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**Title:** Research and methodological assumptions

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**Citation style:** Kubin Tomasz, Lorencka Małgorzata, Myśliwiec Małgorzata. (2017). Research and methodological assumptions. W: T. Kubin, M. Lorencka, M. Myśliwiec, "Impact of economic crisis on the functioning of political systems : a case study of Greece, Spain, and Italy" (S. 7-21). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



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# Research and methodological assumptions

**Tomasz Kubin, Małgorzata Lorencka, Małgorzata Myśliwiec**

The global economic crisis that symbolically began with the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers bank in September 2008, led to a series of new economic, social, and political phenomena. The crisis encouraged many researchers, representing various fields of science, to begin analysing its consequences. Work devoted to this issue was also pursued by political scientists. One of the most intriguing and dynamic fields of research concerns contemporary political systems.<sup>1</sup> The processes that occur in this field and which are a consequence of the influence exerted by the surrounding environment in which they function, could not go unnoticed. The reason for this is in the nature of systemic analysis itself. As noted by Adam Jamróz, who referenced the view points of Michael Crozier and Erhard Fredberg in his work, “the essence of systemic reasoning is treating a given phenomenon as a structured whole, the elements of which remain co-dependent and coordinated in their workings.”<sup>2</sup> A characteristic feature of systemic reasoning is using a pattern of “systemic causality,” which “assumes the co-dependency of consequences and causes within the framework of a given system, the features of which [...] permit us to explain and foresee the results of its activity.”<sup>3</sup> Application of systemic analysis thus obliges the researcher to define at least two matters. The first involves indication of at least several

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed analysis of the literature on the subject dealing with changes in the functioning of political systems that occurred after the 2008 economic crisis has been carried out by Carolina Plaza COLODRO in the publication: “Los efectos de la crisis económica en los sistemas políticos europeos.” *Revista de estudios políticos* 2015, no. 170, pp. 317—336.

<sup>2</sup> A. JAMRÓZ: “Wprowadzenie. Struktura i mechanizm funkcjonowania burżuazyjnych systemów politycznych.” In: *Systemy polityczne wysoko rozwiniętych krajów kapitalistycznych*. Ed. A. JAMRÓZ. Warszawa 1989, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

interdependencies existing between the elements composing a system, which is understood as a whole. Secondly, it is necessary “to outline the borders between such a structured entirety that constitutes the actual system, and the external conditions determining its activity, which in turn constitutes the environment the system operates in.”<sup>4</sup> Such a structured approach derives from the fact that the systemic analysis concept encompasses two main assumptions. The first one is that the source of all changes and transformations lies in the system itself. The other one, however, points to the fact that “any changes taking place within a system are the result of a feedback-type relationship between the system and its environment.”<sup>5</sup>

These were the same assumptions that guided the authors of this study in their research. Before any research could begin, however, a precise selection of the research field had to be made and the aforementioned constituents, which are characteristic for a systemic analysis, had to be defined. Firstly, the authors decided to select the states, whose political systems would be researched. Three southern European states, namely Greece, Spain, and Italy, have been chosen. According to the authors, the economic crisis, the beginnings of which date back to 2008, impacted these states the most severely out of all the countries in the European Union.

The next challenge was to define the set of political, historical, geographic, social, and economic conditions, which form the environment of the political systems to be analysed. The most important factor defining the nature of the planned work was surely the economic factor, which constitutes the aforementioned crisis. This was evidenced by the first observations preceding the selection of the research field, which revealed that serious changes in the functioning of all three political systems occurred after the crisis ensued, that is, after 2008. Conducting a meticulous problem analysis therefore required its causes, its course, and consequences to be characterised, for it needs to be emphasised that political science considers economic conditions to be a key element impacting political systems. Edward Halizak rightly claims that “the truth about social phenomena is of a cross-disciplinary nature and restricting oneself to only one field of research prevents one from fully understanding it”<sup>6</sup> and that is why “separating politics from economy serves a purely analytical purpose.”<sup>7</sup>

By outlining a general overview of the relationship between politics and economy<sup>8</sup> (and between political science and the economics in a theoretical di-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> E. HALIZAK: “Polityka i ekonomia. O potrzebie rozwijania badań w duchu ekonomii politycznej.” *Studia Nauk Politycznych* 2004, no. 1 (year I), 2nd series, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> See T. KUBIN: *Polityczne implikacje wprowadzenia unii walutowej w Europie*. Katowice 2007, pp. 21—25.

mension) it is concluded that economy needs to be understood as a science about how to optimally utilise a limited range of resources that have been made available for use by the people. Considering the strive to optimise the utilisation of these resources, the ideal situation would be when the sole criterion for making any decisions concerning the economy was to achieve their maximum economic efficiency. This, of course, would constitute a best-case scenario, one that has never actually existed. When considered in the light of the relationship between politics and the economy, this would mean the economy's absolute domination over politics. At the other end of the extreme, if politics were to completely dominate over the economy, any decisions concerning the economy would be made without any consideration for the existing conditions and limitations of an economic nature. In practice, should a situation of this kind be at all possible, it would last for a relatively short period of time. Such a scenario, however, has no standing in the long-run, for as noted by Michał Dobroczyński: “[...] the political factor periodically dominates over impetuous economic processes, however, the latter — especially in the long run — leads to a reversal of the dependency and begins to dominate over a primitively understood need for administrative power.”<sup>9</sup> In practice, within the politics-economy interdependency existing at a given moment in a state, there exists a series of various intermediary states that result from a variety of factors such as historic legacy, the political system, economic system, level of economic development, significant ideological values existing in a society, membership of a state in international organisations, international conditions in the broad sense of the term, etc.

Walter Hallstein wrote that “the essence of politics, however, is choice.”<sup>10</sup> Decisions on choosing certain objectives in politics and the means for their realisation, including those pertaining to the economy, are performed “on the basis of a defined value system. Social values, which social aspirations interact with, and which can either unify or lead to the disintegration of an entire sizeable social group, also constitute political values.”<sup>11</sup> Ideological values constitute a link between politics and the economy. “Individuals and social groups always value the expected results when preparing their actions. They also value the projected measures, the use of which will contribute to the achievement of the objective.”<sup>12</sup> In this way, economic actions and decisions are made on the basis of economic factors. However, political factors also play an important role, as they constitute an expression of the preferences of various groups of interest<sup>13</sup> — macroeconomic policy is closely related to various ideologies and platforms

<sup>9</sup> M. DOBROCZYŃSKI: *Międzynarodowe związki gospodarki z polityką*. Toruń 2003, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> W. HALLSTEIN: *United Europe. Challenge and Opportunity*. Cambridge (Mass.) 1962, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> A. BODNAR: *Ekonomika i polityka*. Warszawa 1978, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 206.

<sup>13</sup> E. HALIZAK: “Polityka i ekonomia. O potrzebie rozwijania badań...,” p. 172.

of different political parties.<sup>14</sup> In other words, “the distribution of income and wealth is the driving force of the political process.”<sup>15</sup> For this reason very rarely can decisions influencing, for instance, the scale of inequality in income among people, inflation, scale of income redistribution, what (i.e. work, capital, consumption) and to what degree should be taxed, etc. be made and explained on the basis of data or economic indications. These therefore cannot be treated and analysed solely as strictly “technical decisions.” Nevertheless one needs to bear in mind the specific political conditions and circumstances present when the decisions were taken and the fact that they affect different social groups (groups of interest) in various ways. A given group may profit from or lose given resources as a result of a given decision, or action (or lack of decision or action). As a consequence, its situation compared to other groups can either improve or deteriorate. This therefore is not only of economic, but also of political importance. Furthermore, such a “gain” or “loss” affects the political behaviours of such a group in obvious ways. As noted by Artur Bodnar: “[...] all economic actions that directly affect the interests of large social groups, are actions of great political significance, while the decisions that initiate or adjust these actions on a widespread scale are political decisions of an economic nature.”<sup>16</sup> Thomas Piketty also writes the following about the distribution of wealth between people, a key aspect in economic politics:

The history of the distribution of wealth has always been deeply political, and it cannot be reduced to purely economic mechanism. [...] The history of inequality is shaped by the way economic, social, and political actors view what is just and what is not, as well as by the relative power of those actors and the collective choices that result. It is the joint product of all relevant actors combined.<sup>17</sup>

The interdependencies between the economy and politics or, in other words, the influence of the economic environment on the political system, plays a key role in democratic states, where the influence of particular social groups (groups of interest) on the political decisions taken is, at least in theory, the greatest. In this particular dimension, democracy presents itself as a system, which contri-

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<sup>14</sup> K.R. McNAMARA: *The Currency of Ideas. Monetary Politics in the European Union*. New York 1998, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> B. STEUNENBERG, H.J. BLOMMESTEIN: “Governments and Markets: An Introduction.” In: *Governments and Markets. Establishing a Democratic Constitutional Order and a Market Economy in Former Socialist Countries*. Eds. H.J. BLOMMESTEIN, B. STEUNENBERG. Dordrecht 1994, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> A. BODNAR: *Ekonomika i polityka...*, p. 199.

<sup>17</sup> T. PIKETTY: *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Trans. A. GOLDHAMMER. Cambridge (Mass.)—London 2014, p. 20. The following footnotes refer to the Polish edition of the book: T. PIKETTY: *Kapitał w XXI wieku*. Trans. A. BILIK. Warszawa 2015.

butes to a large degree to the “politicisation” of decisions that appear to be clearly economic and “technical.” Subjects that wield power in a democratic political system make economic decisions based on their potential for improving their chances of re-election. Subjects that aspire to take over power, in turn, criticise these decisions and try to convince as broad an electoral base as possible that the decisions taken once they are in power, will better cater to their interests.

Apart from interests, ideas (ideologies) and values represented by various social groups, another factor that “binds” politics with the economy, are the institutions that function within a political system. Every political and economic activity is regulated by specific public institutions that define the legal framework of the activity, formulate objectives, methods, and instruments needed to perform the activity, act to achieve its objectives, monitor its realisation and control the conformance of the activity with legal regulations.

A more elaborate and presently most significant dimension of the general *politics-economy* interdependence is the *state-market* relationship. The issues of purposefulness, location, scale, or methods of interference of public institutions in the economy are one of the key issues in economic and political analysis and are fundamental for the execution of political power. The state interferes in the economy from the very beginning of its existence. In terms of the opinions on the legitimacy of such interference, at one end of the *state-market* axis, which constitutes a somewhat simplified representation of the relationship, is the position that the market should dominate to the fullest extent possible, whereas the role of the state should be limited to a minimum. The role of the state should be limited only to ensuring the people and companies the right conditions for conducting business, namely, a stable legal system that would guarantee unhampered entrepreneurial freedom, its effective execution, the proper technical infrastructure, a stable currency, and safety. According to such an approach, taxes should be kept to a minimum, the state should not interfere in production and the exchange of goods and services, in contracts signed on the free market, in wealth distribution, etc. On the other end of the extreme is the position according to which public institutions should have a decisively upper hand over market forces to the degree that the market, as a means of allocation and distribution of resources, should be entirely or almost entirely, eliminated. All means of production should remain with the state, companies remaining under the complete control of state institutions should deal with production and the distribution of all goods and services, while private businesses should be reduced to a minimum or eliminated altogether. The most extreme of scenarios sees no room not only for private ownership of production means, but also the private property of anything or nearly anything — all goods should be common, public or social property, depending on the accepted rhetoric.

As in the case of the *politics-economy* relationship, the above views on the role of the state in the economy are also theoretical in nature. In reality we have

dealt with and still deal with many different intermediate variations, that is, with different levels of interference of the state in a grossly free-market economy or with the provision of a smaller or greater range of economic freedom in a centrally-planned economy (socialist, communist). In order to gain a better understanding of this issue, it is worth noting that we are dealing with a visible increase in the state's role in the economy for more or less a hundred years. The most synthetic indicator to prove this is the share of tax-related income in the state budget. Over the course of the 19th century until the breakout of WWI, this share constituted no more than 10%. The taxes gained thus were used to finance such expenditure as defense, safety, and public order, the justice system, administration and, on a relatively small scale, investment in infrastructure or maintaining a defined number of schools, universities, and hospitals. From the 1920s to the 1970s, the share of taxes in the national income of the richest countries rose several times from ca. 30% (USA) to 55% (Sweden) of the total national income. From the 1980 until now, this level has remained more or less stable. Public money is spent primarily on financing the education system, health care, retirement and disability pensions as well as on the construction and maintenance of infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between politics and the economy can be assessed in several ways. As noted by Grażyna Ulicka, the first of these relates to the already mentioned economy-politics interdependency, both treated as separate, albeit closely related and interdependent areas of public life. The second one relates to a matter already raised, namely to the relationship between political party entities and the economy in different social and economic systems. For the purposes of our study, two other dependencies between politics and the economy play and even more important role. These concern the various indicators (and the dynamic of their change) that reflect the economic situation (and its changes) of a given state on its political system, that is, on the stability of this system and the processes and changes taking place within it. Last but not least, we can attempt to explain how a given economic policy and/or the state of the economy impacts the political process and how the political elites and the ruling majority are perceived.<sup>19</sup> Taking into consideration the subject of this work, one example worth analysing is Greece, where the majority of the population believes that the crisis was instigated by “international forces to control the economy, the wealth and the government of the country.”<sup>20</sup> An increasing number of Greeks were of

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<sup>18</sup> T. PIKETTY: *Kapitał...*, pp. 585—587.

<sup>19</sup> G. ULICKA: “Determinanty polityki.” In: *Wprowadzenie do nauki o państwie i polityce*. Eds. B. SZMULIK, M. ŻMIGRODZKI. Lublin 2002, p. 313.

<sup>20</sup> A. IOANNIS: *The Greek Tragedy. The European Financial Crisis in Simple Words*. [n. p.] 2015, p. 39.

the opinion that the two largest political parties in Greece — the PASOK and New Democracy — were controlled by these international powers.<sup>21</sup>

The aforementioned considerations undoubtedly point to the fact that economic factors have a critical influence on the functioning of contemporary political systems. For this reason, the idea of analysing their influence on the functioning of the political systems of Greece, Spain, and Italy in the context of the economic crisis of 2008 has become the basis for the preparation of this research plan. A preliminary analysis of the issue has also shown that the historical, geographical, and social conditions have constituted key components of the environment surrounding the political systems. A troubled political and economic past, especially the country's geographical location at the southern peripheries of Europe, and significant social changes that occurred as a result of the global economic crisis of 2008, have become springboards for further analysis.

Finally, a key step before proceeding to the actual research is the identification of those elements and subsystems of the selected political systems that are to be analysed in detail. It was initially assumed that the study would investigate three horizontal power segments (the legislative, executive, and judicial) and public power centres operating on three levels in a vertical arrangement (i.e. state, regional, and local). Changes that were seen taking place therein demonstrated the highest level of dynamics, such that had not been seen in these states for a long period of time. Party systems, that is, subsystems of the political systems selected for the study, were seen to attract particular attention in this period. A general action plan outlined in this way constitutes a specific background for the main subject of the book presented, namely how the manifestations and consequences of the global economic crisis that began in 2008 influenced the functioning of the political systems of Greece, Spain, and Italy.

An analysis of the influence of the economic crisis on the functioning of selected political systems required the posing of several research questions, the most important of which included:

1. What are the features of an economic crisis and how can we identify its symptoms in the economy of a state?
2. What were the causes of the current economic crisis in Europe?
3. Why did the economic crisis affect Greece, Spain, and Italy so severely?
4. What role did the particular centres of power in these countries (central and regional governments) play in the development and severe exacerbation of the economic crisis?
5. What influence did the economic crisis have on the rhythm of the electoral cycles in the studied states?
6. What influence did the economic crisis have on the functioning of party systems in the studied states?

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.



7. What influence did the economic crisis have on the intensification of decentralising tendencies in the studied states?
8. What influence did the economic crisis have on the intensification of anti-system political postulates in the studied states?

The need to find answers to the questions posed and to recognise their importance inclined the authors of this book to assume several detailed hypotheses. Considering the specificity of the selected research field, the hypotheses were formulated as follows:

1. The political actions of the decision-making centres of Greece, Spain, and Italy with regard to economic matters, both on central and regional levels, led to serious interference in the functioning of their political systems.
2. The economic crisis in Greece, Spain, and in Italy seriously interfered in the rhythm of the electoral cycle.
3. The economic crisis in Greece, Spain, and in Italy influenced the functioning of the party systems of these states.
4. The economic crisis in Spain, and in Italy helped intensify decentralisation tendencies in these states.
5. The economic crisis in Greece, Spain, and in Italy helped intensify the formulation of anti-system postulates by selected political groups.

Verification of the aforementioned detailed hypotheses that were formulated on the basis of the previously posed research question, serves to help check the validity of the main research hypothesis, which assumes that in conditions of representative democracy, the economic situation of a state is one of the most crucial factors determining the stability and sustainability of a political system. The better the economic situation of a state, the more stable and sustainable the political system is. In an economic crisis situation, the stability and sustainability of a political system is put in serious jeopardy.

The timeframe covered by the study encompasses the years 2008—2016. The period starts from the dawn of the world economic crisis, the consequences of which had an immense impact on the functioning of the political systems of the studied states. The end of the period is marked by the year 2016 in which political events of great importance, especially for Spain in Italy, occurred. In Spain, for the first time since the establishment of constitutional order in 1978, it was not possible to appoint a central government after the elections and they had to be organised once again. In Italy, on the other hand, the parliament adopted a constitutional amendment draft.

Due to the nature of the research material, the authors will employ several research methods in their study. In light of the comparative nature of the proposed research, the comparative method will be the most important method used. Its application will allow the authors to identify the similarities and differences in the functioning of selected political systems in the conditions of an economic crisis. Research of the legal solutions adopted in Greece, Spain, and

Italy that relate to the functioning of political systems, will be conducted using the legal-institutional analysis method. The use of the system analysis method mentioned above will make it possible to achieve the desired objectives by using both a macro-system analysis (for studying political systems as coherent wholes), mid-tier analysis (for studying the functioning of party systems), and micro-system analysis (e.g. for presenting the influence of individual political parties on the functioning of an entire political system). Assessing the phenomena and socio-political processes through the prism of political decision-making centres will be conducted using the decision-making method. In order to outline the historical background of the studied phenomena, it will also be necessary to apply the historical method.

The subject of the first chapter is the economic crisis in Greece, Spain, and Italy, which clearly began manifesting itself around 2008. The aim of this part of the book is to research what were the economic causes and manifestations of the crisis in Greece, Spain, and Italy and how the crisis influenced the economic situation of the studied states. This part is going to form the starting point and a background for the analysis presented in the subsequent chapters, that is, for determining if and how the consequences of the economic crisis influenced the functioning of the political systems in Greece, Spain, and Italy.

In the first fragment of Chapter 1, the author lists the causes of the crisis, which from the point of view of the studied states were of an “external” nature, that is, the global causes of the crisis as identified by the literature, which neither Greece, Spain nor Italy could prevent. The second part of the first chapter deals with the causes and economic consequences of the crisis in Greece, Spain, and in Italy. It points to the circumstances, conditions, events, data, etc., which are both peculiar to each individual state and result from the membership of these states in the European Union. In order to provide as clear and concise a picture as possible of how the economic situation evolved in Greece, Spain, and Italy during the crisis, several various kinds of statistical data were presented which reflect changes to the macroeconomic situation. This data concerns the period immediately preceding the start of the crisis and after 2008, mostly until 2015, inclusively. As there is no commonly accepted set of indicators in the literature that would help illustrate the condition and changes in the economic system of a state, and given that discrepancies here are quite extensive,<sup>22</sup> these indicators were selected at the sole discretion of the authors. Eurostat has been the most extensively used source of data in the study. Tables with data presenting the dynamics of change in the position of Greece, Spain, and Italy in economic competition rankings have additionally been employed. They have been prepared

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<sup>22</sup> See for example T. KUBIN: “Economic System of the European Union. Between Particularism and Universalism.” *Studia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensis* 2015, vol. 14, pp. 25—27.

by several international institutions and published periodically as reports. They take the form of data syntheses, in which dozens and sometimes hundreds of various kinds of data, indicators, factors, variables etc. are taken into account. Their incorporation in the study was meant to provide an analysis and show how various economic competitiveness aspects of Greece, Spain, and Italy were evaluated in the course of the crisis, or how the crisis affected competitiveness. Given the different definitions of an economy's competitiveness, these rankings emphasise slightly different factors determining how competitive an economy is and they have been prepared using different methodologies and take into account various factors, data, etc. For this reason, in order to gain a more complete picture of the situation, rankings contained in reports prepared by international institutions/organisations (The Heritage Foundation, World Economic Forum, International Institute for Management Development, the World Bank Group) were taken into consideration, and the final score achieved is the result of more complex evaluations and analyses. Another practically significant and synthetic assessment of the condition of the economy and its changes is provided by rating agencies' recommendations. They have also been included in the study and encompass the long-term ratings of Greece, Spain, and Italy issued by Moody's, Standard&Poor's and Fitch Ratings rating agencies.

Additionally, the summaries illustrating the economic situation in the countries studied also include tables with the corruption perception index (issued by Transparency International) and estimates on the size of the informal economy (based on the research of Friedrich Schneider from the Johannes Kepler University in Linz).

In order to better illustrate the scale of changes in the economic situations of Greece, Spain, and Italy, their evolution was compared to that of other countries of the European Union. The first chapter also shows the actions taken mainly in Greece and Spain to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis and improve the macroeconomic situation. Other sources used in this part of the book also include EU's legal acts, documents of EU institutions, and carefully selected literature on the subject.

Chapter 2 deals with the functioning of the political system of contemporary Greece. It starts from the words of Alexis Tsipras spoken in the parliament during his first speech following his party's victory on 25 January 2015: "It is not only a Greek crisis. The crisis is European."<sup>23</sup> What is striking is the fact that it was a very significant declaration. For the first time since the fall of the Regime of the Colonels in 1974, power in Greece was taken over by the Syriza, a radi-

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<sup>23</sup> Speech of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to the House of Deputies on 8 February 2015: Προγραμματικές Δηλώσεις: Ομιλία του Πρωθυπουργού Α. Τσίπρα (08/02/2015), <http://primeminister.gr/2015/02/08/13322> (accessed 10.02.2015).

cal left-wing group which formed a coalition with the nationalist Independent Greeks party. In the face of a deep economic crisis, several years of recession and the threat of bankruptcy of the state after 2008, both the political powers took a tough stance against austerity and financial cuts, which the cabinets of the socialist PASOK party and the conservative New Democracy party had subscribed to.

From among the states of southern Europe, which according to Huntington's third wave of democracy created a consolidated democratic system, it was Greece that was hit hardest with the effects of the economic crisis of 2008. It also had the biggest effect on the functioning of its political system that was established on the basis of the constitution of 1975. Only foreign financial assistance kept Greece from formally declaring bankruptcy, however, the price to pay for the subsequent bailouts (in 2010, 2012, and 2015) meant even further relinquishment of its power (than that provided solely by membership in the EU) to make decisions concerning its economy. Each consecutive bailout involved the need to introduce specific structural reforms, control their implementation, and was burdened with the risk of it being suspended by the now defunct Troika, that is, the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank. Not even a referendum carried out on 5 July 2015 which rejected the consecutive bound transaction (financial assistance in exchange for further reforms and cuts), including a threat of a so-called Grexit (i.e. Greece's withdrawal from the euro area), considerably influenced the conditions of the subsequent bailout. In this situation, the parliament was forced to accept the proposed bailout package with all its consequences within 48 hours without conducting a longer debate in the House of Deputies. A research hypothesis was drawn from these events stating that a deepening economic crisis and the need to pursue further financial assistance led the political institutions of the Greek state to relinquish even more of its sovereignty to international organisations and resulted in the further radicalisation of public sentiment and the strengthening of extreme parties. In order to verify this hypothesis, a decision was made to first verify the validity of more detailed research assumptions. Several essential issues were considered. Firstly, the following question was posed: To what degree did the consecutive financial bankruptcies in Greece after it had gained independence in 1830 influenced the current political situation in the state? It was then assumed that the lack of strong statehood in a situation where Greece "entered the modern era as a province of the Ottoman Empire, in which the state elites were recruited to work for a foreign power lacking legitimacy,"<sup>24</sup> contributed to a lack of a strong tradition of civil society. According to the authors, this situation led, in consequence, to the growth of state

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<sup>24</sup> F. FUKUYAMA: *Ład polityczny i polityczny regres. Od rewolucji przemysłowej do globalizacji demokracji*. Trans. J. PYKA. Poznań 2015, p. 124.

administration, nepotism, and consolidation of a clientelistic system, which was the reason for political stagnation and lack of essential reforms, which the two main political parties, namely PASOK and New Democracy, were incapable of introducing. The critical economic situation of the post-2008 state and the austerity policy further deepened the already weak public confidence in state institutions, which contributed to a radicalisation of social sentiment. It was also noticed that a long-term economic crisis and the policy of austerity led to the emergence of a new socio-political divide: for/against conditional financial support by foreign institutions, which resulted in the rise in the importance of radical political groups such as the left-wing Syriza or the neo-fascist Golden Dawn parties. Consideration was also given in Chapter 2 to whether the lack of economic stability in Greece was related to the political instability of the government cabinets and the need to conduct the sixth early parliamentary elections (in a row), which had paved radical groups' surge to power in 2015. The author of Chapter 2 also realizes that in the case of Greece, a significantly crucial process that further deepened the economic and political crisis was an increase in the influx of immigrants from the Middle East and northern Africa as a result of the military conflicts that raged in those parts of the world. The considerations contained in Chapter 2 end in a summary.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the functioning of the political system of Spain after 2008. The starting point for analysis were the events from the turn of 2015, when a completely new political power setup appeared in the lower house of the Spanish parliament following election to the Congress of Deputies. Its specificity and the divergent political interests presented by the politicians of the particular groups, led to the most serious governmental crisis in this country since the establishment of democratic constitutional order in 1978.

The structure of the chapter is based on a series of detailed hypotheses and on a general hypothesis, which were raised at the beginning of the chapter and correspond to the detailed questions and hypotheses and the main hypothesis mentioned at the beginning of the book. The first part strives to determine to what extent the consecutive economic crises in the history of Spain impacted the shaping of the political system of this state in the second half of the 20th century. Next, a study was conducted to determine to what degree the deep economic crisis of 2008 led to a deterioration of public confidence in the institutions of the Spanish state that had been shaped in the second half of the 20th century. The subsequent parts of the chapter demonstrate the consequences of this weakening of confidence: the emergence of new social movements fighting for the rights of those bearing the brunt of the economic crisis, utilisation of their social impact to build the political position of new Spanish *state-wide parties*, their winning of a considerable amount of votes to the Congress of Deputies, their thwarting of attempts to form a government in the political centre, and proposals of the main

actors of the political party scene to change the 1978 constitution. The analysis contained in Chapter 3 also covers issues related to the surge in decentralising tendencies in Catalonia.

The summary of Chapter 3 contains conclusions produced by the research that are presented as a verification of the posed detailed hypotheses and the main hypothesis.

Chapter 4 discusses how the economic crisis affected the functioning of Italy's political system after 2008. Analysis of this area took into account our assumption that the economic crisis had a much weaker effect on Italy than on other southern European countries. Nevertheless, its consequences exerted a considerable effect on the current reconstruction of the political scene, contributed to the systematic introduction of social and economic reforms and the drafting of an amended constitution, which was adopted in 2016.

According to our assumptions, Italy, in contrast to Greece or Spain, did not have to ask for external financial assistance. However, due to pressure from the European Union, public opinion and falling rating agency scores, it was forced to introduce austerity measures (e.g. decrease its budget deficit, mitigate growing national debt, limit high unemployment levels among young people), conduct the necessary structural reforms and stimulate economic growth. In 2012, an amendment of article 81 of Italy's constitution was adopted, whereby a budget stability law was introduced. In politics, insufficient actions to rectify the Italian economy resulted in the dismissal of the centre-right government of Silvio Berlusconi on 12 November 2011, which had been appointed as a result of the 2008 parliamentary elections, the disintegration of Berlusconi's The People of Freedom party and the appointment of a non-partisan government of technocrats led by Mario Monti. The effects of the economic crisis deepened the already existing dissatisfaction with the stagnant political elites, leading to the emergence of a group called the Five Star Movement as a manifestation of public disillusionment with bipolar political competition and the assumption of power by a new generation of politicians under the leadership of 39-year-old Matteo Renzi in February 2014. For the purposes of the analysis it was therefore assumed in Chapter 4 that the economic crisis in Italy after 2008 had accelerated political change, a process which was naturally accompanied by social and economic issues. Verification of such a hypothesis was to be assisted by the prior verification of several detailed hypotheses. The first of them assumed that the division of the country into the poor Mezzogiorno and the rich North has existed since Italy's unification in 1861. Such a structured social and economic division continues to be the main factor determining the weak development of civil society in the south of the country, weaker confidence in state institutions and in the activity of mafia-type organisations (e.g. the Mafia Capitale in Rome). In this situation, numerous corruption scandals, an inefficient justice system, a clientelistic state and a continuously overgrown bureaucratic system impede,

and at times prevent, necessary reforms altogether. Social discontent instigated by the aforementioned factors was the main contributing factors behind the appointment of the technocratic government of Mario Monti. However, the dismissal of the centre-right government in 2008 as a result of the economic crisis led political groups to begin cooperating with each other. It also weakened the political divide into parties which had either supported or opposed Silvio Berlusconi's politics, an arrangement that had existed since 1993. It was also assumed that social discontent was the main factor which had led to the emergence of a new populist and anti-systemic group called the Five Stars Movement and to a change of political competition towards a three-bloc system. The next research assumption states that the restructuring of the party system forced on by the crisis contributed to the creation of unstable cabinets formed out of centre-right and centre-left groups after the 2013 parliamentary elections. Furthermore, it was the economic crisis and the political instability that increased the role and significance of the President of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano (Italy's first ever president to be elected for the second term) and of the Constitutional Court (e.g. decision on the unconstitutionality of the parliamentary election law in 2014). An analysis was also made to determine how the 2008 economic crisis contributed to the dissolution of Italy's provinces, that is, the second level the country's territorial division, and thus to the prevention of further decentralisation. As in the previous chapters, the research assumptions stated here will also be verified at the end of the chapter.

A summary of the discussions, found in the part titled "Verification of research assumptions," answers to the research questions posed, and verification/falsification of the assumed detailed hypotheses is included at the end. Given the problem-centred approach of the publication and in order to ensure greater transparency, the references presented herein are broken down thematically and located at the end of each of the book's chapters.

The authors would also like to thank all those whose assistance and goodwill helped in the writing of this book.

The chapter on the political system of Greece would not be as rich in information had it not been for the remarks of Professor Kostas Mavrias and Dr. Marianthi G. Kalyviotou from the Scientific Council of the Greek Parliament, Professor Dimitrios A. Sotiropoulos from the University of Athens, Dr. Giulia Aravantinou Leonidi from the "La Sapienza" University in Rome and Mr. Alexandros Andrikopoulos.

We would also like to thank His Excellence Agustín Núñez Martínez, the Ambassador of Spain in Poland and Ms. Carmen Batres Rodríguez, the Advisor for Information at the Embassy of Spain in Poland, for their very insightful input and help in understanding the internal situation in Spain after 2008.

The final shape of the chapter devoted to the Italian political system was determined thanks to the inspiration of the work of Professor Zbigniew Witkowski from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Professor Fulco Lanchester from the “La Sapienza” University in Rome and Professor Filberto Agostini from the University of Padova.

Special acknowledgements also go to Dr. Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska from the University of Lodz and to Dr. Sławomir Czech from the Katowice University of Economics for his contribution in a scientific discussion on the effects of the 2008 economic crisis in the states of southern Europe and in Germany and Sweden.

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