | 5         |
| 2.3      | Italy and the debt crisis.....  | 6         |
| 2.4      | Portugal and the debt crisis .....  | 7         |
| 2.5      | Spain and the debt crisis.....  | 8         |
| 2.6      | Cyprus and the debt crisis .....  | 9         |
| 2.7      | Theoretical implications for the further analysis.....  | 10        |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Previous research and analytical approach.....</b>   | <b>12</b> |
| 3.1      | The 2014 EP election in previous research .....   | 12        |
| 3.2      | General dynamics of voter participation and voter turnout.....  | 14        |
| 3.3      | The second-order nature of EP elections.....  | 16        |
| 3.4      | Economic voting .....   | 17        |
| 3.5      | Analytical approach.....  | 18        |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Methodology and data.....</b>  | <b>20</b> |
| 4.1      | Logistic regression .....   | 20        |
| 4.2      | Data .....  | 21        |
| 4.2.1    | Choice of dependent variable and independent variables .....  | 22        |
| 4.2.2    | Choice of comparing independent variables (political interest and party identification).....                        | 24        |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Results.....</b>   | <b>26</b> |
| 5.1      | The crisis-related variables: low levels of significance, explanation and effects.....                              | 26        |
| 5.2      | The impact of the European sovereign debt crisis on voter participation .....                                       | 27        |
| 5.2.1    | Greece.....   | 27        |
| 5.2.2    | Ireland.....  | 30        |
| 5.2.3    | Italy.....  | 31        |
| 5.2.4    | Portugal .....  | 31        |
| 5.2.5    | Spain.....  | 32        |
| 5.2.6    | Cyprus .....  | 34        |

|          |   |           |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 5.3      | The impact of political interest and party identification in the selected countries ..... | 35        |
| 5.3.1    | Political interest.....   | 35        |
| 5.3.2    | Party identification .....  | 36        |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Discussion: The crisis, the 2014 EP election and voter participation .....</b>         | <b>38</b> |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Concluding remarks and reflections .....</b>   | <b>41</b> |
|          | <b>References.....</b>  | <b>43</b> |

# 1 Introduction

Ever since they were introduced in 1979, the European Parliament (EP) elections have been a kind of enigma to scholars, politicians and media alike. They were created in order to increase the European Community's own democratic legitimacy and to invite the voters in the member states to participate in European affairs (Andersen, Eliassen et al 1996; 189, Cini et al 2016; 341). However, these intentions have largely fallen short of their aim and have through the years to a high degree been met with disinterest and abstention from the voters. From 62 percent turnout with nine member states in 1979, the voter turnout has fallen consistently to its new record low 42,5 percent in 2014 with 28 member states.

Partly, the explanations have ranged from the European Union's (EU) own inherent accountability problems as a large supranational polity, i.e. the democratic deficit aspect (Cini et al 2016; 340-342). The lack of a unified and coherent European *demos* and a concrete European public sphere has also been offered as an explanation to the lack of interest in European matters on the part of EU's own citizens (Cini et al 2016; 341).

Be that as it may, within in the context of EP elections themselves the low turnout and voter participation and low public interest have been explained that they are considered as "second-order" by the voters in relation to elections in their own countries. From their own point of view, the EP elections are treated as an opportunity to show dissatisfaction or approval of the incumbent national government or to vote for otherwise marginal alternatives (Cini et al 2016; 155). This "second-order" nature of these elections is also present through how national parties treat and frame these elections. More as a rule than an exception, national issues and concerns trump European issues and concerns in the national EP election campaigns by the national political parties.

Nevertheless, there was some expectations leading up to the 2014 EP elections that voter participation would make a turn from this negative trend from earlier elections. Beginning in the aftermath of the outbreak of the 2008 global financial crisis, the European sovereign debt crisis had shaken the EU and its member states to their foundations with recurring convulsions through the years with rising unemployment and government debt ,increased cuts in welfare systems and major restructuring of national economies.

As a result of this, several countries (Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Portugal and Ireland) received

help and bailouts in order to solve their economic problems. Other countries, like Italy, have since struggled to manage their exposure to their government debt. The crisis has also have great political and social consequences in the member states like the protest waves in Greece, Spain and Portugal together with drastic government changes and restructuring of the political party systems. Because of this period of chaos and crisis management the EU has been more and more involved in the internal politics of its member states in an unprecedented way than it has been before, especially in the mentioned countries. Therefore, when the 2014 EP election was approaching the word from Brussels was “This time it’s different!” (European parliament press release February 11<sup>th</sup> 2014) and the expectations were that considering all that had happened in the time leading up to the election surely would have an effect on voter participation and interest as well.

The question therefore is, which the aim of this thesis will be to answer: *What impact did the European sovereign debt crisis have on voter participation in the 2014 EP election in the selected “crisis” countries Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain?*

The relevance of researching this subject is in my own judgement fairly high since it is essentially pointing to the EU’s legitimacy as a supranational polity and the distance between the governing body and the governed. Even after over three decades, citizens in EU member states to a large degree have not shown many signs to bother not only to vote, but bothering at all about the only directly supranational elected body, the European Parliament, even if it has evolved into a powerful actor within this multi-level system through the various treaty reforms (Cini et al 2016; 156-160). The second-order nature of these elections, which the vast majority of scholars and literature agree on, still seems to be in place and therefore it is interesting to see whether a salient and cross-national issue like the European sovereign debt crisis played a role, if any, for voters to actually go to the ballots in 2014.

If that would be the case, then it would possibly indicate a step in the direction towards a more aware electorate in the member states that votes in European elections with *European* concerns and issues in mind. We are though probably still a long way from the ideal of a coherent demos in the EU, but if the results show that the crisis had an impact on voter participation then it could possibly be one step in that direction.

## 2 The European sovereign debt crisis, the situation in 2014 and theoretical implications for the analysis

Below will follow a brief recap of the European sovereign debt crisis, how it affected the selected countries in this research and what theoretical implications they give us for the further research.

### 2.1 Greece and the debt crisis

Where to start if not at the very beginning. Greece has been a central actor in this crisis and from time to time the central focus of the EU's efforts together with IMF and the European Central Bank to resolve this issue.

Greece is where the European sovereign debt crisis took up speed in 2010. While the background rather complex, it's safe to say that years and decades of mismanagement and even corrupt practices by Greek governments and public agencies are at the center of the knot. A large public sector was built up, but with low tax revenues and low tax discipline among the population and private businesses. This not only created big budget deficits, but also a significant government debt since the governments were forced to borrow capital from foreign banks to uphold their promises to their constituencies.

This exposed situation proved to be devastating for Greece once the global financial crisis started in 2008. The country was immediately thrown into a recession and despite of unpopular budget cuts, the EU was forced to take charge of the situation and together with IMF they initiated the first emergency loan of 110 billion euros in May 2010 (Reuters May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, *EU, IMF agree \$147 billion bailout for Greece*). This was the starting point of EU's and IMF's direct involvement and has since been followed by several further interventions through the years.

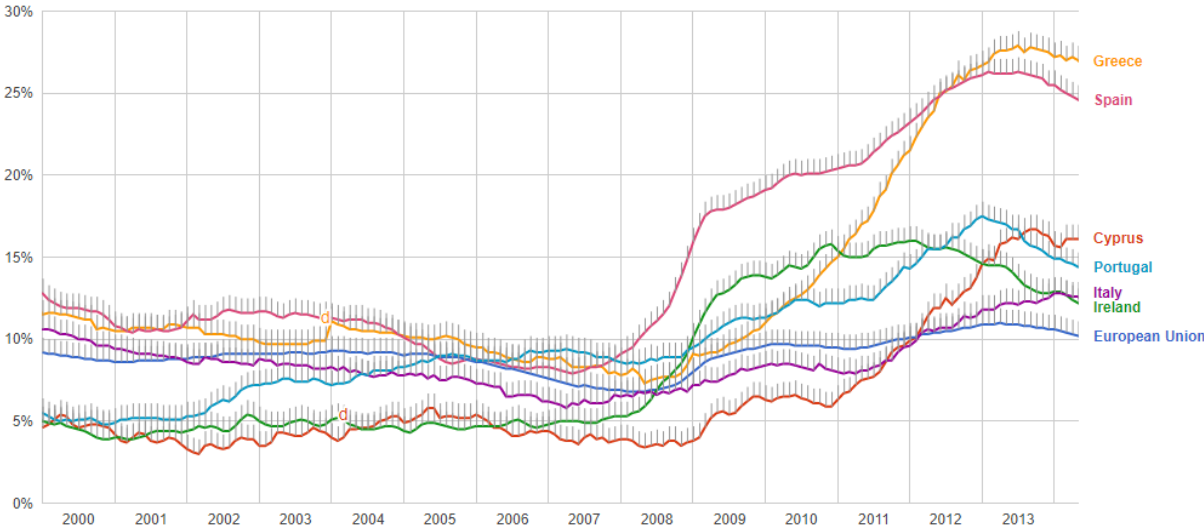
Socially and politically the crisis had, and still has, overwhelming consequences. As a



requirement for the emergency loans the Papandreou- and Samaras-led governments had to more vigorously enforce taxation and to make deep cuts and restructures in the public sector, especially in the welfare systems, leading to massive unemployment, social unrest, lowered living standards and closure of many businesses. At its worst, the unemployment was 28 percent in June 2013 and the government debt was 175 percent of GDP in 2011.

Politically the crisis led to a deep distrust from the public towards the political parties especially PASOK and New Democracy, the two main rivals who interchangeably had been in government since the 1970's and who were blamed for the situation. This otherwise stable party system with two big parties was turned on its head; PASOK all but collapsed as a party while New Democracy, even when they formed a new government in 2012, did that with far less public support than before. Meanwhile, parties on the fringes of the Greek political system started to gain support, best illustrated by the left-wing coalition SYRIZA (Swedish Institute of International Affairs: Utrikespolitiska institutet/Landguiden/Grekland/Modern historia: <https://www.ui.se/landguiden/lander-och-omraden/europa/grekland/modern-historia/>).

All in all, Greece found itself in a tough situation in 2014. Economically, socially and politically the country was in turmoil and the debt crisis was not only the primary concern at the government level, it was also a matter of fact of the everyday life of Greek citizens with painful consequences and with wave after wave of protests, demonstrations and strikes.



Timeline 1: Unemployment rate (%) January 2000-May 2014. Source: Eurostat

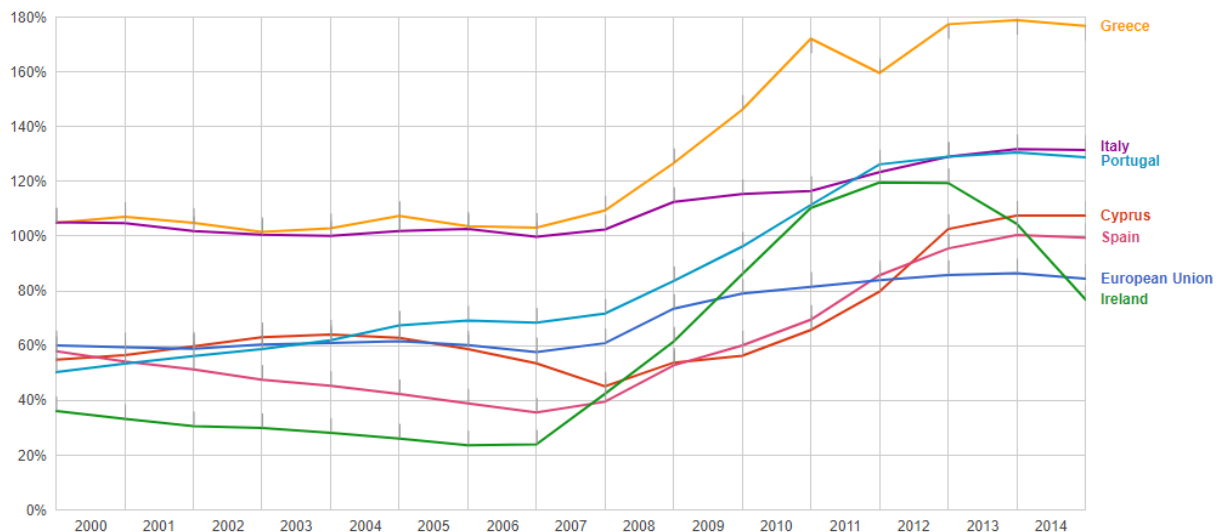
## 2.2 Ireland and the debt crisis

Named as the “Celtic Tiger”, the Irish economy boomed throughout the 1990’s and 2000’s with increased industrial exports, internal consumption and liberal reforms in the economy by the Fine Gael-led government. Low company taxes made the country a popular destination for international companies to relocate and a stable situation between unions and employers also contributed to this situation.

With the outburst of the global financial crisis in 2008, the banks and the financial sector developed into the biggest problem for the Fianna Fail-led government. The government took on the situation with state guarantees to the banks. The banks in turn had concealed how bad the situation was and how exposed they were to the crisis. The increasing state loans started to have its effects on the state budget and the January 2009 takeover of the Anglo Irish Bank (The Irish Times, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2009, *Government to nationalise Anglo Irish Bank*) led to a government takeover of three additional banks. Even with deep cuts, Ireland’s budget deficit quickly rose to 14 per cent in 2009 and almost as much in 2010, far over the EMU limits of 3 per cent. Between 2008 and 2010 the GDP fell with 4 per cent per year. The combined strains of the economic downturn and the crisis in the banking and financial sector was taking its toll on Ireland. By November 2010, the government saw no other option than to request for an emergency loan of 85 billion euros from the EU, IMF, United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden. To get the loan, Ireland in turn had to make even deeper cuts in its state budget and contribute with 17 billion euros on its own to resolve the situation, money that had to be taken from state reserves and the national pension fund (Washington Post, November 28<sup>th</sup> 2010, *Ireland agrees to \$90 billion bailout terms*).

Politically, the crisis had its immediate effect when Fianna Fail Prime Minister Brian Cowen and his government resigned in the beginning of 2011 and in the subsequent elections in February the same year, Fianna Fail plummeted and lost 50 seats in Parliament while their main rivals Fine Gael formed a new government. The deep cuts, especially in the welfare system, and high unemployment rates have had their marring effects with growing disappointment. Several waves of demonstrations against the austerity measures have come by through the years (The Irish Times, November 4<sup>th</sup> 2010, *25,000 protest against fees increase* and RTÉ, April 13<sup>th</sup> 2013, *Thousands attend anti-austerity march in Dublin*). In economic terms, signs of a renewed upturn in the Irish economy started to show in 2013 and in the fall the same year the government declared it was in no need of new loans. But socially

the crisis management had taken its toll socially and by 2014 there was great dissatisfaction against the Fine Gael government because of this.



Timeline 2: Government debt in relation to GDP (%) 2000-2014. Source: Eurostat

## 2.3 Italy and the debt crisis

Traditionally, the engine of the Italian economy has been in the northern part of the country where production-based industries has been the largest contributor of Italian exports. But it has shrunk through the years due to competition from low wage-countries. When the financial crisis started in 2008, the export-based economy became exposed and shrunk even more. Together with this downturn, the government debt went straight up together with increased interest and unemployment rates. Internal consumption also came to a halt.

The Berlusconi government, already burdened by his personal scandals, was in 2010 forced to implement cuts in the welfare system and state budget with a freeze of government wages and a higher retirement age. But with the accelerating crisis in Greece, the government was forced to even more cuts after demands by the IMF. Italy was never subjected to loans as the other countries, but the ECB started its practice of buying Italian state bonds so the government could follow through with its budget commitments (The Guardian August 8<sup>th</sup> 2011, *European Central Bank mounts rescue for Italy and Spain – but sets its price*). But the government debt remained and got even worse; by the end of 2011 it was 120 per cent of the GDP and the EU and IMF started to review the Italian state budget on a quarterly basis. Eventually Berlusconi was forced to resign as prime minister in the end of 2011 and a more

technocratic government under Mario Monti took over, later replaced by the Letta and Renzi governments. Continued unpopular cuts, such as those in healthcare and the government administration, and initiated labor reforms have followed in order to deal with the government debt problem. However, through 2014 until today the progress has been slow.

Politically and socially the debt crisis has also had its effects. Italian voters, already highly skeptical of the political landscape, have slowly turned away from established parties like Berlusconi's Forza Italia or the social democratic PD and instead started to embrace populist options like the Five Star Movement in many public gatherings and demonstrations, fiercely positioned against the other political parties and under the leadership of comedian Beppe Grillo. Anti-austerity movements in Italy have in general been active through the crisis years. As late as April 2014, one month before the EP election, a protest in Rome against the austerity measures spurred out of control and became violent between protesters and police (Al Jazeera April 13<sup>th</sup> 2014, *Anti-austerity protest in Italy turns violent*).

## 2.4 Portugal and the debt crisis

Portugal had a positive economic development in the 1990's through a combination of increased investments from other European countries, higher exports, deregulations of the economy and help from EU funds. Lower wages than in other European countries had made Portugal a popular destination for companies to invest, however with increased competition from Eastern European countries and the surging economies in Asia the economy in Portugal started to dwindle in the beginning of the 2000's with lower investments and tax revenues together with increased government spending.

The country was therefore already in a vulnerable position when the global financial crisis began in 2008. In 2010 the budget deficit jumped to 9 per cent and government debt had reached to 82 per cent of the GDP. But even after two packages of tough budget cuts, the budget deficit hadn't reached the set goal and both Fitch and Moody's lowered Portugal's credit ratings, making it even harder for the country to borrow money. The desperate situation forced the José Socrates government to request for a 78 billion euro loan in May 2011 from the EU and IMF in exchange for continued cuts in the welfare sector, privatizations and economic reforms (Der Spiegel, May 4<sup>th</sup> 2011, *Deal Struck: Portugal to Receive 78 Billion Euro Bailout*) . Additional loans in 2012 were given in order deal with the continued

problems.

Eventually the government managed to reach a budget deficit level of 4,5 per cent in 2014, the economy started to show some positive signs and the loan program ended in the first half of 2014, however at a great cost for the citizens; unemployment had reached record high 17,5 per cent in January 2013 and the effects of the welfare cuts were unpopular. The crisis and the government's handling of it led to a wave of anti-austerity protests through the years (BBC News, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013, *Eurozone crisis: Portugal protests against austerity*) primarily through the March 12<sup>th</sup> movement and several strikes.

## 2.5 Spain and the debt crisis

Through the 1990's and the first half of the 2000's, Spain developed into a strong economic force in Europe. A combination of lowered taxes, privatizations, lowered government spending and the fact that Spain was a large recipient of EU funds got the Spanish economy into full speed. However the housing bubble, fueled by generous loans and large real estate speculations, finally burst in 2008 with sinking real estate prices which led to an immediate halt in building projects and higher unemployment. Higher living costs through high interest rates and increased food prices made life even more difficult for the Spanish public. Lower consumption only worsened the economic situation.

The SPOE government tried in the following two years to stimulate the economy but with a sinking GDP and increased unemployment it instead resolved to make budget cuts worth 50 billion euros including freezed pensions and government wages, higher taxes on real estates and labor market reforms. But the GDP shrunk even more, the budget deficit rose to 11 per cent and household debts were now over 1000 billion euros. Dissatisfaction with the PSOE government led to the election of a new PP government under Rajoy's lead in November 2011 who continued on the path of austerity policies. Unemployment, however, soon rose to 24 per cent.

100 billion euros in loan from EU was requested by the government in June 2012 to deal with the bank's risky loans who in turn requested the budget deficit to get under 3 percent until 2014 (Reuters June 10<sup>th</sup> 2012, *Euro zone agrees to lend Spain up to 100 billion euros*), a time frame that had to be moved due to the failure of reaching that goal. Throughout 2012 and 2013 the austerity measures included lowered pensions, unemployment support, a stop in

government recruitments and lowered appropriations to the industrial and agricultural sector. Many of these structural reforms were made on the proposal by the EU in order to facilitate further help.

The crisis and the subsequent policies by the PSOE and PP governments have brought about great dissatisfaction throughout Spain. Leading up to the regional and local elections in May 2011 the situation created social unrest but also big gatherings through Spain, much of which had its epicenter in the Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid (The Guardian, May 19<sup>th</sup> 2011, *Protest in the Med: rallies against cuts and corruption spread*). Dissatisfaction with the austerity policies by the Zapatero and Rajoy governments, and anger towards the two parties themselves has led to a rupture in the political system itself; in subsequent elections PP and PSOE particularly have lost much of their support and have been challenged by new political forces like Ciudadanos and the Podemos.

## 2.6 Cyprus and the debt crisis

Because of its favorable tax and enterprise laws, Cyprus has especially since the 1990's become a popular destination for offshore companies to establish themselves there. Through time, a very prosperous and powerful financial and banking sector has risen up on that island with protection from strong bank secrecy laws. The financial and banking sector had by the first years of the 2000's grown to a powerful actor in Cyprus with a turnover seven times of the Cypriote government assets, making the government vulnerable for a crisis in that sector.

The breakout of the global financial crisis in 2008 had started to create problems for the Cypriote banks but the situation increasingly worsened in 2009 and 2010 when Greece was severely hit by its own economic problems. Cypriote banks had through the years been buying big amounts of Greek state bonds and lending big sums to Greek companies. The bonds were now 80 per cent down in value and the money loss from the loans to Greek companies was enormous. Other Cypriote companies were severely affected since Greece was the biggest trading partner of Cyprus (Swedish Institute of International Affairs: Utrikespolitiska institutet/Landguiden/Cypern/Ekonomi: <https://www.ui.se/landguiden/lander-och-omraden/europa/cypern/oversikt/>).

The situation worsened for the Cypriote government with an increasing budget deficit, a deficit that the IMF in 2011 started to call on the government to get under control primarily

through restructuring the cost of the public sector which was the largest one in the EU. By the autumn of 2011, initial unpopular austerity measures were approved by the parliament and met with strikes throughout Cyprus. By 2012 Cypriote banks were reviewed as close to bankruptcy and Cypriote state bonds were seen as practically worthless. For the first time the government saw no option but to request for loans by the EU.

The negotiations between Cyprus and the “troika” (The Commission, ECB and IMF) dragged on, but in April 2013 a deal was reached where a loan of 10 billion euros were approved to Cyprus who in turn pledged to lower its budget deficit, raise taxes and to downsize its banking sector (Reuters, April 12<sup>th</sup> 2013, *Euro ministers back 10 billion euro Cyprus bailout*). For the first time ever a one-time-only tax was imposed on all citizens where the government took money from every individual bank account in the country to sanitize the economy and company taxes rose from 10 to 12,5 per cent. Privatizations of semi-state owned companies were also a part of the deal.

Eventually, by 2014 some encouraging news showed signs of a recovery when numbers indicated that the GDP hadn't fallen as much as forecasts had shown. Internal consumption started to rise again, but the Cypriots had large skepticism against the banks and the crisis had also come at high prize with an unemployment rate of 16 per cent in 2014.

## 2.7 Theoretical implications for the analysis

We have now in these brief descriptions and recaps seen how the European sovereign debt crisis affected the selected countries politically, socially and most significantly on a personal level for the voters. However chaotic the situation must have been from a macro level, nothing like the personal experience of losing a job or an income and living in an environment of continuing bad news must have had its consequences with the individuals.

Indeed in politics, few things can change the minds and preferences of voters like sudden drastic events and bad economic news and downturns always have the capacity to change individual minds over all ideological and party lines (van der Eijk, Franklin 2009; 194). However, a bad economy and its consequences do not have clear and linear consequences with how people vote or what impact they have on voter participation. From a rational point of view, austerity measures are assumed to be unpopular since they lead to increased inequality and therefore creates a pushback from voters and social unrest (Talving 2017; 565).

However, research also shows that voters can accept more stringent fiscal policies if they believe that they only will last for a short period of time or if it's presented to them to be the only option for solving the problem (Talving 2017; 565-566).

Holding actors accountable for creating or handling bad economic circumstances is in any case a central motivating factor for voters when they participate in elections out of economic reasons. In a complex multi-level system like the EU with its own institutions and the national governments in member states, and with a complex multi-level issue like the European sovereign debt crisis, it becomes more difficult for voters to determine accountability and responsibility (Talving 2014; 4 Talving 2017; 565). In this chapter, we have encountered several actors and institutions that could have had responsibility for the situation in the eyes of the voters; the national governments, EU, IMF and the banks. The perceived responsibility and accountability of actors like these in the eyes of the voters is thus relevant to include in the analysis whether or not that had an effect on voter participation in the 2014 EP election.

Economic hardship on a micro level and macro level can, as described in theory, have different effects in the voting booth with voters. The fact though that the European sovereign debt was an extended event and problem that affected many levels of the selected countries makes it relevant to determine if it had an effect on voter participation in these countries in the 2014 EP election. We will return to these points in Chapter 3, section 4 concerning the aspects of economic voting.



# 3 Previous research and analytical approach

Before we move on to the analytical approach of this thesis, I turn to previous research and theories on elections, voter participation and turnout and EP elections in particular. Not everything will be included in the final analysis but it is of great value, particular in order to have a basic understanding of some dynamics of voting in general and especially in EP elections. However, before the theoretical aspects, we begin by looking on what previous research has said of the 2014 EP election in the selected countries of this research.

## 3.1 The 2014 EP election in previous research

It has to be noted that research about EP elections are usually and mostly done through the lens of or inspired by the second-order election (SOE) theoretic model described by Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt in their 1980 analysis of the 1979 EP election. The aim of this thesis is not to prove or disprove SOE in the case of the 2014 EP election, however it is valuable to have some insight into this theoretic aspect of EP elections. More about SOE will be discussed in section 3.3.

One SOE-based research on the EP election 2014 is by Schmitt and Teperoglou who in their analysis of the Mediterranean member states (all the selected countries in this analysis, excluding Ireland and including Malta), conclude that the SOE model more or less is applicable to describe the election in these countries. Voter participation was lower than in previous EP elections, except in Greece where it rose significantly. However since the second round of local elections were held on the same day as the EP elections, this also falls in to the SOE assumptions, since voter participation usually rise in EP elections in member states when they find themselves within a national election cycle (Schmitt, Teperoglou 2015; 294, 296). The SOE assumption of electoral losses for government parties in EP elections are also to a high degree confirmed, all but in the cases of Cyprus and Italy (Schmitt, Teperoglou 2015;

297, 301). Schmitt and Teperoglou also conclude that the SOE model is confirmed through the lack of European aspects by the political parties in the election campaign, with the possible exception of Italy (Schmitt, Teperoglou 2015; 291).

In research of the EP election 2014 in individual countries the SOE assumptions are in various ways confirmed. Regarding Cyprus, Katsourides concludes that the low interest of the election among Cypriotes contributed the election campaign to be short and cost effective by the national political parties, also because their own resources had become strained in the aftermath of the crisis (Katsourides 2015; 325). No independent programs were produced by the parties themselves and instead they just adopted programs by their European party affiliations, and even if the European sovereign debt crisis was present it was usually not debated or framed on its own merits and was often secondary in the parties' own campaigns (Katsourides 2015; 326, 328). Where mentioned, the crisis was usually talked about and framed in national terms where either the EU and the banks or the previous government and the public sector were blamed by the major parties (Katsourides 2015; 329-330). Katsourides further attributes the lack of European aspects in Cyprus to the fact that Cypriote politicians and voters see EU primarily through a utilitarian point of view and therefore knowledge about EU and its impact is generally low in the country (Katsourides 2015; 330-331).

The European sovereign debt crisis was something that the Greek government and public had lived with on a daily basis for years in the period of the 2014 EP election. However, as noted before and explained further by Teperoglou, Tstatsanis and Nicolacopoulos it seems to have fallen into the frame of national politics with local election campaigns coinciding with the 2014 EP elections (Teperoglous et al 2015; 337-338, 340-341). The major parties also seemed to frame the crisis issue in these national terms as more or less a referendum on the Samaras-led government, austerity measures and on the EU itself (Teperoglous et al 2015; 338-339).

Quinlan's and Okolikj's analysis reveals an even more striking second-order nature of the 2014 EP election in Ireland. National domestic issues like a very controversial water tax proposal, property taxes and medical cards seemed to have been prioritized by the voters (Quinlan, Okolikj 2016; 307) while attitudes towards the Fine Gael/Labour coalition and the personalities of individual candidates seems to have been important for voter choices.

With regards to Spain, Cordero and Montero make the assessment that the EP election 2014 were held against the backdrop of the serious social effects of the economic crisis and austerity politics with broad disappointment against the then current Rajoy government, but also against PP and PSOE, two parties that had dominated Spanish politics since the

democratization process in the 70's and 80's. These factors according to Cordero and Montero, produced a typical second-order election with significant losses for the two major parties and success for smaller fringe parties like the left-wing Podemos, however the election results also seemed to signal a dealignment and reshaping of the Spanish political system (Cordero, Montero 2015; 375).

In the case of Portugal, Freire and Santana-Pereira assess that the EP elections as well fell in line with second-order expectations with losses for the government party PSD and low turnout, however that by voters it seems to mostly have been met with apathy (Freire, Santana-Pereira 2015; 397). Even if the election had been preceded for months by intense debates about the Memorandum of Understanding with EU and the approaching end of the bailout program, with mutual accusations between the PSD government and the main opposition party PS, the EP election largely seems largely to have fallen in line with typical Portuguese characteristics where party ideology, party size and whether they were in government or in opposition were determining factors (Freire, Santana-Pereira 2015; 387).

## 3.2 General dynamics of voter participation and voter turnout

Mark N. Franklin is one of the most prominent scholars in the field of voting research. One very significant conclusion that he makes is that voting, as any individual participation in the public sphere, is an *act of habit* which requires a process of socialization, interaction and learning during our formative years as young adults (Franklin 2004; 63-65, van der Eijk, Franklin 2009; 47-50). Interaction with other people and the ability of networking when we become individual participants in society is crucial to this learning process and ultimately to our decision whether we decide to vote for the first time or not and it also explains why voter turnout generally is lower and has been lower among first time-voters in Western democracies since the reform of lowering the voting age to 18. On the other hand, older age groups of voters generally produce higher voter turnout because they have developed the habit of voting. That is why, depending on how well young voters are integrated into this learning process, turnouts will be higher or lower in elections in individual countries. Meanwhile, those who at an early age are not well integrated into this process also develop a standing decision of not voting even when they get older (Franklin 2004; 78-80).

Further on, there are according to Franklin institutional and individual contextual factors that explain the motivation of voters to actually go to the polls on the Election Day. From an institutional point of view *executive responsiveness* is important as a motivational factor (Franklin 2004; 92). What it means in plain terms is whether the voters see any reason to vote or not; if the input of their vote also has an effect on the output i.e. the formation of the government and its policies. Franklin provides two illuminating examples, Malta and Switzerland (Franklin 2004; 92-98). Since its independence in 1962, Malta has seen turnouts over 90 percent in its parliamentary elections. Executive responsiveness plays a role here since the casted votes have direct effects on government formation, through the elected parliament, and ultimately policy directions. Maltese voters therefore know that their votes are significant (clear input) since they also directly affect policies (clear output). Swiss parliamentary elections on the other hand have since 1962 gone down from the 60-percentile to the 40-percentile today. The simple reason is that Swiss voters see a low causality between their votes and government formation and policy outcomes. Since the 1960's Swiss government formations have been broad and included different and ever changing party constellations, decided in post-election negotiations and not known beforehand in the public. With no clear government options or policy outcomes, there is therefore little motivation for Swiss voters to go to the polls.

From his individual-level analysis, Franklin draws the conclusion that contextual factors in the elections themselves impact the individual voter's decision to go to the polls. Unlike rational choice-based theories that emphasized the importance of individual resources like education and social status, Franklin draws the conclusion that there are three factors among individual voters that have an impact on their decision to vote: 1) the character of the elections (whether they are competitive and the results are unsure beforehand), 2) political interest and 3) party identification (Franklin 2004; 162-167). The character of the elections is through his extensive research the single strongest factor in driving up voting participation among all groups of voters. However in elections that are not competitive, factors like political interest and party identification have larger effects on the voter participation which in other words mean that the parties focus on getting their core voters, often in older age groups, to go to the polls. EP elections, with its second-order characteristics, can in a sense be included in this kind of elections; not really competed for and not creating much interest among voters or priority among the political parties. More of this second-order nature of these elections will be explained in the next section.

### 3.3 The second-order nature of EP elections

Typically, EP elections have been seen by national electorates, governments and media as just another opportunity to give their current take or dissatisfaction on their national governments (McCormick 2002; 108, Hix 2008; 79-80) and not as a real chance to influence EU policy. The lack of a clear input and output of the elections, or executive responsiveness in the words of Franklin, is probably the reason why voters through the years haven't seen the utility of going to the ballots, at least not in great numbers (Andersen, Eliassen et al 1996; 213, Hix 2008; 84). This of course is a paradox since the EP through all treaty reforms, especially since the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, have gotten increased capacities.

Much of this was explained already in 1980 when Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt in their analysis of the first 1979 EP election where they came to the conclusion that the EP election was "second-order" to the national electorates in relation to their national elections (Reif, Schmitt 1980). What mainly characterizes EP elections as second-order is that they include lower voter participation, that smaller or new political parties gain much more votes than in national elections and that government parties receive much less support than in national elections, especially if the EP election occurs in the midst of a national term (Reif, Schmitt 1980; 9-10). National media usually treat these elections with less intensity and attention than in national elections (Reif, Schmitt 1980; 28, 30, 34) which only reinforces the impression that less is at stake in EP elections. Since the election campaign is dependent on the mobilization of resources by the national political parties (Reif, Schmitt 1980; 13-14), which is lower in EP elections, it also contributes to make the elections less interesting for the voters. Reif and Schmitt also explain that if voter participation really goes up in the EP elections in individual countries, it is usually because the EP election is held in close temporal relation to a national election i.e. that the country already finds itself in an atmosphere of a national election campaign (Reif, Schmitt 1980; 17).

In any case, EP elections because factors like these should be viewed and approached as 28 separate national elections held within the scope of national circumstances and framed primarily by national political parties and media.

### 3.4 Economic voting

Even if there is a good empirical reason to trust the long term research of the dynamics of elections as mentioned in the previous sections, elections also tend to be affected by the outburst of unexpected events such as bad economic news (van der Eijk, Franklin 2009; 194). Depending on how parties respond to events like these, especially governing parties, and what potential they have among the voters and their preferences, can change upcoming elections in either way (van der Eijk, Franklin 2009; 198-199). Worsened economic conditions are from a rational point of view seen as an underlying cause for a great pushback against the government by voters (Talving 2017; 565), however it is not a guarantee. In short, the effects of worsened economic events on voters depend on *how* they perceive the austerity measures by the responsible parties and how the crisis is framed by those responsible parties to the voters (Talving 2017; 565-566). Even harsh cuts in welfare systems can therefore be tolerated by voters if they are persuaded that no other options are available.

For that reason there exists a disagreement among scholars what role economic conditions play in elections. One side claim that bad or good economic news creates a valence among voters and that they will want to punish or reward the governing party or parties according to their perception of the economy while the other side claim that these perceptions to a large degree is affected or even manipulated by political parties among voters because of their political predispositions and attitudes towards the economy (Okolikj, Quinlan 2016; 147).

In any case, as was described in Chapter 2 the economy, the crisis and the management of the crisis was a salient issue in the selected countries leading up to the 2014 EP elections. The question of course, as this paper will try to answer, is what impact the debt crisis had on voter participation in this election. If economy played a role to their decision to go and vote, it is important to underline that they probably did that because of their *subjective economic evaluations* (Talving 2014; 7-8, Talving 2017; 568), i.e. their own perceptions about the state of the economy in their countries since it's impossible that any voter alone is informed about all the aspects of the economy. Further, if economic circumstances motivated voters to the polls it is probably with the motivation of holding some actors responsible and accountable

for the situation. However, within a multi-level system as the EU and with an issue with its own specific actors such as the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, it is probably harder for the voters to point accountability at any of them (Talving 2014; 4, Talving 2017; 565). But some actors like the national governments, EU, IMF and the banks emerge as primarily interesting with regards to accountability as was also discussed in Chapter 2, and therefore it is appropriate to include them in that aspect in the analysis. In the literature, economic voting also includes whether voters take retrospective or prospective aspects into account when they vote (Okolikj, Quinlan 2016; 147, van der Eijk, Franklin 2009; 207-208). What it implies is whether voters take into account past experiences of policies when they vote, dealing with consequences of the European sovereign debt crisis in this case, or if they vote with future positive or negative expectations of the economy in mind. Finally, there is also the aspect of whether voters with the economy in mind vote out of sociotropic or egocentric motivations (Okolikj, Quinlan 2016; 147-148), where sociotropic motivations takes into regard of voter's perceptions of the macroeconomic aspects in their countries while egocentric motivations points to that voters go to the ballots with their own personal economic gains or losses in mind.

### 3.5 Analytical approach

With previous research in mind it is clear that this analysis should approach voter participation in the selected six countries individually, especially when one takes the second-order nature of EP elections in mind. Even with a political issue such as the European sovereign debt crisis that has affected the EU as a whole but also several of its member states, it is fair to assume that voters in individual countries pay significantly more attention to how the political discourse and debate about it goes in their own countries with input and framing of the issues from their national politicians and media. Therefore, the individual-level analysis should analyze voter participation with regards to the individual countries.

Further on, the individual-level analysis will be conducted with independent variables that will be selected with relation to theoretical aspects discussed in this chapter to determine how the crisis affected voters in the selected countries to go to the polls and vote. Based on the discussion in the previous section the selection of relevant independent variables will be done with regard to questions that reflects a) subjective economic evaluations by voters, b)

questions that takes into account the accountability of relevant actors, c) retrospective and prospective aspects and d) sociotropic as well as egocentric motivations. Added to this, as was also discussed in Chapter 2, anti-austerity movements were prominent in the national political arenas during the years that the crisis occurred and they manifested their disappointments through demonstrations, protests and strikes. The analysis will therefore also take this aspect into account in choosing relevant independent variables.

Finally, in order to see how strong impact these independent crisis-related variables had on voter participation in the selected countries, an individual-level analysis will also be conducted for comparative reasons on variables that concerns political interest and party identification among voters in the selected countries in accordance with Franklin's conclusions. This, since EP elections are not as contested as national elections and therefore it is relevant to see how influential factors like these were in this election compared to the crisis-related variables.



## 4 Methodology and data

In any kind of research the question of what kind of method that is appropriate for one's objective is crucial. Depending on how one executes a research and extract results from it, one will objectively get different results and beforehand there is really not something that can tell whether this or that methodologic approach is better or worse for one's objectives. It all depends on how one frame the research question and what options it gives one for the road ahead.

With that said, I would argue that for this thesis it is most appropriate to have a quantitative approach, specifically to perform a statistical analysis. One reason is time sensitivity and resources; to travel to the six countries and to find out what motivations voters had four years ago in an individual election would probably be an exercise in futility. But the main reason is probably that a statistical analysis has its clear advantages, you get clear and precise results that are transparent and most importantly easy to replicate and track step by step.

In that sense, statistical analysis generally have a high level of reliability. However, it is even more crucial to conduct a precise and systematic pre-selection of relevant variables with help from theoretical aspects of one's subject in order to reach good levels of validity as well, in other words that one is really is researching within the scope of the objectives (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wägnerud 2012; 63-65, Marsh, Stoker et al 2010; 269-270). Below I will present my choice of method and motivations for it, but also my motivations behind the choice of dependent and independent variables and the process of the analysis.

### 4.1 Logistic regression

In the world of statistics, logistic regressions are appropriate in order to visualize the connections and effects of various factors to a specific phenomenon. To exemplify, if someone wants to decipher why certain individuals choose to study at a university and other individuals do not, that is a good subject for a logistic regression and could be explained by various factors like age, gender, social background, educational history, income group etc.

The situation of studying at a university or not represents a choice with only two options for the individual (studying/not studying) and therefore the dependent variable of attending the university is *dichotomous*, a prerequisite for a logistic regression. For independent variables, it is of course an advantage if they also have dichotomous values but independent variables with scale values can also be included in the analysis. As will be shown below, some independent variables have been recoded into dichotomous variables where it is possible and in order to simplify the analysis but will also include some independent variables with scale values.

As with any statistical method the results that are produced through the analysis are open for interpretation. In other words, it depends on what you are looking for and what the results are telling you in relation to your research area. Statistical significance however is something that has to be observed at any point. When a logistic regression is statistical significant it means that the results does not deviate too much to be uncertain, typically when a result is at least 95 percent significant it means that 95 percent of the observations of a result are within the scope of certainty and are not by chance or accident (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wägnerud 2012; 337, Sundell 2016; Guide: Vad är signifikans?). Below that level, the results are believed to be too uncertain.

Beyond that, what will be observed in the logistic regressions in this analysis are the coefficients of determination (Cox & Snell  $R^2$  and Nagelkerke  $R^2$  from the SPSS version used in this analysis) which in short are values that enlightens how good an independent variable explains the dependent variable (Sundell 2011; Guide: logistisk regression). The outcome values are between 0 and 1, and the higher the value the better the independent variable explains the dependent variable. Finally, B coefficients determines how the impact of an independent variable has on the dependent variable. A 0 result indicates that there is no effect, below 0 that there is a negative effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable and over 0 that there is a positive effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Sundell 2011; Guide: logistisk regression).

## 4.2 Data

In this thesis, the objective is to see whether the European sovereign debt crisis had any effect on voter participation in the selected countries Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and

Spain. Countries that to various degrees had been affected by the crisis and where the crisis and the economy were salient issues domestically.

To achieve this I have chosen to make use of the European Election Studies (EES) voter study dataset from 2014. The extensive EES voter studies have been conducted since 1979 after every EP elections every fifth year in every member state by the GESIS institute of Social Sciences in Mannheim, Germany. It covers a range of theoretical fields concerning voting, but also include EU-topical questions with regards to current events. As it happened, the 2014 EES dataset has several relevant questions to the respondents that relate to economy, both with concern to macro-level economic circumstances and micro-level private economic conditions. That makes it appropriate for an individual-level analysis for this study and also since it also touches upon several theoretical points from the previous chapter.

#### 4.2.1 Choice of dependent variable and independent variables

Before we move on to independent variables I argue that as a dependent variable QP1 in the 2014 EES dataset is appropriate to examine voter participation since it touches on if voters did go and vote or not. It is therefore appropriate as a dependent variable for a logistic regression because it involves a situation of two choices, to vote or not to vote: *European Parliament elections were held on the (INSERT CORRECT DATE ACCORDING TO COUNTRY). For one reason or another, some people in (OUR COUNTRY) did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?*

It has to be noted that a third option, “Don’t know”, was available for the respondents but in this analysis it was removed in order to avoid any spurious results or ambiguities.

Additionally, “Yes” was recoded from 1 to 0 and “No“ was recoded from 2 to 1.

As shown in Box 1 below, these are the independent variables related to the economy and crisis that have been chosen in order to understand if the crisis had an effect on the voter participation in the EP elections 2014 in the selected countries. The QPP11 and QP12 values were recoded into 0 and 1 in order to facilitate a precise calculation with the dependent variable. Since QPP12 had two “Yes” options that both indicated participation in demonstrations, these were both merged and recoded into the same value, making it a dichotomous variable as well. The other scale variables were left unchanged for the analysis. As with the dependent variable, all negative values (such as “Don’t know”, “System missing”

etc.) in all the independent variables were also removed from the analysis in order to avoid spurious results.

- (QPP7) *Now I would like to ask you some questions about how much responsibility the different institutions have in the current economic situation in (OUR COUNTRY). Please use a scale from 0 to 10, where '0' means that you think they have "no responsibility" and '10' means that they have "full responsibility".*
  - i) (QPP7.1) National government (0=No responsibility, 10=Full responsibility, value range 1-11)
  - ii) (QPP7.2) The European Union (0=No responsibility, 10=Full responsibility, value range 1-11)
  - iii) (QPP7.3) The IMF (0=No responsibility, 10=Full responsibility, value range 1-11)
  - iv) (QPP7.4) The banks (0=No responsibility, 10=Full responsibility, value range 1-11)
- (QP11) *Please tell me whether or not each of the following situations has happened to you or someone in your household during the last two years?*
  - i) (QPP11.1) You or someone in your household lost his or her job (1=Yes, 2=No, recoded into 0=Yes, 1=No)
  - ii) (QPP11.2) Your household experienced a decrease in income (1=Yes, 2=No, recoded into 0=Yes, 1=No)
- (QPP12) *During the last 12 months, have you taken part in a demonstration? (the answers 1="Yes, several times" and 2="Yes, once" were recoded into 0 and 3="No" was recoded into 1)*
- (QPP15) *What do you think about the economy? Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in (OUR COUNTRY) ...? (1=Is a lot better, 5=Is a lot worse, value range 1-5)*
- (QPP16) *And over the next 12 months, how do you think the general economic situation in (OUR COUNTRY) will be? Will it...? (1=Get a lot better, 5=Get a lot worse, value range 1-5)*

*Box 1: Chosen independent variables. Source EES voter study 2014*

QPP7 is a relevant variable to include in the analysis since it takes into account the subjective economic evaluations of the voters, but also that it lifts the aspect of to what degree they hold different actors and institutions (their national governments, EU, IMF and the banks) accountable for the economic situation in their countries. Not every of these actors was involved to the same degree in each of the countries in order to manage the economic situation during the period leading up to the 2014 EP election. However, they are relevant to through their involvements overall and it is appropriate to see if the possible accountability of any of these actors through the respondent's perception of their responsibility was relevant for the voters to actually go and vote. The QPP11 questions are relevant and appropriate for the analysis since they take into account the respondent's personal economic situations and whether they personally have been affected by the economic situation. It also indicates if the respondents had egocentric motivations to go to the polls. As discussed before, the crisis helped to initiate anti-austerity movements in countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland with demonstrations, protests and strikes as manifestations for their disappointments of the management of the crisis in their respective countries. That's why it is also appropriate

to include QPP12 in the analysis to see whether the participation in demonstrations could have had an effect on voter's decision to vote or not.

QPP15 and QPP16 were selected into the analysis since they also touch on the respondent's subjective economic evaluations of the economy. QPP15 touches on whether the respondent's decision to go and vote was retrospective in nature or not while QPP16 touches on the prospective aspects of the respondent's decision to go and vote. In other words these two questions touches the aspects whether the respondents went to the polls because of their past experiences of the economy or their expectations of the economy in the near future. To a degree these questions could also be regarded to be sociotropic in nature since it asks of its respondents about their perceptions of the macroeconomic situation

#### 4.2.2 Choice of comparing independent variables (political interest and party identification)

Finally, based on Franklin's individual-level analysis of what typically motivates voters to go and vote, I have included two additional variables to analyze in order to compare them with the effects of the crisis-related variables. They are the following in Box 2.

- (QP6) *For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion.*
  - i) (QP6.9) You are very interested in politics ("Yes, totally" recoded from 1 to 0, "Yes, somewhat" recoded from 2 to 0, "No, not really" recoded from 3 to 1 and "No, not at all" recoded from 4 to 1)
- (QPP21) *Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular political party? If so, which party do you feel close to? (All political parties recoded to 0, "No, you do not feel close to any political party" recoded to 1)*

*Box 2: Chosen political interest and party identification variables in accordance with Franklin's individual level-analysis. Source: EES voter study 2014*

As explained in the previous chapter, Franklin's conclusions are that the most relevant factors that motivates voters to go to the polls are the character of elections, political interest and party identification. Character of elections concerns whether the elections are competitive and uncertain beforehand, in short if it's not known what political option will win the election and form a government. That aspect is not really applicable for EP elections because of their second-order nature with low turnouts and lack of executive responsiveness. In elections that are not competitive, it becomes more important for political parties to mobilize their core

voters who already have a habit of participating and voting in the elections and therefore have developed a political interest and party identification through their continuous participation in the elections. That is why these variables are more relevant to analyze voter participation in the case of the EP elections.

Since EP elections have this non-competitive aspect of themselves, it would be appropriate to include the variables in Box 2 in the analysis for a comparison with the crisis-related variables. QP6.9 is appropriate since it is relating clearly to the respondent's own interest in politics. To facilitate a more clear result, the "Yes" options have been merged into one value and recoded to 0 and the "No" options have merged as well and recoded to 1, making it a dichotomous variable as the dependent variable QP1. QPP21 was chosen since it is the variable that more than any other corresponds with Franklin's party identification variable. Even if it does not specifically asks what party the respondent identifies with, the closeness to a party is still within the scope of identifying oneself to a specific political party. To facilitate a clear result here as well, all listed political parties were recoded to 0 while the "No" answer was recoded to 1. To avoid any spurious results, all "Don't know", "System missing" or similar answers were excluded in these variables as well.

## 5 Results

Before we move on to the specificities of the results it is appropriate to go through some overall assessments of the results of the analysis. What can already be determined at this point however, is that the European sovereign debt crisis did not have an expected or desired effect on voter participation. But more of this will be explored through the coming results and in this chapter.

### 5.1 The crisis-related variables: low levels of significance, explanation and effects

As can be seen in Table 1 on page 29, the chosen independent crisis-related variables in the majority of the observations were not statistically significant. In fact, 33 of the 45 observations were not statistically significant, meaning that the results were too uncertain to deem objectively relevant among those who participated in the EES study. The QPP15 and QPP16 variables, concerning the respondent's opinion on the economy the last twelve months and coming twelve months, were most striking in this sense where only one of twelve observations was statistically significant, and that one was Portugal where QPP15 only had a marginal effect on motivating voters to go to the polls. Already here, we can conclude that retrospective and prospective motivations regarding the economy was not a factor to in getting voters to go and vote. Further on, the “lost income” variable (QPP11.2) only produced observable results with the Italian respondents, while the rest of the variables produced statistically significant results in 2 to 4 concerned cases each.

If we look at the observable results themselves we also see that they do not indicate to be good explaining variables for the voter participation in the selected countries in the EP elections 2014. The coefficients of determination (Cox & Snell  $R^2$  and Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) are very low at instances where we have statistically significant results. Normally within the fields of social sciences, coefficient of determination values that reach the range of 0,2 to 0,3 are considered to be good indicators that the chosen independent variable explains the

dependent variable very well. In this analysis however, these values are continuously low at every instant, never reaching beyond 0,033 and 0,047 (QPP7.3 in Italy). The conclusion one can make already at this point is that the European sovereign debt crisis is not a factor that explains the voter participation to a high degree in the selected countries in the EP election in 2014.

Also, where we have observable results we can also see that in many cases we see a negative effect, as indicated by the B column, meaning that the variable in these cases rather had the effect on the voters *not* going to the polls and voting. The most illustrative example of this is the lost job variable (QPP11.1). With observable results from Irish, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish respondents it is clear that this variable had very strong negative effects on voting in this election, suggesting that the experience of losing a job was a factor that affected voters not to participate in the elections. One crisis-related variable that seems to have had some positive effects on voter participation is QPP12, where the results from Italian, Portuguese and Spanish respondents show a, to some extent, stronger positive effect between participating in demonstrations and actually voting. Otherwise, the rest of the results show marginal effects on either side of voting or not voting.

## 5.2 The impact of the European sovereign debt crisis on voter participation

Here below, a full review will follow of the results from the individual-level analysis of the impact of the European sovereign debt crisis-related variables on voter participation in the selected countries.

### 5.2.1 Greece

Of all the countries that were affected by the turmoil that is the European sovereign debt crisis, Greece is arguably the one that was most affected by all the troubles that came into its way. Data supports that suggestion, but also the fact that Greece through the years has been at very center of EU's own crisis management. That is why it is puzzling to see that the European sovereign debt crisis seems to not have affected the voter participation in Greece in



any significant way. Of the selected countries for this analysis, Greece was the only country where voter turnout increased (+7,36 %) in the EP election 2014. However, the results show that the crisis had very marginal effects on voter participation in Greece.

Only two variables presented observable results; the respondent's opinion on EU's responsibility for the economic situation (QPP7.2) and the respondent's opinion on the bank's responsibility for the economic situation (QPP7.4). All other variables proved not be statistically significant. QPP7.2 showed a positive effect on voter participation. That the respondent's opinion about EU's responsibility for the economic situation had a positive effect on the Greek respondents to vote is not surprising. EU has been a central actor in the management of the crisis in the country, on top of that a very controversial one. The effect however is very marginal ( $B = 0,067$ ). The coefficients of determination show very low values (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,006 and Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,009), determining the respondent's opinion about the responsibility of EU as a very low explaining variable and the effect of this variable is also very low as well.

So even if it is proven that the opinion on EU's responsibility was contributing to voter participation in Greece, it was in fact very marginal. QPP7.4 also show that it had an effect, however an opposite one. Coefficients of determination values show the same values as QPP7.2 (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,006 and Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,009) illustrating that this variable also marginally explains voter participation, while the variable has an opposite negative effect ( $B = -0,064$ ). It shows rather that the respondent's opinion about the responsibility of the banks was a factor that affected voters *not* to go to the polls.

The rest of the crisis-related variables turned out not be statistically significant with regards to the Greek respondents. The results are, as mentioned before, puzzling when you take into account that unemployment rates and harsh austerity cuts in welfare provisions through the years had left many Greek citizens in dire private economic problems and that's why it some degree is surprising that variables like lost job (QPP11.1) , lost income (QPP11.2), opinion about the economy last 12 months (QPP15) and opinion about the economy coming 12 months (QPP16) turn out to be irrelevant for the analysis, especially since the voter turnout rose so significantly in comparison with the other selected countries. Considering also that the austerity measures also sparked such political controversy and disappointment, manifested through waves of demonstrations, protests and strikes in Greece, it also curious that participation in demonstration (QPP12) also didn't provide any statistically significant results.

|   | CYPRUS                        |                               |                               |                               | GREECE                        |                               |                               |                               | IRELAND                       |                               |                               |                               | ITALY                         |                               |                               |                               | PORTUGAL                      |                               |                               |                               | SPAIN                         |                               |                               |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|   | Sig.                          | C&S R <sup>2</sup>            | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup>         | B                             | Sig.                          | C&S R <sup>2</sup>            | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup>         | B                             | Sig.                          | C&S R <sup>2</sup>            | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup>         | B                             | Sig.                          | C&S R <sup>2</sup>            | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup>         | B                             | Sig.                          | C&S R <sup>2</sup>            | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup>         | B                             | Sig.                          | C&S R <sup>2</sup>            | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup>         | B                             |
| <b>Responsibility nat. Government (QPP7.1)</b>  | 0,051                         | 0,008                         | 0,001                         | 0,0059                        | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,001                         | 0,009                         | 0,012                         | -0,053                        | 0,042                         | 0,004                         | 0,005                         | 0,051                         | 0,042                         | 0,004                         | 0,005                         | 0,051                         | 0,042                         | 0,004                         | 0,005                         | 0,051                         |
| <b>Responsibility EU (QPP7.2)</b>               | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,008                         | 0,006                         | 0,009                         | 0,067                         | 0,000                         | 0,014                         | 0,02                          | -0,053                        | 0,000                         | 0,026                         | 0,037                         | -0,072                        | 0,024                         | 0,005                         | 0,006                         | -0,035                        | 0,024                         | 0,005                         | 0,006                         | -0,035                        |
| <b>Responsibility IMF (QPP7.3)</b>              | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,000                         | 0,023                         | 0,032                         | -0,055                        | 0,000                         | 0,033                         | 0,047                         | -0,054                        | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant |
| <b>Responsibility banks (QPP7.4)</b>            | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,009                         | 0,006                         | 0,009                         | -0,064                        | 0,006                         | 0,007                         | 0,01                          | -0,044                        | 0,001                         | 0,01                          | 0,014                         | -0,044                        | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant |
| <b>Lost job (QPP11.1)</b>                       | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,001                         | 0,011                         | 0,015                         | -0,512                        | 0,001                         | 0,009                         | 0,013                         | -0,468                        | 0,007                         | 0,007                         | 0,009                         | -0,333                        | 0,007                         | 0,007                         | 0,009                         | -0,333                        |
| <b>Lost income (QP11.2)</b>                     | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,012                         | 0,006                         | 0,008                         | -0,323                        | 0,012                         | 0,006                         | 0,008                         | -0,323                        | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant |
| <b>Participation in demonstration (QPP12)</b>   | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,000                         | 0,019                         | 0,027                         | 1,162                         | 0,000                         | 0,015                         | 0,02                          | 0,849                         | 0,000                         | 0,018                         | 0,024                         | 0,721                         | 0,000                         | 0,018                         | 0,024                         | 0,721                         |
| <b>Opinion economy last 12 months (QPP15)</b>   | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | 0,03                          | 0,005                         | 0,006                         | 0,03                          | 0,005                         | 0,006                         | 0,085                         | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant |
| <b>Opinion economy coming 12 months (QPP16)</b> | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant | Not statistically significant |

Table 1: Individual-level analysis with crisis-related variables through logistic regression. Dependent variable: QPP1 (European Parliament elections were held on the (INSERT CORRECT DATE ACCORDING TO COUNTRY). For one reason or another, some people in (OUR COUNTRY) did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?)

## 5.2.2 Ireland

By 2014, some signs in Ireland had shown that the economy was on its way to recover from the crisis. However, the still high unemployment rates and the still lingering effects of the crisis and the recent experience of the crisis among the population still makes Ireland a relevant country to examine in a study like this. The results from the individual-level analysis of the Irish respondents shows that in spite of Ireland's relevance, the crisis-related variables either were not statistically significant or that they had the effect of the respondents not going to the polls and voting.

The variables that produced some observable results were whether the respondents had lost a job in the last 12 months (QPP11.1) and three of the accountability variables: responsibility of the EU (QPP7.2), responsibility of the IMF (QPP7.3) and responsibility of the banks (QPP7.4). The banks were as mentioned in Chapter 2 the triggering factor of the economic problems in Ireland and EU together with IMF were involved in negotiating the crisis package for the country. As with all other observable results from the analysis, these variables have low coefficient of determination values signaling that they explain voter participation in Ireland to a low degree (QPP7.2: Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,014 and Nagelkerke  $R^2$  : 0,02, QPP7.3: Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,023 and Nagelkerke  $R^2$  0,032, QPP7.4: Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,007 and Nagelkerke  $R^2$  : 0,01). On top of that, the B values of these variables show that they seem to have had the effect of the respondents *not* going and voting (QPP7.2: -0,053, QPP7.3: -0,055 and QPP7.4: -0,044). Even these values show a marginal effect, but they sure show negative effects on voter participation in this regard.

The QPP11.1 variable showed more clear results, but also as a factor that didn't contribute to the voter participation. It too has a low degree of explaining voter participation among the Irish respondents (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,011 and Nagelkerke  $R^2$  : 0,015), but the effects of it was higher than the accountability variables (B = -0,512). Clearly, the experience of losing a job was not a factor for the Irish respondents to go to the polls. Rather it seems to have had the opposite effect.

The rest showed to be irrelevant in the analysis of the Irish respondents, since they turned out not to be statistically significant. Somewhat puzzling is that the participation in demonstration (QPP12) didn't turn out to be a factor since there was an active anti-austerity movement in Ireland in the years leading up to the EP election 2014.

### 5.2.3 Italy

The analysis of the answers from the Italian respondents show similar patterns as in the case of the Irish respondents. There are observable results from all the variables except QPP15 and QPP16.

The accountability variables (QPP7.1-QPP7.4) as with the answers from the Irish respondents showed to explain very little of voter participation in Italy and also had marginal, but still negative effects on voter participation motivating respondents to stay at home rather than to vote. The personal experiences of the crisis, losing a job (QPP11.1) and losing income (QPP11.2), proved also to be have low explanations of the voter participation in Italy. However the effects were, as with the Irish respondents, stronger in the direction that the respondents didn't go and vote ( $B = -0,468$  and  $B = -0,323$ ).

Still, one variable in the case of the Italian respondents showed to have some positive effects on voter participation and that one was if one had participated in a demonstration the last 12 months (QPP12). Even if the coefficients of determination, as with all the other variables, are low (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,019, Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,027) the effects of it are stronger in the direction of respondents going and voting ( $B = 1,162$ ). This shows a positive connection between participating in demonstrations and voting in Italy.

It is not that surprising. Throughout the years of Italy's own problems with its government debt, dissatisfaction not only with the austerity measures but also with the political establishment have been high. This dissatisfaction have been manifested through demonstrations and protests against the austerity policies of the different governments, as those public gatherings organized by the Five Star Movement. But as already noted, this variable as well is not explaining the voter participation in Italy to a high degree even if it seems to have had a positive effect on people actually voting.

### 5.2.4 Portugal

Unlike the individual-level analysis of Irish and Italian respondents, the accountability variables (QPP7.1-QPP7.4) turned out to be totally irrelevant since the results from them were not statistically significant. The loss of income (QPP11.2) and opinion about the economy in the coming 12 months (QPP16) also proved not to be statistically significant and therefore not relevant in regards to the Portuguese respondents.

Observable results were therefore only available from the loss of a job variable (QPP11.2), participation in a demonstration variable (QPP12) and the respondent's opinion about the economy the last 12 months (QPP15). As previously noted in the previous sections, the loss of a job did not produce coefficient of determination values that explains voter participation to a high degree among the Portuguese respondents (Cox & Snell R<sup>2</sup>: 0,004, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>: 0,005) and had also the effect of people not going and voting (B = -0,251).

On the other hand, the two other variables with observable results did have a positive effect on voter participation. The Portuguese respondent's opinion on the economy the last 12 months (QPP15) also had low coefficient of determination values (Cox & Snell R<sup>2</sup>: 0,005, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>: 0,006) making it a variable that explains voter participation in Portugal to a low degree, but with a marginal positive effect on voter participation (B = 0,085). The retrospective subjective evaluation of the economy by the Portuguese respondents therefore did have a small effect on getting Portuguese voters to the polls. However, the effect is very small and cannot in the bigger picture be seen as a significant factor. The fact that this is the only instance through the whole analysis where retrospective or prospective opinions and evaluations on the economy did have any observable effect only confirms the assumption that one should lay too much weight with this result either.

In the case of the participation in a demonstration variable (QPP12) the results actually are as to those with the Italian respondents. The coefficients of determination here as well show low degrees of explanation of the voter participation in Portugal (Cox & Snell R<sup>2</sup>: 0,015, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>: 0,02) but a positive effect on voter participation (B = 0,849). This shows that there was an effect between participating in demonstrations and to actually go and vote in Portugal. This of course does not come as a surprise since anti-austerity demonstrations and protests have been common in Portugal throughout the crisis, manifested through the March 12<sup>th</sup> movement for example.

### 5.2.5 Spain

In the case of the Spanish respondents in the study, the results of the analysis were mixed. Here as well, there were several variables that did not turn out to be statistically significant with regards to the voter participation in Spain in the EP election 2014. The respondent's opinion about the responsibility of the IMF (QPP7.3), opinion about the responsibility of the banks (QPP7.4), lost income (QPP11.2), opinion about the economy the last 12 months

(QPP15) and opinion about the economy the coming 12 months (QPP16) turned out to be irrelevant because none of them were statistically significant.

Besides this, there were four variables that showed observable results. Two of these, the respondent's opinion about the responsibility of the EU (QPP7.2) and the lost job variable (QP11.1), showed results in the direction of a negative effect on voter participation in Spain. The respondent's opinion about the responsibility of the EU showed low coefficient of determination values (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,005, Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,006) indicating that overall this variable explains little about the voter participation in Spain and the effects are marginal in the direction of the respondents not going to the polls ( $B = -0,035$ ). The opinion about EU's responsibility for the economy in all shows to be a marginal variable, both in explaining voter participation but also in its limited negative effect for Spanish respondents to not go to the polls. The experience of losing a job in that sense also explains little about voter participation in Spain (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,007, Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,009), but had a stronger negative effect ( $B = -0,333$ ). As with previous results, the personal experience regarding the economy seems to have served as a negative factor rather than a positive factor to participate in the 2014 EP election.

The two remaining variables, the respondent's opinion about the national government's responsibility for the economy (QPP7.1) and participation in a demonstration (QPP12), showed positive effects on voter participation in Spain. However, both variables as the previous ones show low coefficient of determination values which in turn shows that they too explain voter participation in Spain at a low degree. The coefficient of determination values for QPP7.1 are low, indicating low levels of explanation (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,004 and Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,005) while the variable showed to have some marginal and positive effects on the Spanish respondents going and voting ( $B = 0,051$ ).

This is not that surprising, since there had been broad disappointments among the public Spain against the austerity measures, especially against those against the at the time current PP government under Mariano Rajoy's leadership. However, in the bigger picture one should lay too much weight at this variable either since it only shows to have had marginal effects on voter participation. A more clear effect on the other hand can be seen when one looks at the QPP12 variable. Here as well, the coefficients of determination values show low levels of explanation (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,018, Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,024) but some stronger positive effect with regards to voter participation ( $B = 0,721$ ). This is not that surprising either. Anti-austerity movements like those emanating from the Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid have

been very active through the years, attracting much participation from the Spaniards in their demonstrations and protests through the years during the crisis.

### 5.2.6 Cyprus

The analysis of the Cypriote respondent's answers in the EES study is the one that really stands out in the sense that the vast majority of the variables did not produce statistically significant results. Cyprus is therefore the example that most of all illustrates of how marginal the European sovereign debt crisis as a factor was for voter participation in the selected countries.

Only one variable, the respondent's opinion of the national government's responsibility for the economy (QPP7.1), showed observable results. This variable has been included, even though it slightly goes over the limit over statistical significance (0,051). It is, one could say, the example that confirms the rule in the case of the Cypriote respondents. The coefficient of determination values shows low values (Cox & Snell R<sup>2</sup>: 0,008, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>: 0,001) illustrating that it explains voter participation in Cyprus to a low degree and the effects of this variable had marginally positive effects on the voter participation (B = 0,0059). It is indeed an example of how little the crisis mattered for voters in Cyprus to go to the polls. Even with this only observable variable, it doesn't explain much to us and the effects of it are barely detectable. One possible explanation however that QPP7.1 had a positive effect on voter participation could be the very significant structural changes and austerity measures that were implemented by the Cypriote government in the midst of the crisis. Measures like the one-time only tax on the private bank accounts and higher taxes in general must surely have been unpopular with the Cypriote voters.

The rest of the variables as mentioned did not produce any observable results, which indeed is somewhat puzzling. Not even QPP7.4, the respondent's opinion on the responsibility of the banks for the economy, proved to statistically significant even when the roots of the crisis in Cyprus originate from the banks and their misplaced investments and wild speculation prior to the crisis. Contextually to the EP elections however, maybe the low turnout numbers offer a partial explanation. Of the selected countries, the turnout fell to 43,97 percent in 2014, a downturn of 15,43 percent compared to 2009. It could suggest that even those who had any disgruntles about the situation chose to stay at home on Election Day, either to mark their disappointments by abstaining or because of lack of interest to vote.

## 5.3 The impact of political interest and party identification in the selected countries

As previously explained in elections that are not contested to a high degree, factors like political interest and this is a relevant aspect to EP elections that typically are not regarded very seriously by political parties and voters in general. In elections like these, the pattern more clearly shows that factors like personal political interest and identification with political parties are more determine for the turnout and voter participation, according to Franklin.

As political interest and party identification are factors that are achieved through socialization and increased familiarity with elections, it is normally those who have developed the habit of going to the polls in their lifetime who also participate in less competitive elections. We have in the previous sections seen how little the different aspects of the European sovereign debt crisis mattered for the voter participation in the selected countries in the EP election 2014 and therefore we move on to first look at the impact of political interest.

### 5.3.1 Political interest

As we can clearly see in Table 2 on the next page, political interest (QPP6.9) with regularity is a statistical significant variable with each country's respondents. The coefficient of determination values also, even if they in the bigger picture only explain a portion, explain more of the voter participation in each country than the different crisis-related variables. The lowest observed coefficient of determination values can be seen in the case of the Spanish respondents (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,04, Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,06) and the highest values can be seen in the case of the Cypriote respondents (Cox & Snell  $R^2$ : 0,11, Nagelkerke  $R^2$ : 0,15). The effects of this variable was also positive throughout the analysis and contributed to the voter participation with each country's respondents. The lowest effect again was with the Spanish respondents ( $B = 0,9$ ) and the highest effect was observed with the Italian respondents ( $B = 1,52$ ).



|                              | CYPRUS |                    |                       |       | GREECE |                    |                       |       | IRELAND |                    |                       |       | ITALY |                    |                       |       | PORTUGAL |                    |                       |       | SPAIN |                    |                       |      |
|------------------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|--------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|----------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|-----------------------|------|
|                              | Sig.   | C&S R <sup>2</sup> | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup> | B     | Sig.   | C&S R <sup>2</sup> | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup> | B     | Sig.    | C&S R <sup>2</sup> | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup> | B     | Sig.  | C&S R <sup>2</sup> | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup> | B     | Sig.     | C&S R <sup>2</sup> | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup> | B     | Sig.  | C&S R <sup>2</sup> | Nkerke R <sup>2</sup> | B    |
| Political Interest (QPP6.9)  | 0,000  | 0,11               | 0,15                  | 1,43  | 0,000  | 0,06               | 0,1                   | 1,35  | 0,000   | 0,05               | 0,07                  | 1,02  | 0,000 | 0,09               | 0,13                  | 1,52  | 0,000    | 0,08               | 0,11                  | 1,32  | 0,000 | 0,04               | 0,06                  | 0,9  |
| Party Identification (QPP21) | 0,000  | 0,07               | 0,094                 | 1,138 | 0,000  | 0,07               | 0,113                 | 1,427 | 0,000   | 0,053              | 0,075                 | 1,064 | 0,000 | 0,091              | 0,13                  | 1,489 | 0,000    | 0,077              | 0,103                 | 1,165 | 0,000 | 0,041              | 0,054                 | 0,83 |

Table 2: Individual-level analysis of political interest and party identification. Dependent variable: QPP1 (European Parliament elections were held on the (INSERT CORRECT DATE ACCORDING TO COUNTRY)). For one reason or another, some people in (OUR COUNTRY) did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?

It makes sense that if a salient issue like the European sovereign debt crisis and its separate effects in the selected countries still were not positive for voter participation, then other factors has to be taken into account and analyzed. Personal political interest as we see, to various degrees both explains voter participation better than the crisis-related variables and had more significant effects on voter participation in the selected countries. This shows that mostly those who already had developed a personal political interest, through interaction and socialization and the habit of voting, were more inclined to vote than those who were affected positively or negatively to vote by the crisis. It is a strong indicator that those who showed up at the polls in May 2014 for the EP election also were those who always otherwise show up at the polls at every election.

### 5.3.2 Party identification

A similar pattern that we can see with the political interest variable can also be observed with the party identification variable (QPP21), with statistically significant results with each country's respondents although with somewhat lower coefficient of determination values and effects.

The answers from the Spanish respondents again had the lowest values that could explain voter participation there (Cox & Snell R<sup>2</sup>: 0,041, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>: 0,054) while the highest explanation values were observed among the Italian respondents (Cox & Snell R<sup>2</sup>: 0,091, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>: 0,13). Again, as with the political interest variable, party identification explains a portion of voter participation in these selected countries. But, as can be clearly observed as well, they do explain the voter participation better than any of the crisis-related variables at any instance. It is yet another indication that the European sovereign debt crisis did not matter much in getting the voters to go to the polls.

Finally, the effects of party identification indicate lower positive effects than political interest as well, although marginally. The lowest effects were again observed among the Spanish respondents ( $B = 0,832$ ) and the highest values were again seen among the Italian respondents ( $B = 1,489$ ).

## 6 Discussion: The crisis, the 2014 EP election and voter participation

The encompassing inference one can make after the results from this research is that however a salient issue the European sovereign debts crisis was at a political, social and a personal level in the selected countries for this research (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain), it had at best marginal effects on the electorates of each country to go to the polls and vote. The fact that 33 out of 45 observations turned out not to be statistically significant tells us that, the fact that many of the observed results had the opposite effect of not voting/abstaining tells us that and the fact that those variables that indicated positively on voter participation showed to have small or marginal effects. EU's own hopeful proclamation "This time it's different!" was not substantiated in terms of affecting voter participation. Even if it was not the intention of this thesis, the results in a way is a reflection of how second-order these elections were, even in times of national and cross-national economic crisis.

The lack of importance of the crisis for the voter participation is illustrated as well with the results from the political interest and party identification variables. These are variables that, as previously explained, usually become strong factors in explaining voter participation in elections that are not competitive in the sense that the outcome is anticipated in advance by the public and therefore it becomes crucial for political parties to mobilize voters that are usually in the older age groups and that have developed the habit of voting in every election. Political interest and party identification are aspects of this since they are developed through the continued and repeated act of voting and socialization. As the results from the analysis show we can see that these factors to a large degree played a larger role in getting voters to the polls. It is therefore reasonable to assume that those who decided to vote in the EP election 2014 in the selected countries also are those that have voted in a majority of elections previously in their respective countries.

When one take a closer look at the results of the crisis-related variables, some nuances can be detected. Out of 24 observations regarding the accountability variables (QPP7.1-QPP7.4), 12 observations turned out not be statistically significant while the other 12 produced observable results. Out of those 12, only three variables showed marginal positive effects on

voter participation while the rest showed marginal negative effects on voter participation. It is illustrative of not only the weakness of this variable as a factor to get voters to the polls, but also makes one draw the conclusion that accountability towards actors and institutions within the scope of EP elections doesn't play a significant role, at least not judging from this election.

The variables that deals with the respondent's personal experiences of the crisis, whether they lost a job or income (QPP11.1 and QPP11.2) showed to be an even lesser factor for voter participation in the selected countries. 7 out of 12 observations turned out not to be statistically significant. The rest of the variables that had observable results in turn showed significantly stronger negative effects on voter participation than the accountability variables. Not only does it show that egocentric motives concerning the economy was not a factor in getting voters to the polls, but it would seem to indicate that the personal experience of losing a job or an income rather was a discouraging factor instead of motivating people to go and vote.

The retrospective and prospective variables regarding macroeconomic subjective evaluations (QPP15 and QPP16) also proved to be irrelevant after the analysis. 11 out of 12 observations turned out not to be statistically significant, and in the only case where the retrospective evaluation of the economy by the Portuguese respondents only had a marginal positive effect on voter participation there which is rather telling on how irrelevant these variables also were for analyzing voter participation in these countries in the EP election 2014.

Only one crisis-related variable turned out have some continuous positive effects, and that was whether the respondents had participated in a demonstration or not (QPP12). In three instances the results turned out not to be statistically significant, while this variable had clearer positive effects on voter participation with the Italian, Portuguese and Spanish respondents. It has some logic to it since anti-austerity movements have been very active in all of these countries during the years of the crisis. But this fact alone also tells us something about the different dynamics of the selected crisis-related variables. The accountability variables (QPP7.1-QPP7.4) and the macroeconomic subjective economic evaluation variables (QPP15 and QPP16) touches on opinions held by individuals, an intrinsic property that under the right circumstances could materialize and manifest itself through voting but it does not have to. Losing a job (QPP11.1) or losing an income (QPP11.2) are also personal and individual experiences that under the right circumstances can materialize and manifest themselves in going to the polls, but it does not have to either. Participating in a demonstration however is an act in itself where the one's own political opinions and personal

experiences materialize and manifest themselves by joining other citizens in expressing those opinions and experiences. It is an act where citizens actively participate within the political arena, they have taken a step further beyond just reflecting about the problems that they believe their society and country is facing. By participating in this political arena in this manner, it is therefore not unreasonable to believe that the step of actually voting also is shorter.

Concerning the results from respondents from each individual country in this analysis it is also another proof that EP elections still are 28 separate *national* elections that are held within *national* political circumstances, where *national* political parties and *national* media outlets set the agenda and where the issues in the campaigns, EU-related or not, are framed within the *national* context and therefore voter participation in EP elections will continue to be dependent on factors within the *national* political contexts.

The analysis of the answers from respondents in each individual country to a large degree reflects this. The irrelevance of the independent crisis-related variables in Cyprus for example is reflected in Katsourides' own analysis of the EP election there where interest by Cypriotes in general was very low, where voter participation fell significantly in comparison with the 2009 EP election and where the election campaign by the national political parties was short and not really prioritized by them. Also in the example of Greece, the crisis-related variables also to a large degree turned out not to be statistically significant even when the crisis had been present in the election campaign. However, as Teperoglou, Tstatsanis and Nicocopolous point out the EP election fell within the scope of the already ongoing domestic local election campaigns so the conventional explanation is that the higher turnout in the EP election 2014 relied on that the country already found itself in a national election campaign environment. The crisis, where it was present, also was framed within the national political context as being for or opposed to the austerity measures by the government. In other words, the dependency on the national political contexts is still highly alive and relevant in EP elections in terms of voter participation and there is no reason to assume that it will continue to be like that for the time being.

So, to return to the question that was asked at the beginning of this thesis; what impact did the European sovereign debt crisis have on voter participation in the selected "crisis" countries Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain? The answer is as simple as it can be after this analysis: not a big impact and at best, marginal.

## 7 Concluding remarks and reflections

As we can see now, after this analysis, the impact of a salient, crucial and cross-national issue like the European sovereign debt crisis did not affect voter participation in the 2014 EP in countries that suffered deep and hurtful consequences by the crisis in the years leading up to the election. Not even when the member states of the EU were deeply involved with each other to cope with and to find concrete political solutions for a crisis, that will surely go to history as one of the darkest and most troubling periods of the EU, did this experience do much to materialize into the citizens of these most affected countries to transform their own experiences, thoughts and opinions into casted votes the voting booths. The hope in Brussels that this common experience, however negative, would somehow start to break the mold of low voter participation and EU issues starting to be at the center stage of the different national campaigns turned out to be a hope in vain. That hope was both premature and not really taking into account past experiences. This thesis is just another contribution to that fact.

The fact is that as long as national political parties and media are the ones that are in charge of the agenda setting of these separate national campaigns, future analysis of future EP elections will most probably come to the same conclusions that this thesis and many other previous studies have come to. We are still far away from the ideal of a unified European demos that votes in the EP elections with a European mindset in the voting booths.

I would argue that one very central factor for the low voter participation and generally low interest in participating in EP elections is still of a highly utilitarian nature. One has to understand that the vast majority of the national electorates in the EU have learned that there is clear input and output of their vote, or executive responsiveness as Franklin puts it. The consequences are known: an election campaign is held, you get informed of your options, you go and vote on Election Day, the votes are counted and you get a result, the new national assembly goes into session, a government is formed by the national assembly. That is what typically happens in national elections and this vertical and horizontal scope of national elections is known to voters.

With EP elections this chain of expected outcomes at every stage is not as clear for the average voter and that is why media, political parties and candidates have to put a lot of energy and time to just explain to voters every five years what the European Parliament is,

what role and what powers it has and why they should cast a vote on Election Day. I suspect that already at this point many potential voters choose to abstain. If it is not obvious and self-evident in itself to vote in these elections without these efforts to explain to them, why should they bother? This I believe, is at the core of the issue of voter participation in EP elections and no treaty reforms or any additional structural changes within the EU will probably be able to change that. Possibly that was the reason why there was hope that at least a salient issue like the European sovereign debt crisis would be able to on its own at least move the needle little in the direction of higher voter participation. But as we see, that was not to be the case.

In conclusion, when these words are written, the next election to the European Parliament will be held in less of year in 2019. It is already hard at this juncture to expect what effects it will have with regards to voter participation. Judging from the empirical results from this thesis and other empirical knowledge, not much if anything will change at these elections either. The European sovereign debt crisis, and the effects of it, is no longer the salient issue that it was in 2014 but of course many other salient issues has come up to the surface since then.

The migrant crisis in the autumn 2015 put the immigration issue front and central in Brussels as well as the member states and to date the union continues to struggle to find political cohesiveness together with the member states in that area. The tragic terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, Germany and Sweden have renewed questions about our internal security. The effects from the Brexit referendum, its chaotic aftermath and United Kingdom's coming exit from the EU are still uncertain and where all this will lead in a longer term for the EU is still an open question. The uncertain future of NATO and the transatlantic link since the emergence of Donald Trump together with the continued mutual tensions between the EU and Russia is maybe the biggest worry among European leaders at the moment. The consequences of the trade war initiated by the Trump administration are still to be observed.

There is, at the moment, no shortage of salient issues that probably will stay salient in May next year. Whether they will get the voters in EU's member states to go to the polls is impossible to say. But with the empirical evidence that we have, it is probably best to readjust our expectations this time.

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