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## The Eurozone crisis' impact: a de-Europeanization of Greek and Portuguese foreign policies?

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### ABSTRACT

This article compares the impact of the Eurozone crisis on the foreign policies of Greece and Portugal from a de-Europeanization perspective. These two Southern European countries were significantly Europeanized in the past and both suffered greatly from the Euro crisis. Focusing on the Troika period and on relations with China, the article shows that both Greece and Portugal's foreign policies towards Beijing went through an important degree of de-Europeanization during the Eurozone crisis. Such effect was, however, more intense and durable in the case of Greece, much driven by domestic politics. These national factors were intimately connected with exogenous drivers, such as EU-level developments and Beijing's agency, both more relevant for illuminating the case of Portugal. Ultimately, the Eurozone crisis strengthened the influence of external actors like China over EU foreign policy-making, working as a complementary driver of de-Europeanization.

### KEYWORDS

de-Europeanization; Greek foreign policy; Portuguese foreign policy; Eurozone crisis; China

## Introduction

Relying on the (de-)Europeanization concept, this article compares the impact of the Eurozone crisis on the foreign policies of Greece and Portugal. There are several reasons why these two countries are analyzed together. First, both are small Southern European countries that joined the European Union (EU) in the 1980s, after overcoming dictatorial regimes. Second, their national foreign policies went through a significant level of Europeanization in the past, although the extent and depth of such a process is debated. Third, both EU member states suffered greatly from the Eurozone crisis, even if the impact of such a disruptive development was heavier in Greece. Finally, the existing literature on foreign policy de-Europeanization tends to focus on single country studies. By following a comparative approach, this article is able to draw out commonalities and differences in the diplomatic reactions to the Eurozone crisis of two 'most similar' cases. More precisely, the study considers the effect of the austerity measures imposed by the so-called Troika on preexisting patterns of national foreign policy Europeanization. Thus, it offers a chance

of examining to what extent both countries were willing to formulate external balancing initiatives leading towards a de-Europeanization of their foreign policies.

The analysis is centred on the Troika period, which in Greece lasted from 2010 to 2018 and in the case of Portugal from 2011 to 2014, complemented with a broader contextualisation. Relations with China were deemed a relevant policy focus due to the Asian country's significance as an international actor and the importance that Beijing's support came to have for both Athens and Lisbon during the Euro crisis. Indeed, China is now an unescapable international actor on all levels and its importance was even bigger during the Eurozone crisis. Both Greece and Portugal needed financial and other support to come out of those dire times, having attracted Chinese investments in strategic sections of their economies. Yet, Beijing is pursuing a policy of 'divide and rule' among EU member states, favouring good relations with big states like France or Germany, without neglecting smaller ones, be they Southern states or Central and East European ones. In addition, Chinese foreign policy seeks other advantages from playing the EU against the USA (Le Corre 2018, 2019). China's dynamic links with both Greece and Portugal can therefore strengthen even more the 'logic of diversity' in the EU by giving strong incentives to Athens and Lisbon to contest common EU positions, thus pursuing a de-Europeanization process.

It is, therefore, imperative to assess Greek and Portuguese foreign policies towards China because, in order to alleviate their economic suffering during the Eurozone crisis, both countries tried to improve their economic links with Beijing. The effect of the crisis is assessed by engaging explicitly with the de-Europeanization framework proposed by this Special Issue (Müller, Pomorska, and Tonra 2021). This article shows that both Athens and Lisbon's foreign policies towards China went through an important degree of de-Europeanization during the Euro crisis, although with a less intense and durable effect in the case of Portugal. The comparison between the two countries also reveals differences in terms of the main drivers of de-Europeanization, with domestic politics playing a more significant role in the case of Greece. National factors appear, however, intimately connected with other drivers of a more exogenous nature, such as EU-level developments and China's agency, which are both more relevant for understanding the degree of de-Europeanization found in the case of Portugal. The article proceeds in two steps. The first one discusses differences and similarities in the (de-)Europeanization of Greek and Portuguese foreign policies, setting out the wider context of the case study on China, which is developed in the second part of the article.

## **1. The Europeanization of Greek and Portuguese Foreign Policies**

The case of Greece has received much more attention by the literature on foreign policy Europeanization than Portugal. This is perhaps not unrelated to an ongoing debate over whether the former country's Europeanization is deep or superficial. Indeed, on Greek foreign policy two schools present opposing findings. One argues that the country's foreign policy has been successfully Europeanized, pointing to a shift from nationalist, pessimistic, defensive and ethnocentric positions to a realistic, optimistic, active Europeanization (Economides 2005, 472). The other one notes that Greece has continued to address the same old 'narrow' national interests, mainly the Cyprus Problem, Greek-Turkish relations, and relations with neighbouring Balkan countries, especially the

Macedonian issue (Tsardanidis and Stavridis 2005, 234). Even if, since the mid-1990s, Greece has tried to promote those traditional interests through the EU framework, this was done mainly in an instrumental manner (Tsardanidis and Stavridis 2011, 117). Furthermore, there is the view that turning Greece into positions that were closer to those of the EU was a result of wider post-Cold War systemic changes. Therefore, far from being a completed process, the Europeanization of Greek foreign policy would be a rather superficial one. Angelos Chrysosgelos (2019) has recently added the idea of a 'reflexive Europeanization' which can become even more constraining as nationalist re-politicization turns into societal re-politicization – challenging not just the alignment between national interests and European commitments, but the very legitimacy of a Europeanized state.

On Portugal, general studies have contended that participation in European integration has helped reshape the country's foreign policy identity (Teixeira 2012). Benefiting from a broad and enduring internal consensus, fully-fledged EU participation has been crucial for buttressing Portugal's political stability, economic development and international credibility. As a result, as mentioned by José Magone (2000), much of Portugal's current external action would be conducted through the EU framework. However, more specific assessments have argued that the Europeanization of Portuguese foreign policy has been limited. It was clearer in the 1990s, much driven by fears of marginalization in the post-Cold War changing context. Moreover, there was no detachment from old national priorities, notably transatlantic relations and the Lusophone world. Atlantic motivations have guided Portugal's participation in EU security and defence policy, which has developed as complementary to NATO (Ferreira-Pereira 2007). Also, Lisbon was relatively successful at uploading its Lusophone priorities during its past Council presidencies, contributing to an upgrading of Brussels' relations with Africa and Brazil (Robinson 2015). This prominence given to other international fora and the instrumental projection of national preferences onto the EU level would have foreclosed a deeper Europeanization (Raimundo 2013; Robinson 2016).

Summing up, it is possible to see both similarities and differences in the two countries' processes of foreign policy Europeanization. Whereas that of Portugal seems deeper, there are still reservations about it that are very similar to those also expressed in the relevant literature on the Greek case. This contrast means that when we will discuss de-Europeanization, the country with a more superficially Europeanized foreign policy is more likely to show signs of such a reverse development – as will indeed be shown next.

### ***(De-)Europeanization and the Eurozone crisis***

Both Greece and Portugal were particularly affected by the Eurozone crisis, which also impacted their foreign policies. Between 2008 and 2015 Greece lost a quarter of its domestic product, mainly due to economic austerity (Sakellaropoulos 2019). Similarly, the Troika years in Portugal (2011–2014) had a profound impact on the country's economic and social fabric. The harsh conditions of the €78 billion bailout (signed with the EU and the IMF in May 2011 by Portugal's three larger parties and implemented by the majority center-right coalition government of Passos Coelho) led to a successful fiscal consolidation, but also to a deep recession, high unemployment and a steep rise of emigration flows. Despite the increased levels of social dissatisfaction, protest and

pressure on its political system, Portugal did not experience the same degree of politico-institutional instability seen in other Southern European countries, such as Greece (Pinto and Teixeira 2019; Morlino and Sottillotta 2020). However, the Troika years weakened the European consensus among its political elites. Disagreement among Portugal's centrist parties on the management of the crisis led to an unprecedented politicization of European matters. Moreover, small radical left parties took the opportunity to step up their traditional criticism of the EU, questioning Portugal's membership of the Euro. Like in Greece, Brussels had been mostly linked to positive developments in the past, but its association to the Troika's austerity contributed to a strong degradation of the EU's image among Portuguese public opinion. That image only started to improve with the ending of the bailout in 2014, while the broader socioeconomic consequences of the crisis continued to be felt (Lisi 2020).

As a result of the crisis, considerable budget cuts were applied to Greece's Foreign Affairs and Defence ministries. Moreover, two new discourses on Greek foreign policy emerged. The first one, coming mainly from the Left, was that the EU, and especially Germany, had been particularly inept in their handling of the Eurozone crisis, proving unable to provide effective economic security. Some even started equating Europeanization with the old notion of a 'foreign power protection' and for this reason started rejecting it (Anastasakis 2012, 39–42; Tziampiris 2013, 27–40). This became more evident from early 2015 under the coalition government formed by the leftist SYRIZA and the right-wing populist party Independent Greeks (ANEL). A clear example of de-Europeanization was the Tsipras government rejection of the EU (and Western) policy on Ukraine.

That government's negotiation strategy was to push its European partners to the edge, arguing that Greek resistance to the EU neoliberal demands would not only change Greece's relationship with the bloc, but also change the EU itself (Kalaitzidis 2017, 41). However, this also amounted to blackmailing its partners with a possible Greek collapse (Pedi 2017, 152). At a July 2015 dramatic meeting of Eurozone leaders, a provisional agreement was struck on a third bailout programme for Greece, which represented a complete U-turn from SYRIZA's electoral promises. Since then, a re-Europeanization process started to materialize in many foreign policy areas, with the EU appearing as a priority and national goals being more linked to EU ones once more. A good illustration of such a change was the July 2018 Prespes agreement with the Republic of North Macedonia (see below).

The second discourse was of a geopolitical nature. Under the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition government Greek foreign policy-makers developed a new geopolitical strategic concept depicting Greece as a stable country in the middle of a regional triangle of instability and crisis, around Ukraine, Libya, Syria and Iraq (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018). This simplistic and exaggerated geopolitical strategic discourse, aimed at maximizing Greece's strategic value, echoed a confused Greek foreign policy during 2015–2019 and reflected how personal beliefs have traditionally influenced the formulation of foreign policy in the absence of efficient institutions; a clear sign of absence of institutionalized Europeanization (Ioakimidis 1999, 140–170).

The case of Portugal showed similar developments, but of a less profound and lasting effect. After having sought external assistance, the need to rebuild Portugal's credibility and autonomy was seen as critical (Gorjão 2012). Apart from budget cuts and significant

restructuring of the country's diplomatic machinery, these exceptional circumstances led to greater internal debate at elite level over foreign policy priorities. In a context of crisis and uncertainty in the EU, the hitherto predominant Europhile line in Portuguese foreign policy formulation came under increased contestation, particularly from a nationalist line emphasising the country's own interests and a 'Lusophone option' as a potential alternative to Europe.<sup>1</sup> Beyond this discursive dimension, under the centre-right government, economic diplomacy came to be Portugal's top foreign policy priority.

The country's external action became much focused on Europe since it had to give great attention to the successive European attempts to provide a response to the crisis.<sup>2</sup> However, this was translated into a strict focus on economic issues and an exclusive alignment with Germany, rather than a proper European policy. Moreover, Lisbon showed little engagement in EU foreign policy, pursuing its national goals in a more emphatic and autonomous way. Throughout this phase, Portugal's presence in EU (and NATO) military missions was reduced to its lowest historical levels. Besides, the centre-right government put great emphasis on relations with extra-European partners. This was particularly visible in initiatives towards Portugal's ex-colonies and in efforts to build new partnerships in Asia, Latin America and North Africa (Sousa and Gaspar 2015, 105–7). These initiatives sought to diversify the country's internationalisation, but appeared as more disconnected from the EU level than in the past. Against the perception of EU policy mechanisms as less significant, Portuguese decision-makers retreated from actively Europeanizing its foreign policy.

Such evidence of re-nationalization of Portuguese foreign policy was, however, stronger during the peak of the Eurozone crisis. Already in 2013 the approval of a new national strategic concept had helped clarify the reach of the more intense domestic debate over external priorities described above. Adopted under the conservative government of Passos Coelho, this document reiterated the country's traditional foreign policy orientation as a Euro-Atlantic country with a 'universal vocation' (Governo de Portugal 2013). This external orientation, still providing for an important role to Europe, was also present in the electoral manifestos of Portugal's main parties for the 2015 legislative election. Under the centre-left government of António Costa (2015–2019), there were even more evident signs of a re-Europeanization of Portuguese foreign policy, with Europe appearing as a clearer priority and national goals being more linked to the EU's ones than during the Troika years (see Governo de Portugal 2015). Yet, this was balanced by a persistent Atlantic and Lusophone emphasis as well as by a new stress on the idea of a 'Global Portugal' (Sousa and Gaspar 2015, 106–108).

Similarly, and showing once more the importance of domestic factors as far as foreign policy Europeanization is concerned, a change of government in Greece also led to some further re-Europeanization. First, even if New Democracy was against the Prespes agreement (mainly due to the electoral weight of its voters in the Greek Macedonian region), it played down its opposition arguing that, if and when in power, it would respect an international agreement. Which it did. Such a stance, going against the bulk of Greek public opinion, is further evidence of some foreign policy re-Europeanization among elites, but still no Europeanization at the popular level. Also, there was further evidence of re-Europeanization, on ideological grounds, regarding the July 2019 recognition of the Guaido 'Presidency' in Venezuela. In early 2019 the SYRIZA-ANEL government had been opposed to it, including during a European Parliament vote in favour of Guaido. Then,

domestic politics prevented a Europeanization of Greek foreign policy because over Latin America issues there has been a strong Left-Right division, echoing the Bolivarian versus the Western approach. These are in part remnants of Greece's post World War II civil conflict and the 1967–1974 military junta.

## **2. Greece and Portugal's relations with China during the economic crisis**

This section uses the case of China to illustrate de-Europeanization patterns in both Greece and Portugal's foreign policies. In Greece, there was a pre-existing lack of Europeanization, as noted above. Such superficial level of Europeanization predated the economic crisis, grew faster during it, and has continued afterwards, irrespective of the political parties holding power. This situation is also valid for relations with China. The Portuguese case is more nuanced in general terms, but regarding relations with China there were signs of a more national focus, even before the Eurozone crisis started.

### ***Greece's foreign policy towards China and the Eurozone crisis***

The fall of the Greek Junta in 1974 laid the foundations for a new relationship between Greece and China, especially in the business domain. In the mid-2000s Greek-Chinese relations began to develop in fields such as tourism, education, trade and culture (Skordili 2015, 59–64). Various economic sectors also played an important role, such as the shipping industry which is very important for both countries. The relationship moved into a new phase in 2008, as bilateral talks resulted in a contract between China's COSCO shipping company and the Piraeus Port Authority (PPA) that gave the former a 35-year lease as operator of two of the port's piers (Davarinou 2016, 9). Then in 2016, the Greek Government sold 51% of its PPA shares to COSCO, making the Chinese company the owner and operator of all of the port's piers, among other assets. Another major Chinese investment was the acquisition of a 24% stake in Greece's Independent Power Transmission Operator (Le Corre 2018).

These ever-closer economic relations have led many to consider the Greek-Chinese relationship as a 'Trojan horse' (Tonchev 2018a, 44). This relates to the fact that Athens started to diverge from a number of EU policies towards China, suggesting a degree of de-Europeanization. First, there was evidence of a repudiation of established and fundamental CFSP norms in Greece's position vis-à-vis the issue of human rights in China. What a number of EU member states and institutions considered as particularly annoying was Greece's stance during a UN Human Rights Council meeting in June 2017, when it blocked the Annual EU statement on China's human rights record. In that context, a Greek foreign ministry spokesperson said that selective criticism against specific countries would not facilitate the promotion of human rights in these states, nor the development of their relationship with the EU (Yellinek 2017, 1–2). This was the first time the EU had failed to produce a joint statement to the UN's top human rights body (Tonchev 2017, 74).

Second, in a number of cases Greece also circumvented EU foreign policy by giving priority to other fora or pulling back from previously established common CFSP priorities. For example, in July 2016, Greece was one of three member states (the other being Hungary and Croatia) which opposed the adoption of a joint EU statement on the South China Sea dispute. This move came immediately after China had lost an arbitration at The

Hague over fishing rights in the Spratly Islands (Tonchev and Davarinou 2017, 53). Then, in August 2018, Greece and China signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding to advance Beijing's flagship Belt and Road Initiative, making Greece the first developed Western nation to sign such a deal. Greece's conspicuous overtures to Beijing not only reflected the corrosion of the country's commitment to liberal political values, but also undermined the EU's ability to maintain a principled position vis-à-vis China. Finally, in April 2019, Greece officially joined the 'Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries' Group.<sup>3</sup> From Brussels' perspective, this forum is problematic because it might split the EU member states into different subregions. There are also ample examples of Greek parliamentarians showing their support for Chinese investment in Europe. For instance, in 2017, Costas Douzinas, the head of the Greek Parliament's foreign affairs and defense committee and a member of the governing Syriza party, said that 'while the Europeans are acting towards Greece like medieval leeches, the Chinese keep bringing money'.<sup>4</sup>

The main drivers for these de-Europeanization patterns seem to be mainly domestic. Greece's ouvertures towards China must be understood against the country's incapacity to attract foreign investments – a situation that preceded the global and Eurozone financial crises (Pantelidis and E. Nikopoulos 2008, 98). Trapped in a severe fiscal and economic predicament Greece was not in a position to discourage foreign investment from any source. Moreover, the crisis was the perfect opportunity for China to sow its 'dragon head' investments in Europe, with the port of Piraeus as the focal point of the strategy (Van Der Putten 2016, 341). Although Greece had shown some desire to attract Chinese investment to Piraeus prior to the outbreak of the 2009 crisis, it remains uncertain whether it would have proceeded with its complete sale had it not been forced by both its commitments to service its debt and the need to attract capital in order to recover economically (Skotiniotis 2017, 47).<sup>5</sup> It is against this backdrop that China came to be considered as a 'white knight' in Greece.

This Greek-Chinese partnership started to be considered as an additional driver of de-Europeanization. As seen above, the populist coalition government that came to power in Greece in January 2015 started to substantially re-define previously Europeanized national priorities in matters such as negotiations with creditors, but also migration/refugees, energy security and relations with Russia. In other words, Athens sought to politicize its EU membership terms and consequently numerous aspects of its foreign policy experienced a more radical movement towards de-Europeanization (Chrysogelos 2019, 618). The coalition government also needed to satisfy its domestic political interests. Indeed, Prime Minister Tsipras was trying to meet the demands of SYRIZA's leftist wing – the so-called Left Platform – which favoured leaving the Euro and a more autonomous foreign policy, rejecting 'instructions' from the EU or the USA (Nikolinakis 2017, 139).

In addition to the above, the economic crisis has profoundly transformed the Greek party system and created a deep division between its political elites and the wider society. It also greatly undermined the EU's image among Greeks. However, Greek public opinion turned more into a 'Euro-critical' stance, rather than a 'Euro-rejectionist' one (Clements, Nanou, and Verney 2014). In contrast, societal perceptions of China were very positive. Being geographically remote, China played no negative role in issues that are vital to Greece's national interest. Its perception as an ancient and influential Eastern civilization (analogous to the Greek heritage in the West) also had a positive effect (Skotiniotis 2017,



49). Undoubtedly, a big part of the official Sino-Greek relations is a cultural diplomacy campaign launched mostly by the Chinese side. Indeed, Greek citizens appear to support closer relations with China in areas such as culture, economic cooperation and political relations. Thus, it was in the 'void' left by the EU during the crisis that China stepped into, stating repeatedly its commitment to Greece as a 'strategic partner' (Tonchev 2018b, 7).

In short, China's growing impact on the international system makes it difficult for a country like Greece to resist its support, especially in times of economic need. This stance by Athens was seen by many as being dictated by China, in return for much-needed investment (Tonchev and Davarinou 2017, 53). However, there is no evidence that Beijing demanded a political *quid pro quo* for its investments in Greece. It should not be forgotten that Beijing was giving priority to its relations with major EU powers, such as France and Germany. China did not seek to get involved in the Greek debt crisis nor provided significant liquidity to Athens. Considering the problem as a European one, Beijing supported Greece's permanence in the Eurozone, something that plays in favour of its wider economic relations with the Union (Tzogopoulos 2016, 193–194). If anything, it was the Greek government that used the Greek-China rapprochement as a foreign policy tool to gain leverage in the negotiations for a bailout deal. From this perspective, the adoption of a de-Europeanization strategy was made for tactical reasons. These reasons were relevant to negotiations with the EU over the various bailouts, and they included relations with Russia and the refugee crisis. It could also be seen as a move by the Greek government to increase its autonomy, as Chinese state-led investment allowed SYRIZA-led Greece to distance itself from additional EU demands, thus further satisfying ideological preferences of the party's supporters, especially its most radical ones. The fact that the New Democracy conservative government (which arrived into power in July 2019) has continued to promote good economic relations with China shows that Athens has decided to continue to play this card (Kathimerini 2021). This provides evidence of a combination of ideological and rationalist forces at work.

### ***Portugal's foreign policy towards China and the Eurozone crisis***

China has not been a traditional foreign policy priority for Portugal. Geographical and cultural distance, meagre economic exchanges and the EU's limited political role in Asia have all acted as major hindrances for a more intense bilateral relationship. Portugal's historical links to Macau are an exception to that general picture (Neves 2000). Dating back to the sixteenth century, such long and complex colonial ties have profoundly shaped Portugal-China's contemporary relations. That single issue dominated the bilateral relationship until 1999, when Macau's administration was finally returned to China according to the 'one country, two systems' principle, also adopted for Hong Kong (Mendes 2013). Since then a new chapter was opened between the two countries, characterised by a more fluid and comprehensive relationship, which coincided with China's international 'rise'. The relatively smooth handover process of Macau strengthened this political relationship, leading to an intensification of reciprocal official visits and the establishment of a bilateral strategic partnership in 2005.<sup>6</sup> Cultural and economic ties were also gradually reinforced. While Portugal managed to reduce some its traditional large bilateral trade deficit, Chinese investments in Portugal increased strongly, especially during the Eurozone debt crisis. Like other European countries, Portugal has been much

interested in exploring the economic opportunities China offers, emphasizing the record of positive bilateral relations and positioning itself as a facilitator for Chinese companies in Europe as well as in Portuguese-speaking Africa and Latin America (Breda 2015). In turn, China has valued the possibility of demonstrating the 'success' of Macau's transition (in contrast to the more problematic Hong Kong process), explore Portugal's ties to the wider Lusophone world, as well as its perceived 'friendly' role within the EU.<sup>7</sup>

Lisbon's relations with China have been to a large extent framed and shaped by the EU's joint policy. Like other smaller EU member states, Portugal has shown much willingness to build and follow a functioning common foreign policy towards China, even if without trumping its national interests (Sandschneider 2002). At EU level, Portuguese attitudes towards China have been described as similar to those of a large group of 'accommodating mercantilist' member states (including Greece), sharing protectionist views on economic matters and an accommodating position on political issues. Indeed, Portugal has supported anti-dumping measures against China and while following the EU position on the arms embargo, it has been among the member states most inclined to its lifting. Lisbon has also adopted a zero-risk approach on Taiwan and human rights issues (Fox and Godemont 2009). The country's historical links with Macau have been used at EU level as a specific national interest justifying Portugal's moderate position vis-à-vis China and also as a 'trump card' to leverage its role in Brussels-Beijing relations. Lisbon's efforts to 'bridge' and promote that relationship (drawing on the Macau niche issue) have aimed at serving both national and EU goals, indicating that the Europeanization of Portugal's relations with China has included uploading attempts. These have, however, been an exception to the main downloading trend, which in turn has been constrained by the limits of the EU's joint policy towards China. With Brussels' initiatives lacking both strategic depth and internal coordination, Portugal has given priority to its bilateral relationship. Thus, as for other member states, the EU has represented an additional tool for Lisbon's foreign policy, working as a useful larger framework and a cover for difficult issues (Bersick 2015). Such bilateral prioritization was reinforced with China's rise and, notably, during the Eurozone crisis.

As seen above, during the peak of the Eurozone crisis Portuguese foreign policy-makers gave a clear priority to economic diplomacy matters and to the intensification of relations with extra-European partners, particularly with China. Contrasting with the increased levels of dissatisfaction with the EU, Portuguese domestic attitudes towards China during the crisis were overall positive. While at official level the general stance was clearly open and welcoming vis-à-vis China, at societal level there was mainly a mix of limited interest and pragmatism (Rodrigues 2017, 121–122). Lisbon's interactions with Beijing over this period were very much conducted via bilateral channels and centred on national goals. During an official visit to China in 2012 the then Portuguese foreign minister Paulo Portas said that Portugal wanted to establish a 'special relationship' with Beijing, following a cooperative and non-confrontational perspective (Lusa 2012). Throughout this phase, Portugal also displayed great openness to Chinese investment, becoming one of its largest recipients per capita in Europe. The privatization of Portuguese assets under the Troika granted mostly state-owned Chinese companies access to strategic sectors, such as energy, financial services and media.<sup>8</sup> One of the most significant operations was the selling of a stake in the largest national electricity provider to a Chinese state-owned firm for €2.7 billion, leaving behind an offer from a German

company. Another telling example is the Golden Visa Scheme, launched by Portugal in late 2012. Chinese citizens became the main beneficiaries of this scheme, allowing them to reside in Portugal and move within the Schengen area, in exchange for investment of at least €500,000 in the country (Rodrigues 2017). In this context, Portugal came to be seen as part of the group of ‘cash-strapped deal-seekers’ peripheral member states (including Greece) disputing the direction of EU policy towards China with the ‘frustrated market-openers’ (Godement et al. 2011).

Despite the intensification of bilateral relations and China’s growing economic presence in Portugal, this trend seems to have had a weaker de-Europeanization effect on Lisbon’s foreign policy than in the case of other EU countries, namely Greece. During the period under consideration, there was no apparent repudiation of or ‘resistance’ to fundamental EU foreign policy norms in Portugal’s discourse and practices. In contrast to Greece, Portugal did not block any EU declaration on human rights in China, even if it persisted with its traditional position of avoiding confronting Beijing on political issues in bilateral dealings (Le Corre 2019; Rodrigues 2018). Also, while not being opposed to granting market economy status to China, contrary to Beijing’s expectations, Lisbon did not lobby for the Chinese on that issue in the run-up to the decision by the EU in 2016 (Godement and Vasselier 2017). Portugal was at first reluctant to support the EU’s requirement for certain foreign investment screening procedures, implicitly targeting Chinese investments. At the June 2017 European Council meeting the Portuguese Prime Minister, António Costa (supported by Alexis Tsipras of Greece, among others) strongly opposed those plans. However, it did so pointing out that Portugal had been forced to privatize strategic industries during its financial bailout and that the country’s recovery from the crisis relied heavily on foreign investment (Beesley et al. 2017). In other words, the contestation was made on the basis of a perceived lack of European solidarity and an argument of non-discrimination. Similar justification, within EU norms, was made regarding Portugal’s involvement in China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Rather than joining Beijing’s initiative (like Greece and some Eastern European countries did), in December 2018 Lisbon signed a ‘memorandum of understanding’ on the BRI, presented by Lisbon as coherent with EU principles and goals (Santos Silva 2019).

This evidence supports the interpretation of a moderate degree of de-Europeanization of Portuguese foreign policy towards China. The manifest prioritisation of national goals and bilateral channels in Portugal’s dealings with China, during the peak of the Euro crisis, points to the presence of a degree of ‘disengagement’ and ‘circumvention’. Indeed, during that specific phase of national emergency not much consideration seems to have been given to Brussels’ efforts in finding a common approach towards China, with some EU procedural norms, such as information sharing, consultation and consensus-building, appearing to have been neglected. The clarity of these dynamics of re-nationalization was, however, stronger for matters with an economic dimension and during a relatively short period of time. As mentioned above, with the ending of the Troika period and, later, the arrival into power of António Costa’s government, such dynamics lost steam. The idea of having a close bilateral relationship with Beijing subsisted, yet in a more linked way to the EU level and with a greater engagement with Brussels’ initiatives towards China, than in the recent past. This re-Europeanization was well visible in the more active role adopted by Portugal’s representatives, even attempting to ‘upload’ its preferences and justifying difficult national positions within EU norms. It

also coincided with a worsening of domestic perceptions of China (Franco and Dennison 2020, 6–7).

Portugal's moderate de-Europeanization during the Eurozone crisis was driven by a combination of domestic and external factors. Its main explanation resides in the national need to deal with the severity and urgency of the crisis. While other domestic factors, such as government composition and decision-makers' views might have contributed for a more self-centred and intergovernmental response, it was under the exceptional circumstances of the Troika period that Portugal's representatives adopted a more autonomous foreign policy towards China – a reaction that lost force even before the change of government in 2015. These important internal drivers were, however, not separate from exogenous factors. Indeed, the perceived lack of EU solidarity during the crisis together with the inherent limitations of joint European instruments for dealing with its effects seem to have propitiated the de-Europeanization outcome. The same can be said about Portugal's historical bilateral links with China as well as Beijing's interest in developing its relations in Europe. Another systemic factor that seems to have intermingled was the new uncertainty in transatlantic relations, which might have pushed Lisbon to a more open position vis-à-vis China following a hedging logic, at least for 'softer' matters.

Ultimately, what seems to have been present was a greater instrumentalism in Portuguese foreign policy, with the near 'existencial crisis' the country went through during this period pressing its decision-makers to rationally emphasise national interests, out of mainly material considerations. Some sovereigntist impulses and rhetoric seem also to have been at play, particularly in view of the increased domestic Eurosceptic pressure and the overall favourable societal views towards China during the Troika years. However, the country's overall foreign policy continued to express a wide normative alignment with EU norms and practices, founded upon the pro-European views of the large majority of Portuguese elites and public opinion. Thus, rather than a trend, the moderate degree of de-Europeanization found in this analysis represented a tactic or an opportunistic strategy, complementing a more long-term strategy through which Portugal's diplomacy tries to balance its important European commitment with other relations around the world.

## Conclusions

The empirical evidence gathered in this article shows that both Greece and Portugal's foreign policies towards China went through an important degree of de-Europeanization during the Eurozone crisis. While both countries had already been trying to intensify their bilateral relations with China for several years, the new challenges and difficulties brought about by the Euro crisis increased their incentives to step up ties with Beijing. Such engagement was made emphasizing national goals as well as prioritizing bilateral and other mini-lateral channels, instead of EU ones. Put differently, and linking those findings to the framework of the present Special Issue (Müller, Pomorska, and Tonra 2021), the two countries retreated from actively Europeanizing their foreign policy, 'disengaging' from and 'circumventing' EU foreign policy mechanisms. These dynamics of 're-nationalization' helped Greece and Portugal attract badly needed investments, but they simultaneously granted Chinese companies access to strategic sectors in two economies part of the broader European market.

The dynamics of de-Europeanization found in this study were, however, less intense or profound in the case of Portugal. For instance, while, as noted above, Greece joined the China-promoted '16 + 1' initiative, Portugal only signed a 'memorandum of understanding' on the Belt and Road Initiative, presented by Lisbon as coherent with EU principles and goals. Moreover, differently from Greece, Portugal did not block any EU declaration on human rights in China, even if Lisbon persisted with its traditional stance of avoiding confronting Beijing on political issues in bilateral dealings. In other words, whereas Portugal's engagement with China remained mostly nuanced or balanced, with no signs of 'resistance' to substantive EU foreign policy norms, Greece's one was more intimate or determined, including clear instances of 'repudiation' of European fundamental norms.

Apart from a different intensity, the de-Europeanization dynamics disclosed by the analysis were more durable for Greece. Indeed, the signs of re-Europeanization, visible for both countries, began faster in the case of Portugal, almost as soon as the worst of its financial troubles were over. With the end of its bailout program in 2014, and the election of a new government the following year, Portugal's engagement with China went back to being made more in accordance with EU objectives, yet without losing sight of its own national priorities. In the Greek case, although there were indications of a general re-Europeanization trend from mid-2015, the de-Europeanization over China was lengthier. Starting from a much lower level of Europeanization of its overall foreign policy, even after Greece's financial situation started to improve, the country continued to play the 'Chinese card' in a more autonomous way than Portugal. However, the fact that the relationship with China was still used to gain leverage inside the EU, together with the variability or inconsistency of de-Europeanization dynamics, indicates that the latter represented more of a tactic than a trend; a feature relatively clearer for the case of Portugal.

The comparison between the two countries also revealed differences in terms of the main drivers of de-Europeanization, with domestic politics playing a more significant role in the case of Greece. Indeed, the weight of populist, nationalist and Eurosceptic political forces was stronger in Greece, even with a direct reflection at the very level of government composition – something that did not happen in Portugal where pro-European mainstream parties remained in power throughout the economic crisis. As seen above, under the populist governments of Alexis Tsipras Greece's diplomacy gave more centrality to the country's 'national interest', triggering a clearer movement towards de-Europeanization.

The role of such domestic factors was intimately connected with other drivers of a more external nature, such as EU-level developments and China's agency, which are both more relevant for understanding the degree of de-Europeanization found for Portugal. Even if building on pre-existing dynamics, it seems difficult to conceive that either Portugal or Greece might have engaged China in the same intense way as they did (even selling strategic assets), without the additional challenges and increased politicization derived from the EU's response to the economic crisis. Against the widespread perception of a less solidary EU (that the option for a Troika of creditors encapsulated), the overtures from China must have come out as a blessing for both Southern European countries. Particularly in the case of Portugal, pre-existing strong bilateral ties with China were certainly a facilitating factor. Thus, it can be argued that the Eurozone crisis strengthened the influence of external actors like China, which worked as an additional driver of de-Europeanization.

Ultimately, the dynamics of de-Europeanization found in this article can be explained by an intricate combination of rational interests and ideology, with the latter playing a more significant role in the case of Greece. The closer and more autonomous ties established by the two Southern European countries with the Asian economic giant during the height of Eurozone crisis were patently inspired by a utilitarian logic aimed at securing relative economic benefits. In the Greek case, the use of the 'China connection' as a bargaining tool during the bailout negotiations was also indicative of a calculation of expected political payoffs, both at the EU and domestic levels. The promotion of political party gains by the SYRIZA government was arguably one of the clearest illustrations, in this article, of how rational interests and ideology intertwined to produce foreign policy de-Europeanization dynamics.

## Notes

1. This preference found some echo among the conservative Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party (CDS-PP), which was the junior partner in the centre-right coalition government (2011–2015), responsible for implementing the bailout programme, and whose leader, Paulo Portas, was Portugal's Minister of Foreign Affairs during the first half of that government's mandate. As foreign minister Portas stated several times in domestic discussions that with the Troika's intervention Portugal had become a 'protectorate' and needed to restore its 'sovereignty' (Sousa and Gaspar 2015, 105–106).
2. Showing commitment in those negotiations was seen as important to ensure support in solving Portugal's financial problems and to distinguish itself from the case of Greece.
3. Initially known as '16 + 1', the group became the '17 + 1' when Greece joined.
4. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/26/world/europe/greece-china-piraeus-alexis-tsipras.html>
5. Nonetheless, while Greece badly needed FDI, this was not the whole story. There are strong indications that Greek shipowners not only facilitated COSCO's investment in Piraeus, but also initiated the whole process (Huliaras and Petropoulos 2013, 14).
6. At the time only four other European countries (France, Germany, United Kingdom and Spain) had established a strategic partnership with China.
7. In 2003 Beijing established in Macau the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries.
8. While securing the lion's share of the privatization wave and involving sensitive sectors, Chinese investments' share of Portugal's total FDI stock remained relatively small (around 1.6% in 2016).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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