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# MAPPING THE EUROPEAN LEFT

Socialist Parties in the EU

By Dominic Heilig

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## The Rise of the European Left

The European party system is changing rapidly. As a result of the ongoing neoliberal attack, the middle class is shrinking quickly, and the decades-old party allegiance of large groups of voters has followed suit. The European far right has been able to capitalize on this development; in many countries, populist and radical right-wing parties have experienced an unprecedented boom, as Thilo Janssen's RLS-study on "Far-right Parties and the European Union" shows.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the electoral victory scored by the Greek "Coalition of the Radical Left"—better known as SYRIZA—in January 2015 has galvanized the European Left, which had previously comforted itself by standing on the oppositional sidelines. Still rubbing their eyes in disbelief, the Left in Europe realized that they could not only conquer "respectable" positions, but could, in fact, become the leading force in government. The European and international Left was enthused.

At the same time, however, this electoral victory alarmed their opponents. Under the leadership of the German government, they made life for the Greek government difficult and, at times, turned it into a living hell. The struggles between SYRIZA and the Troika (consisting of the European Union, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund) over Greek government policy dominated the headlines in spring and summer 2015. In the course of this conflict, Merkel, Schäuble & Co. succeeded in defending the cornerstones of their neoliberal austerity regime against the Greek attack and forcing SYRIZA to accept cornerstones of this regime. At the same time, however, the re-election of the Tsipras government in September 2015 demonstrated that the Troika did not succeed in getting rid of the leftist "troublemakers."

Since then, the Left in Spain and Portugal scored electoral victories in the fall of 2015. In Spain, the conservative People's Party lost their majority due to the rise of Podemos. In Portugal, the conservative Prime Minister was even replaced by a center-left government. In Britain, the Labour Party elected socialist Jeremy Corbyn as their new party chairman, while in other European countries, including Germany, the left parties were able to reorganize and stabilize themselves.

So it's about time we take a closer look at the European Left! Which parties are of particular relevance, and where do they stand politically? What is dominant: programmatic parallels or national differences? How was the Left able to organize on the European scale?

In this study, journalist Dominic Heilig examines the current situation. Starting from an overview and a categorization of the different European left parties, Heilig focuses on three particular parties: SYRIZA, Podemos, and DIE LINKE. In his thorough presentation of recent developments, Heilig shows what has already been accomplished—thanks to the rise of the Left—but also where the Left still needs to evolve. For one thing is clear: The Left still has a lot of work to do if we want to politically influence the path of the European continent.

*Stefanie Ehmsen and Albert Scharenberg  
Co-Directors of New York Office, April 2016*

# Mapping the European Left

## Socialist Parties in the EU

By Dominic Heilig

### 1. The Left in Europe: History and Diversity

The left spectrum in Europe ranges from social democratic through green-alternative to traditional communist parties. Taking as our point of departure the way they position themselves as left parties, 60 of them can be identified for the European Union alone with its 28 Member States.<sup>1</sup> This self-definition, however, is based on diverse historical, strategic, and programmatic backgrounds. The parties of this political spectrum are, moreover, at the same time subject to continual change through splits, refoundations, or fusions.

Before looking more closely at selected examples—Syriza (Greece), the United Left and Podemos (Spain), as well as DIE LINKE (Germany)—in the context of this study, we will first analyse two European associations in which left parties are active. First there is the Party of the European Left (EL), a Europe-wide federation of national left parties in the framework of the EU. Then the member parties of the European Parliament's left group (GUE/NGL) are understood as elements of the left family of parties. This study only looks at those left parties which either have representation in the European Parliament or—despite all the criticism they may have, or even rejection, of the EU—have accepted the European arena as a framework for political activity and have joined the EL.<sup>2</sup>

This focus is necessary simply to be able to compare left parties in Europe. In the EU alone, in each of its 28 member states, we are in part dealing with 28 very specific national contexts; that is, with diverse electoral systems, legal statuses of the parties, and historical conditions. For example, while in Germany a party needs to get at least 5 per cent of the votes in national elections in order to gain seats in parliaments, this bar in Portugal and Greece is only 3 per cent; by contrast, in France there is a first-past-the-post system instead of proportional representation. Also, the possibility of forming electoral alliances of parties or social movements is handled in very diverse ways in different countries. Together these factors have great impact on the concrete form that left parties take.

In some EU states—as in Portugal—there are several significant left parties in competition with each other. In the Scandinavian countries (with the exception of Denmark) the left is not divided and is stable (even if recently at a low level). Here, in Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden, there is only one significant left party in each country, and until recently each has been in governments led by social democrats.

In most eastern European countries, by contrast, the left is not only fragmented, as in

<sup>1</sup> See Birgit Daiber, Cornelia Hildebrandt, and Anna Striethorst (eds.), *From Revolution to Coalition—Radical Left Parties in Europe*, Dietz Verlag, 2010, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See Jürgen Mittag and Janosch Steuer, *Politische Parteien in der EU*, Vienna: Facultas wuv, 2010, p. 179.

*Table 1: Member parties of the GUE/NGL in the European Parliament since 2014*

<b>Party</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Members of Parliament</b>
AKEL	Cyprus	2
Bloco de Esquerda	Portugal	1
DIE LINKE	Germany	7
Euskal Herria Bildu	Spain (Basque region)	1
People's Movement against the EU — Red-Green Alliance	Denmark	1
Front de Gauche (PCF; Parti de Gauche, et al.)	France	3
Izquierda Plural (Izquierda Unida et al.)	Spain	5
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM)	Czech Republic	3
L'Altra Europa con Tsipras	Italy	2
Portuguese Communist Party (PCP)	Portugal	3
Party for the Animals	Netherlands	1
Podemos	Spain	4
Popular Unity	Greece	1
Sinn Féin (SF)	Ireland/Northern Ireland (GB)	4
Socialist Party (SP)	Netherlands	2
Syriza	Greece	4
Union pour les Outre-Mer	France (DOM-TOM)	1
Left Party (V)	Sweden	1
Left Alliance (VAS)	Finland	1
Independents	Germany, Ireland, Greece, Italy	4

southwestern Europe, but also completely marginalised. Only in Slovenia and Croatia has parliamentary representation been achieved via re-founded organisations and fusion processes within the left spectrum.<sup>3</sup> Thus one characteristic of left parties is their heterogeneity.

All left parties in Europe are classical membership parties. Even newly founded parties like France's Parti de Gauche emphasise the retention of members; none of the left parties are personality-oriented electoral organisations.

European left parties link particularly to four voter groups: On the one hand, (1) a classical worker and (2) alternative milieu that protests the present state of things; on the other hand, new voter groups, which the left, in its resistance to neoliberalism and austerity policy, has been able to attract, are (3) people with experiences of precarity and (4) middle strata in danger of falling into the precariat. However, none of the parties has been able to win over all four voter groups in equal measure. Communist parties like Portugal's PCP mainly receive the votes of classical worker milieus whose existence is threatened; on the other hand, DIE LINKE is chiefly supported by the precari-

<sup>3</sup> See Dominic Heilig, "Ein weißer Fleck färbt sich rot," 14 July 2014, [www.die-linke.de](http://www.die-linke.de).

ous. At the same time, workers and those with precarious work lives are the minority among members of all left parties. In the Scandinavian and central European EU countries, it is overwhelmingly employees and members of the upper educated middle strata who join left parties.<sup>4</sup>

The evolution and programmatic location of parties to the left of social democracy have always also been the product of social changes and conflicts within the left. In each case these changes meant drastic caesuras for the left, which furthered the emergence of the most diverse forms of left parties.

The first caesura that led to the formation of left parties in Europe was the split in social democracy as a result of the First World War, the October Revolution, and the founding of the Soviet Union. Even if previously there had occasionally been parties to the left of social democracy that wanted to achieve communism or socialism through a revolutionary path, it was only with the split in social democracy that such parties gained social relevance.

The second caesura occurred around the 1968 Prague Spring. The split of classical communist parties in western Europe took place here in relation to how the CPSU's claim to leadership was seen. "Third Way" parties, or Eurocommunist parties broke away from those who insisted on a revolutionary social development, the "democratic-centralist" leadership principle, on Marxism-Leninism as the obligatory ideological foundation, and on the CPSU's claim to leadership. The rejection of alternative paths of development to socialism and of alternative, democratic conceptions of socialism involved an intransigent ideological battle with any divergence from the Soviet model. In west-

ern Europe some communist parties broke their ideological and organizational ties to the CPSU; others split. Eastern Europe's state parties continued to subordinate themselves to their big brother in Moscow.

The Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) comprises 52 Members of European Parliament (MEPs) from 19 parties or electoral alliances. The MEPs come from 14 EU Member States. As the name indicates, the group has a confederal character, that is, each party retains its autonomy and therefore makes its own decisions within the broad framework of the group.

Increasing European integration, the emergence of new areas of social conflict, and new green-alternative movements, as well as the growth of the peace movement for (nuclear) disarmament in the 1970s and 80s marked a third caesura for the left. These years saw, for the first time, new composite left parties whose roots were in the social movements of the period and raised demands going beyond those of the classical representation of workers' interests against capital. The left party spectrum thus enlarged to include left eco-socialist formations. These parties, which first appeared to resemble plural movements less than classical parties, focused on a transformative strategy for overcoming capitalism while taking account of new social attitudes and values.

A fourth caesura—especially in the countries of "actually existing socialism," but also in countries of the European Community (EC)—came with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the power bloc confrontation. Socialist/communist state parties lost their leadership role, dissolved, or underwent internal processes of reform made necessary by external circum-

<sup>4</sup> See Anna Striethorst, Mitglieder und Elektorate von Linksparteien in Europa, in Daiber et al., *Von Revolution bis Koalition*, pp. 89ff.

stances. In what followed, many of these parties in eastern Europe transformed themselves into social democratic parties, as in Poland or Hungary; others underwent a programmatic and democratic process of transformation, such as DIE LINKE in Germany, and still belong to the camp of parties to the left of social democracy. Some parties that emerged from former state parties, such as the Czech Republic's KSCM, kept to their traditional communist orientation. However, the existing left parties of western Europe, as in the Eurocommunist parties or those tied to the new social movements, also entered into legitimization crises and underwent processes of internal reform, during which some of them, for example the Eurocommunist Italian Communist Party (PCI), completely disappeared.

European integration, which rapidly intensified after the end of the power bloc confrontation, the crisis of classical communist and other modern left parties, and the simultaneously arising social and alter-globalist movements, led by the end of the 1990s to the formation of new composite left parties. This fifth caesura also led to a pooling of left forces and parties across the borders of nation-states. It is true that loose cross-border discussions had already been conducted starting in 1990/91, as with the New European Left Forum (NELF); these attempts, however, did not produce cooperation of a binding character. In 2004, the lack of a European coordination process was to a certain extent rectified with the founding of the Party of the European Left (EL).

The unleashing of capitalism—or, more precisely, unbridled, revolutionising neoliberalism and the resulting dominance of the financial markets—led from 2007/2008 not only to what was up to then the most serious economic and financial crisis of the post-war era but also to the emergence of new left anti-austerity movements. This sixth caesura led in part to the

emergence of new political parties or brought about further reforms of already existing left parties, as in Spain, Greece, or France.

## The Party of the European Left

After the end of the power bloc confrontation the left in eastern and western Europe went onto the defensive. The collapse of state socialism became a new defeat of an entire political idea and with this the defeat of left parties as a whole, independently of their ideological orientation. To overcome this, coordination and substantive exchange on the European level became more important than ever. In NELF, a common search began for reform ideas, models for action, and for the most successful party concepts for a reformed left.

The new millennium saw the founding of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EAL), strongly characterised by Trotskyist and extra-parliamentary left parties. It was, however, hardly able to gain any political influence.<sup>5</sup> On 8 May 2004 the Party of the European Left (EL) was founded. It has been attempting to work out a common political identity amongst member parties, without ignoring national political conditions. It is governed by the principle of consensus. The EL today comprises 31 member and official observer parties, some of them from countries that are not in the EU (Turkey, Moldavia, Belarus, Switzerland, and North Cyprus). The important left parties in Sweden and Norway, however, are not represented in the EL.

There is great consistency among all EL member parties in terms of the core issues; they want to concertedly lead a struggle for "peace, democracy, social justice, gender equality, and

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<sup>5</sup> See Martin Schirdewan, *Links—kreuz und quer: Die Beziehungen innerhalb der europäischen Linken*, Berlin: Dietz, 2009, p. 69.

Table 2: *Caesuras of the left in Europe*

Six caesuras	Time frame	Left	Examples
October Revolution and World War I	1914 until 1923	Communist left	PCP, KKE, KPD, PCE, et al.
Prague Spring	1968	Euro-communist left	PCF, PCI, PCE, KKE reform
New left-leaning alternative left; left-green formations	1970s until mid-1980s	Formation of left-green, left-leaning alternative & anti-authoritarian Left	IU, Synaspismos, Swedish Left, SP Netherlands, SYN
End of the Cold War	1989 until 1990	Pluralistic, democratic-socialist left & reformed states parties	PDS, PRC, Left Alliance Finland, Red-Green Alliance Denmark
European integration & global justice movement	End of the 1990s until mid-2000s	Party alliances integrating the global justice movement	Bloco de Esquerda, Dei Lénk Luxemburg, PRC, SYN, IU
Global economic and financial crisis	Starting 2007/2008	Party alliances integrating the anti-austerity movement; transformation of anti-austerity movement into parties	Syriza, Podemos, Parti de Gauche

respect for nature".<sup>6</sup> There is particular focus on issues such as the defence of the welfare state, the struggle against unemployment and precarious conditions of employment, and for collective security and peace. A further issue that was not yet a focus in 2004 but influences the politics of EL parties today is the crisis of financial-market capitalism and the EU's austerity policy.

EL proposals for overcoming the crisis are primarily conceived within the capitalist system. Here a dilemma arises: The need to develop concrete concepts that can be realised now to benefit broad strata of the populations forces left parties to shore up a system they actually would like to defeat. This can be seen, for example, in the demand for stronger regulation of the financial sector. The left wants to boost domestic demand and stimulate recov-

ery through a redistribution of wealth from the top to the bottom and thus respond to the crisis. The focus is on the demand for public investments and the critique of the retreat of the state from important economic and social functions.

Among the EL's member parties, there are eight that have more than 30,000 members and a stable parliamentary presence. Alongside these, the EL also includes middle-sized left parties with 8,000 to 17,000 members, which are represented in parliaments. Then there are a variety of extra-parliamentary small parties with 5,000 or less members (such as the Communist Party of Austria).<sup>7</sup> In total, the EL comprises more than 500,000 members.

<sup>6</sup> See Statute of the Party of the European Left, adopted 8 and 9 May 2004 in Rome, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Membership numbers must of course always be seen in proportion to the population of the particular EU states; see Anna Striethorst, "Mitglieder und Elektorate von Linksparteien in Europa," Daiber et al., op.cit., p. 90.



Table 3: Member parties of the EL (incl. observer status)

Party	Country
Bloco de Esquerda	Portugal
Izquierda Unida (IU)	Spain
Partido comunista de España (PCE)	Spain
Esquerra unida i alternativa (EuiA)	Spain (Catalonia)
Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (PdCI)	Italy
Partito della rifondazione comunista (PRC)	Italy
Parti de Gauche (PG)	France
Gauche Unitaire (GU)	France
Parti Communiste Francais (PCF)	France
Syriza	Greece
Birleşik Kıbrıs Partisi	Cyprus
Yeni Kıbrıs Partisi	Cyprus
Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού (AKEL)	Cyprus
Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi (ÖDP)	Turkey
Българската левица (BL)	Bulgaria
Partidul Socialist Roman (PSR)	Rumania
Partidul Comuniștilor din Republica Moldova (PCRM)	Moldavia
Magyarországi Munkáspárt 2006	Hungary
Komunistická strana Slovenska (KSS)	Slovakia
Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy (KSČM)	Czech Republic
Strana demokratického socialismu (SDS)	Czech Republic
Kommunistische Partei Österreichs (KPÖ)	Austria
Partei der Arbeit der Schweiz (PdA)	Switzerland
DIE LINKE	Germany
Communist Party Wallonie-Bruxelles (PC)	Belgium
Enhedslisten — De Rød-Grønne (EL)	Denmark
Suomen kommunistinen puolue (SKP)	Finland
Vasemmistoliitto (VAS)	Finland
Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei (EÜVP)	Estonia
Belarusian Party of the Left "Fair World" (BSM)	Belarus

## Left Parties in Europe

Europe's left parties are in very diverse phases of their development. While the Scandinavian parties all have a strong ecological profile and are at pains to launch comprehensive socio-ecological transformational processes,

and only using the word "socialist" in their names or programme in a rudimentary way, other parties, like the PCF in France or the PdCI and PRC in Italy, are still strongly Eurocommunist in character (that is, they represent the second caesura) in character. The Bloco de Esquerda (BE) in Portugal and the SP in the

Netherlands are strongly action-oriented democratic socialist parties arising out of two different phases (SP: third caesura, BE: fifth caesura) as composite parties of the new left. DIE LINKE and the KSCM, on the other hand, have emerged in the course of the fourth caesura (1989-90) and have pursued different paths of development. While DIE LINKE can be included with the democratic socialist reformed state socialist parties, the KSCM belongs to the camp of the communist parties. While, for example, the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP) is a classical communist party (first caesura), the French Parti de Gauche (fifth caesura) is a left social democratic formation. The category of left socialist party alliances would include Spain's Izquierda Unida (third caesura) or Greece's Syriza (sixth caesura) whose dominant core, Synaspismos arose in the second caesura (1968/69). Spain's Podemos, like Syriza, arose in the course of the sixth caesura. However, in contrast to its Greek sister party it is not a left socialist party alliance but a movement with a party statute.

Not all left parties in Europe can be unequivocally classified in this way, in part because of internal party debates and conflicts between their various wings. Denmark's Red-Green Alliance, for example, arose out of a left socialist alliance of parties but programmatically also exhibits many features of a left-green formation. The accompanying table provides an overview of the classification of parties against the background of their historical origins and present shape.

It is clear that the different caesuras led to the formation of specific types of left parties. They filled a political representation gap that the extant parties at the time could not fill. This means at the same time that different forms of left parties existed and exist simultaneously, which are able to demonstrate their political relevance within the competition between parties.

In order to grasp the multifacetedness of the history of the left in Europe we will, in what follows, look in greater detail at four different party formations.

First, we will describe Greece's "Coalition of the Radical Left" (Syriza) and its present challenges as the governing party. Syriza is a classical party alliance, which arose in the course of anti-austerity movements and protests. Nevertheless, the history of its constituent party—Synaspismos (SYN)—dates back to the split of the Communist Party in 1968/69. Synaspismos itself has repeatedly changed its character as new social movements formed in the 1980s and the alter-globalisation movement in the 2000s. Through Syriza it was finally possible to develop from an alliance of splinter groups of several very small parties to the largest opposition—and then government—party.

Spain's Izquierda Unida (United Left, IU) has its roots in the new social, alternative movements of the 1980s. However, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) exerts major influence on its politics. In contrast to Syriza, the IU was and is still an alliance of various (partly regional) left parties. Even if it was active in the anti-austerity movements of recent years, IU is not an example of the new anti-austerity parties. This kind of left is represented in Spain by Podemos, which will also be examined here. Podemos is among the most recent left parties in Europe that have no direct historical predecessor. It can be described as a movement with a party statute since it is officially registered as a party, but its organisation can hardly be compared with that of a classical party.

Finally, the Federal Republic of Germany's DIE LINKE is a party whose roots are in a reformed state socialist party of the former East Bloc. It is true that since the fusion with the West German WASG it acts as an all-German party, but

Table 4: Subfractions of the family of leftist parties in Europe (GUE/NGL & EL)<sup>8</sup>

	Communists	Reform-communists	Leftist socialdemocratic parties	Leftist socialdemocratic party alliances	Leftist green parties	Movements with party status	Reformed state socialist parties
<b>Examples</b>	PCP, KSČM, SKP, DKP, PC, KSS, PCRM, PSR, BSM	PCF, PdCI, PRC, KPÖ, PCE, AKEL	SP, SDS, PdA, PG, SF, V	BE, Syriza, IU, EuiA, GU, DIE LINKE, EL,	ÖDP, EL, VAS, SF, V	Podemos	DIE LINKE, KSČM, KSS
<b>Alternatives/pathways</b>	Communist society, revolution	Communist society, revolutionary transformation processes	Caring society with democratic structures of participation	Democratic socialism, emancipatory process	Social-ecological, feminist and sustainable society, transformation process	Direct democratic society, popular democratic plebiscites	Democratic socialism vs. communist society, revolution (KSČM & KSS)
<b>Forms of co-operation</b>	Avant garde	Relativized avant garde	Political alliances, center-left coalitions with social democrats	Broad corporative alliances as a precondition for parliamentary/political alliances with social democrats	Red-green alliances and corporative alliances	Alliances of population strata against oligarchy	Broad corporative alliances as a precondition for parliamentary/political alliances vs. Avant garde (KSČM & KSS)

its programmatic contents are still strongly marked by its confrontation with the failed attempt at socialism in eastern Europe. DIE LINKE is among the most stable and largest left parties in Europe and is consequently a central pillar of the EL.

All four parties have comparable programmatic demands but meet the current political challenges with very diverse strategic and organisational concepts. While Syriza, after a broad social fusion process, is now working towards the formation of a common identity as

a left party, the IU is focusing on maintain itself as a party alliance. And while Podemos wants to remain more of a movement than a party, DIE LINKE politically competes for majorities as a classical party formation. Common to all four parties is their tendency to succeed when they launch coalition processes and connect the plurality of actors to each other. In contrast to classical communist parties they do not claim a vanguard role. These examples thus also demonstrate that the left in Europe can once again play a role in the struggle for alternative majorities.

## 2. Syriza and Europe's Left Spring

The German weekly *Der Spiegel* once compared him to Elvis Presley. When he stepped onto the stage his supporters burst into cheers—as they did at the beginning of 2015 when Alexis Tsipras launched his electoral campaign in front of thousands of sympathisers. While the ruling conservative *Nea Dimokratia* (ND) kicked off its campaign in a convention hotel, the social democrats (PASOK) considered a cafeteria an adequate venue, and their ex-leader Papandreou presented his splinter project in a museum, the Syriza crowd boundless.

But Tsipras was rarely described positively in European media. Shortly before the 2012 parliamentary election, *Bild*, Germany's biggest tabloid, described him as a semi-criminal who sympathises "with violent anarchists." At the beginning of 2015 media descriptions of the charismatic party leader continued to be unflattering.

### From Synaspismos to Syriza

The founding of Greece's left party began with the split of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). In 1968, a wing later designated as Eurocommunist left the CP, which was outlawed during Greece's military dictatorship (1967-1974). After the end of the military dictatorship a section of the Eurocommunists evolved into the undogmatic Greek Left (EAR), which was close to the new social movements. At the end of the 1980s, in the midst of a crisis of the scandal-plagued social democratic PASOK, the EAR together with the Marxist-Leninist KKE formed the "Coalition of the Left and Progress" (SYN). Although this electoral alliance was very fragile from the start, it did get 13 per cent of votes in the parliamentary election of 1989. In 1991, internal conflicts and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a break once again; nevertheless, undog-

matic leftists and the so-called KKE reformers decided a year later to transform the Synaspismos alliance into a party. In 1996 the new formation was able to get into Greece's parliament (in Greek, *Vouli*). In succeeding years, the party continuously struggled to break through the 3 per cent electoral threshold.

In 2000 the party's first big split occurred. Protagonists of the right wing migrated to the social democrats, and Synaspismos shifted further left. This made it possible for the party to incorporate more left groups and Greece's alter-globalist movements, the first on the European scene. Shortly before the 2004 parliamentary election, the "Coalition of the Radical Left"—Syriza—was formed for the first time; however, it was only able to garner 3.3 per cent of votes. After this, the electoral alliance largely fell apart. Only in 2007 could Syriza be revived. The common basis for the widely divergent parties and groups was once again the struggle against the neoliberal reconstruction of Greece and the close ties to the new social movements. Despite the presence of Maoist and Trotskyist groups in Syriza, Synaspismos remained the central pillar of the alliance. Despite deep scepticism within the alliance vis-à-vis the EU, it was possible to establish Greece's continued membership in the EU as part of the programme.

After the electoral alliance's 2007 entry into parliament with 5 per cent, other left, social, and ecological groups joined it. In the 2009 election, however, its vote percentage fell to 4.6 per cent. During the first years of the financial crisis, the continually re-emerging internal battles nearly led to the definitive split of the alliance. In 2010 a large section of Synaspismos's right wing left and founded the "Democratic Left" (*DimAr*) "as a constructive left opposition" to PASOK. In what followed, the party leadership around Tsipras succeeded in using the new room for

manoeuvre in order to open up Synaspismos further and thus win over disillusioned members of PASOK and the KKE to work in Syriza.

In the 6 May 2012 election, Syriza, with nearly 17 per cent, captured the second largest share of votes in the country. After failed attempts at coalition by the ND, which placed first, Tsipras, who had always advocated a common alliance of all left forces, was given the task of forming a government. However, his attempts failed. Tsipras' refusal to go into coalition with PASOK and instead push for a left government led to Syriza's increased popularity in opinion polls. This meant a neck-and-neck race with ND in the new ballot that had now become necessary. But the biggest obstacle for Syriza turned out to be not ND but a peculiarity of Greece's electoral system, which awards 50 bonus seats to the strongest party in a parliament with about 300 seats. Since only parties and not electoral alliances can benefit from this Syriza registered itself as a party in time for the 17 June 2012 ballot. It increased its vote share and got 26.9 per cent but narrowly missed the goal of becoming the strongest party.

The increase in its electoral showing from 4.6 (2009) to 26.9 per cent (June 2012) is historically unprecedented for the left in Europe. It was only possible because the party was able to form a common party out of the two-decades-old fragile alliance, without losing the character of a broad political alliance.

Among the European left, the period after Syriza's January 2015 electoral victory is generally known as the European left or red spring. In my view, however, this spring already had its beginnings years before Syriza's coming into government. After being shaken for four years by a devastating economic and financial crisis, Greece caught the attention of Europe with the parliamentary elections of May and June 2012. The reason for this was, aside from the left's good performance, the increasing

fragmentation of the political system and the inability to create stable majorities in Athens. What was new was that it was no longer the camps around ND and PASOK that were confronting each other; now the confrontation was between the proponents and opponents of austerity policy. The two major establishment parties saw themselves confronted by growing political margins that had previously functioned as nothing more than legitimization aids to democracy. The small parties had never taken part in coalition governments; but now they were suddenly needed. The days of a mere exchange of majorities between ND and PASOK were over.<sup>8</sup>

That the two dominant parties at first still controlled the levers of power was due not only to the tremendous media pressure from Europe but also to Greece's left. The left—which was divided into the three parliamentary parties Syriza, KKE, and DimAr—did not see itself in a position to act together. Instead, DimAr and KKE pursued their rejection of Alexis Tsipras and refused any pre- or post-electoral cooperation. That in 2012 the votes of ND and PASOK still allowed for a coalition government of these two parties was primarily due to the electoral system with its 50 bonus seats for ND. At the same time, however, the election showed that Syriza was reaching more than protest voters, but rather was able to collect 27 per cent of voters behind an anti-austerity policy based on both resistance and the responsibility to shape policy. This simultaneously illustrates that a new societal line of conflict had come into centre field in Greece: austerity and Troika policy.

## **Syriza's Electoral Victory**

The conservative/social democratic coalition's parliamentary vote of 7 December 2014 on a

<sup>8</sup> See Dominic Heilig, Griechenland: Europa streitet wieder über Alternativen, 2012, and Heilig, Die Parlamentswahlen in Griechenland, 2012, both at [www.rosalux.de](http://www.rosalux.de).

new round of budget cuts made it clear that Antonis Samaras' (ND) government no longer had the secure support of 180 deputies in parliament. This number is constitutionally necessary to elect a new state president (in the third ballot), and this vote, due to rotation, was due to occur two months later. The governing coalition, which only had a narrow majority after DimAr's exit from the governing alliance, sought rescue by leaping forward and calling anticipated elections for a new state president. The intention was to pressure their own deputies and at the same time push through the austerity policy anchored in the budget plan. The announcement of an anticipated presidential election also had to do with the Eurogroup's declared wish to prolong the "Bailout Programme"—which is to say, to subject the country to the further diktat of the Troika. In so doing, Samaras was holding out the prospect that the Troika's austerity diktats would soon end.

In the first two ballots, with 160 and 168 votes, the coalition fell short of the requisite two-thirds majority for electing a president. For the third and final ballot, in which only 180 votes were necessary, Samaras counted on the votes of deputies from the DimAr and ANEL parties, which according to polls had poor prospects of getting back into parliament in the event of anticipated elections.

Between ballots Syriza made it clear that the party insisted on anticipated elections. The Greek people, it said, must first have the possibility of voting on the future of the country—the budget plan.

When after the third ballot on 29 December 2014 the coalition failed to receive the needed majority of 180 deputies, Samaras called for new elections to be held on 25 January 2015.

The 2015 electoral campaign lasted less than a month but was very intense. Whoever believed

that the Europe-wide media and political commentary on the 2012 electoral campaign was unusually heated learned better in 2015. One would have to look far and wide to find an election in an EU Member State that drew similar attention throughout Europe. Seen positively, this election thus had a European dimension—much more so than the European Parliament elections held a year before. Speaking as objectively as possible, we have to say that never before had there been such an aggressive attempt to exert external influence on the electoral behaviour of an EU country. This was mainly because Syriza was leading in the polls, which truly terrified Europe's conservative and social democratic elites. They feared they would have to swallow a symbolic defeat for their neoliberal policy of cuts, which would have a ripple effect on the upcoming elections in the crisis countries: Spain, Portugal, and Ireland. Especially in Germany, the most decisively important state for current European policy, many politicians felt obliged to criticise Syriza's electoral programme. Flanked by high-circulation media, members of the German government threatened Greece with being thrown out of the euro ("Grexit").

These attacks also produced a fightback. Throughout Europe a struggle developed between the political camps—Troika proponents versus the left—around hegemony in the Greek parliament. Delegations of prominent left politicians travelled to Athens to lend support, organised solidarity actions and tried to put their national governments under pressure to correct their policy towards Athens. In the course of this confrontation a European left consciousness developed for the first time. After 2014, when the EL had already put up Alexis Tsipras as their lead candidate for the office of EU Commission president, he now became a European candidate again. Never before had the electoral campaign of a left party created such extensive mobilisation beyond national borders in its partner parties.

The stooge of the conservative Europe-wide campaign was the conservative Nea Dimokratia and its head of government Samaras. If Tsipras were to win the election, the country would be isolated and be without a strong currency, Samaras warned. He repeatedly stressed that the country had "already accomplished a long and painful road of cuts and consolidation," which could now turn out to have been in vain. Germany's Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) put it similarly. He warned Athens against abandoning the "reform course" prescribed by the Troika and pointed to the billions in bond purchases by the European Central Bank (ECB), which had begun right before election Sunday in Athens. The political right's campaign was thus based on fear and "more of the same."

"Syriza is restoring hope," was the party's own motto. Its campaign rested on two pillars: the struggle for democracy, that is, the Greeks winning back their sovereignty; and an economic programme worked out in detail, but set forth in layman's terms, for overcoming the crisis. Since the 2012 parliamentary election, Syriza had rallied many celebrated economists to its side and had them develop a new programme for a future government.<sup>9</sup> The core demand was the rejection of the Memorandum (the Troika treaties) and their substitution by an alternative economic and social programme. This programme was based on:

- ⇒ ending austerity policy and the reinstatement of collective labour agreements as well as the rescinding of the labour legislation introduced by the Memorandum;
- ⇒ a commitment to reviving the economy, stimulating the labour market, and the introduction of a fair tax system, as well as a democratic restructuring of the incrustated political system;
- ⇒ cancellation, through a debt conference,

<sup>9</sup> See the interview with John Milios, *Neues Deutschland*, 22 January 2015.

of the greater part of the nominal value of public debts;

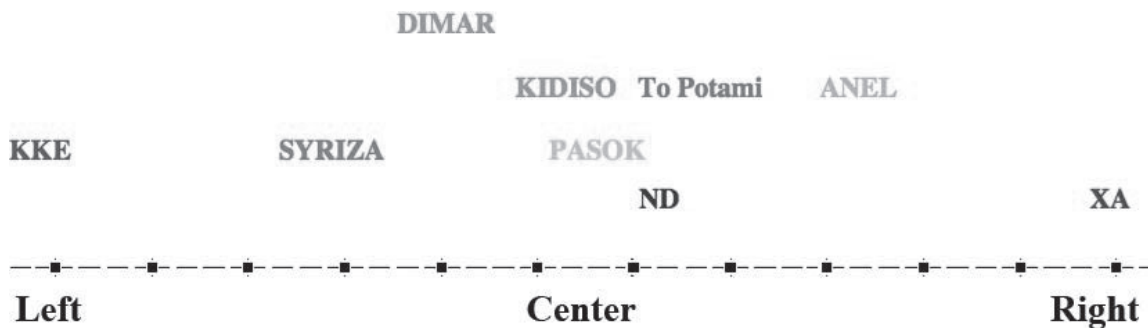
- ⇒ inclusion of a growth clause in the repayment of the remaining debts that would peg them to the growth rate rather than having them paid with budgetary resources;
- ⇒ a European New Deal for public investments, financed by the European Investment Bank.<sup>10</sup>

Since the June 2012 election there have been seven parties in the Vouli. With the exception of DimAr, they could all hope to re-enter parliament. In 2015 a total of 22 parties stood for election. According to polls, the social democratic PASOK was hovering around the 3 per cent electoral threshold; so was its splinter group KIDISO—founded by former PASOK chair and prime minister Giorgos Papandreou—and the Independent Greeks (ANEL). All polls indicated that the party To Potami (The River), founded in 2014, was sure to enter parliament.

On the eve of 25 January 2015 election it became clear early on that Syriza would be the strongest party. It also soon became evident that Papandreou and his KIDISO splinter party would not make it into parliament and that his former party, PASOK, would get in at an extremely low level: 4.7 per cent. Thus the once major party of the 1980s after the fall of the military dictatorship was only able to get a tenth of the votes. Even the KKE, with 5.5 per cent, slid into parliament ahead of PASOK. On the other hand, the results of ANEL, the ND splinter, were sobering; with a 3 per cent loss but just ahead of PASOK it also got into parliament. The economic-liberal To Potami, which had arisen from protest against Troika policy, fell below expectations and won 6 per cent of the votes, which was even a bit less than the

<sup>10</sup> See the Greek Government Programme, [www.transform-network.net/en/focus/greece-decides/news/detail/Programm/what-the-syriza-government-will-do.html](http://www.transform-network.net/en/focus/greece-decides/news/detail/Programm/what-the-syriza-government-will-do.html).

Diagram 1: Left-right scale of parties in Greece (simplified)



fascists of Golden Dawn. The unequivocal loser of the election was—alongside DimAr, which disappeared from parliament altogether—the conservative governing party under Prime Minister Samaras.

However, Syriza won 36.3 per cent and became the strongest party. That gave Alexis Tsipras the electoral mandate to form the first left-led government in the history of the EU.

### Europe's Left Spring Loses Its Bloom

In the first weeks after Syriza's electoral success Europe's left was in a euphoric mood: "We began in Athens, next we'll take Madrid". For the first time, leftists in Europe's capitals demonstrated for and not against a government.

But the first test for the new Greek government occurred as early as February 2015, when further payments that had been negotiated by the predecessor government in a second aid package had to be paid by Athens, necessitating another round of Eurozone credits.

Tsipras withstood this test as well as left-wing criticism in Europe directed against the choice of ANEL as coalition partner and also the fact that his government had not appointed one woman as minister. However, since the KKE

had declared on election eve that they would not be available as a coalition partner, Tsipras had very little room for manoeuvre. If he wanted not to break his electoral promise of not going into coalition with any of the parties supporting the old system, the only possibility left was cooperation with ANEL, a right-wing populist, clerical, and chauvinist formation. It was founded by ex-ND members that had left their party in opposition to the government's social spending cuts. This is where the minimal consensus of the unequal partners lay: ending austerity.

In spring the Tsipras government tried to negotiate new conditions for debt forgiveness with the members of the Eurozone. Many on the left had high hopes for a change of course in Europe, for an alternative to the austerity diktat and Germany's crisis policy. But in view of the real relations of forces, people already began to sense that first on the agenda would be "compromises to buy time and keep open the spaces for manoeuvre."<sup>11</sup> Alexis Tsipras is reported to have said in the European Parliament: "We negotiated more than we governed. "Under conditions of financial strangulation our care, our worry, our thinking was about how we would manage to keep Greece's economy alive."<sup>12</sup>

11 Tom Strohschneider, "Nach dem Frühling," *ND-Dossier: Deutsch-Europa gegen Syriza*. #ThisIsACoup, 2015, p. 3.

12 Quoted in *ibid.*



However, by the end of June it was clear that there would not be any settlement between Athens and the Eurogroup. In the innumerable negotiation rounds Tsipras had gone a long way to try and accommodate the creditors, but the latter had no interest in compromise. They wanted to be rid of this government as quickly as possible—on principle but also as a signal to the other crisis states in which there were upcoming elections and the left was becoming increasingly strong.

Especially over the Greek Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis, there was a parting of the ways, and the negotiations increasingly took on a personalised form. For weeks negotiations were under way between Syriza and the representatives of the International Monetary Fund, the ECB and the EU over an extension of the credit programme for Greece. At the ultimate meeting of the Eurogroup finance ministers on 25 June it was finally impossible to reach an agreement. At the meeting of heads of government, President of the European Council Donald Tusk said of Athens, "the game is over". Tsipras packed up his bags. On the next day Tsipras issued a public declaration that he had decided to submit to the Greek people via a referendum the final conditions offered by the creditors for a continuation of the credit programme that had been ongoing since 2012. At the same time he asked the population for their rejection because the current paper was "worse than the original Memorandum of 2010". Europe's establishment was aghast.

From Syriza's point of view, it was obvious that this was the course of action to take—after all, the party's aim was, after getting control of the crisis within the country, also to democratise Europe's monetary system. Still, the Prime Minister was anything but certain that he would get a majority voting OXI (no). Since there was no movement in the negotiations, the criticism within his own camp had become louder in recent weeks. While some asked for

more concessions, others demanded a harder line against Brussels and brought the idea of Grexit into play. Many people in Greece felt the absence of the promised reforms—but these were only feasible for the government if there were means to carry them out, in other words, if the creditors' conditions were changed. Even within the EL, criticism of Tsipras was growing, although his critics did not formulate alternatives.

What followed from Tsipras' announcement was equal in its dramatic intensity to the January electoral campaign: European politicians, especially those from Germany, openly interfered and campaigned against the vote Syriza was calling for. Eurogroup head Jeroen Dijsselbloem called the referendum a "sad decision for Greece" that would close the door to further discussions.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, the Eurogroup discussed a temporary closing of banks and capital controls in Greece to be enforced up to the referendum, which at that point was to take place a week later. The ECB pressed the Greek government to agree to these measures. On the other hand, the ECB did not want to expand the framework for default loans for Greek banks; this was to intensify pressure on Athens.

These steps show that the ECB was carrying out a policy directed against the elected government. Athens had to agree to a closing of the banks a week before the referendum; from that moment on citizens could only withdraw a maximum of 60 euros per day. Greece's economy practically came to a standstill. The German federal minister of the economy and chair of the SPD, Sigmar Gabriel, even declared that the referendum would be about Grexit: A "No"-vote would be a clear signal against remaining in the euro. Eurogroup president Dijsselbloem agreed: "If the Greeks vote OXI in the referendum, there will of course be no basis for a new

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Strohschneider, p. 5.

credit programme, and it will be very questionable whether there is any basis left for Greece to be in the Eurozone."<sup>14</sup>

For a long time polls pointed to a close race between the left's OXI camp and those who wanted to vote against the Tsipras government. However, on 5 July the referendum turned into a brilliant victory for the Tsipras camp, which got 61.3 per cent.

For one more time the Greek and European lefts could breathe a sigh of relief together. Once again the left in Europe could draw strength from this unexpected referendum victory. Once again Syriza had made it against all establishment resistance, against Merkel and the Eurogroup. The fury of the neoliberals was as great as it was because the numbers from Greece were so impressive: 85 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds said no to austerity policy, as did 70 per cent of employees in the public sector and almost 73 per cent of the unemployed. But the big question now was: What next?

The day after the referendum Yanis Varoufakis resigned as Minister of Finance, explaining that he wanted to depersonalise the conflict with the Eurogroup and free the way to new negotiations. His successor Efkidis Tsakalotos, who had already assumed the responsibility of negotiating with Brussels two days after the referendum, got no further with his proposals than had Varoufakis. It had long since not been a matter of Greece but of the question whether the euro would become a straitjacket in which there would be no room for manoeuvre left for democracy.

On the Thursday evening after the referendum the Greek government sent a new paper to the EU institutions with new proposals that largely accommodated the creditors' conditions. As a whole, the measures were to total 13 billion euros, consisting of spending cuts and reve-

nue increases. In return Athens wanted credits from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) in the amount of at least 53.5 billion euros over three years in order to be able to pay back debts until 2018, an investment package, as well as concessions on the primary surplus and on debt relief.

Some of the left in Europe saw this paper as a reinterpretation or even "betrayal" of the OXI-vote, and Syriza's left wing itself also rebelled and demanded that the country exit from the euro. Tsipras vehemently disagreed with a euro-exit and asked parliament to mandate further negotiations. Although he got a solid majority, the governing coalition at the same time was short of its own governing majority. One day later the German finance minister reissued his threat: Either the Greek government accepts the creditors' conditions or it must leave the Eurozone. And so the German suggestion of Athens' (temporary) exit from the euro came onto the agenda.

On 12 July the heads of government of the Eurozone met and negotiated until late at night. Tsipras received no support from other member states. Later, the phrase "mental waterboarding" was to make the rounds. At any rate, the pressure exerted on the head of government, who was forced to choose between being thrown out of the euro or a terrible creditors' package, must have been huge.<sup>15</sup>

The next day it was clear that Tsipras would accept the Eurogroup's demands. "In this fierce struggle," he said, it was possible to achieve a restructuring of debts, and with the new ESM programme put a solution on the table. At the same time, Tsipras spoke of "our lost democratic sovereignty". #ThisIsACoup became the number one hashtag on social media. The left in Greece and in Europe was shocked. As a result of the credit programme agreed with the creditors Tsipras finally lost his majority in par-

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Strohschneider, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

liament, because members of Syriza's left wing did not want to support the accord. In several votes on the government's reform course, up to a third of Tsipras' parliamentary group refused to give him allegiance. On 20 August Tsipras therefore announced his resignation as prime minister in order to clear the way for new elections.

The wing of Syriza organised as the "Left Platform" left the group and the party and on 21 August founded the party Laiki Enotita—Left Popular Unity (LAE). The new party confidently launched its electoral campaign, hoping to

become the third strongest force in parliament. In addition, it advocated Greece's exit from the euro.

In the end, Syriza won the anticipated elections of 20 September 2015 with 35.5 per cent (0.8 per cent less than it received in January) and took 145 of the 300 parliamentary seats. Tsipras' second cabinet, again a coalition government with ANEL, was sworn in three days after the election. The other parties' results were very close to what they received in January; the Syriza splinter LAE did not manage to enter the Vouli.

### **3. The Black Autumn of the Left in Europe: The Left in Spain**

Since the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, Spain's political landscape has been characterised by extreme polarisation. This is expressed in the struggle of two political blocs, one side of which is dominated by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the other by the conservative People's Party (PP). Other smaller, often regional, formations and parties are located on the political margins and between these two blocs. This bloc confrontation was broken through the protests against the central government's austerity policy with the emergence of new parties that did not identify with either bloc. Instead, they—especially the movement with a party statute: Podemos—see themselves as movements against the old political oligarchy.

The regionalisation of Spain, in any case, was not broken by these new citizens' parties. This regionalisation, and the electoral system derived from it today, still favours the formation of regional parties. Consequently, a country-wide left has difficulties in asserting itself, to the chagrin of the left socialist party alliance Izquierda Unida (IU).

#### **Izquierda Unida: The Left Unites**

On 15 April 1920 the Partido Comunista Español (PCE) was founded out of the youth organisation of the Socialist Workers' Party. At the same time, members of the Socialist Party (PS) tried to move their party to join the Communist International. Instead, the PS joined the International Working Union of Socialist Parties, at which point those who favoured the Communist International announced their exit and on 13 April 1921 founded the Partido Comunista Obrero Español (PCOE). Both of the two young communist parties—the PCE and the PCOE—united on 14 November 1921 to form the Partido Comunista de España (PCE).

At the end of the 1920s, a pro-Soviet tendency prevailed in the party, which resulted in splits and resignations. When the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed in 1931, internal conflicts brought the party to the verge of collapse. The PCE actively participated in the workers' uprisings in 1934 and in the 1936 elections affiliated with the Frente Popular (Popular Front).

In the Spanish Civil War, which broke out in 1936 and lasted until 1939, the PCE enjoyed great popularity, and its membership rose to circa 200,000.<sup>16</sup> With the defeat of the Republic the PCE was outlawed, and its members were persecuted and murdered under Franco. Many went into exile, especially in the Soviet Union and France.

Until its legalisation on 9 April 1977 the party operated illegally.<sup>17</sup> In the first free elections of 1977, the PCE received 9.4 per cent of votes. At this time, it was in an alliance with the Socialist Workers' Party, the *Coordinación Democrática*, against the representatives of the old regime. In the 1979 elections, the PCE could even improve its result, reaching 10.8 per cent. The history of the party can be divided into five phases:<sup>18</sup>

1. split-off from the PSOE and founding of the PCE;
2. Spanish Civil War and establishment of the PCE;
3. illegality and orientation to the CPSU;
4. legalisation and acceptance of the constitutional monarchy;
5. socialist turn and formation of new alliances.

Since the 1960s, the PCE has acted in an increasingly moderate manner. This strategy proved successful, as the 1979 elections showed, but it—especially the change of relation of the party to the Soviet Union and the CPSU—was

also the occasion for inner-party conflicts.<sup>19</sup> In the end, the party broke loose from the influence of the CPSU, turned to Eurocommunism, and accepted Spain's parliamentary system.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1982 elections, the party fell to only 4.1 per cent of votes. Its still centralist structures counteracted its programmatic opening and turn towards Eurocommunism. But an explanation of its vote loss also needs to take account of the polarisation of the political conflict between the PSOE and PP, for at the end of the 1970s the Socialist Workers' Party had established itself as the alternative to the *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD), a bourgeois party of the centre right, which had been governing up to that point. The UCD's crisis of government was aggravated when the party made Spain's accession to NATO—which is unpopular among Spaniards—a central issue in its electoral campaign. This enabled the PSOE to get an absolute majority and govern uninterruptedly until 1996.

With its accession to the European Community (EC) in 1986, Spain began to experience strong economic growth, which was often compared to the German "economic miracle". The upswing brought changes to the economically weak country, affecting its political attitudes, social relations, and cultural orientations. Above all, the EU's Structural Funds contributed to decomposition of the classical proletariat in Spain. With this the PCE lost broad sections of its base. The left—that is, the movements and parties to the left of the PSOE—had no answer to the effects of the increasing globalisation of economic and financial circuits.

16 See Andreas Baumer, "Jenseits der Pyrenäen. Parteiensysteme und gesellschaftliche Konflikte in Spanien und Portugal," Edith Ulrich and Gerd Mielke (eds.), *Gesellschaftliche Konflikte und Parteiensysteme, Länder und Regionalstudien*, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001, p. 144.

17 See Walther Bernecker, *Spanien-Lexikon. Wirtschaft, Politik, Kultur, Gesellschaft*, Munich: Beck, 1990, p. 338.

18 Division following Rainer Schultz (who recognises only four phases); see Rainer Schultz, *Linksdemokratische Parteien in Spanien. Facetten und Entwicklung*, RLS-Studie, January 2003, p. 4.

19 See Fred A. Lopez III, "Bourgeois State and the Rise of Social Democracy in Spain," Ronald H. Chilcote et al. (eds.), *Transition from Dictatorship to Democracy. Comparative Studies of Spain, Portugal and Greece*, New York: Crane Russak, 1990, pp. 17-72, especially pp. 53f.

20 See Marita Müller, *Politische Parteien in Spanien (1977-1982). Interne Konflikte und Wahlverhalten*, Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik, 1994, pp. 46ff.

The left socialist party alliance, Izquierda Unida, has its origins not in a party but—as with Syriza or Synaspismos—as a loose electoral alliance grouped around the question of NATO membership. Although Spain had since 1950 already accepted US military bases, Spain's NATO accession in 1982 represented a political sea change for the still young democracy in the context of the Cold War and the Reagan Administration's nuclear offensive. Many voters were disillusioned with the PSOE's "cave-in," turned away from the party, and were active from then on in citizens' movements against NATO membership. Through these struggles a new force to the left of the PSOE was established. In 1985, from the Plataforma Civica por la Salida de España de la OTAN, there developed the electoral alliance Plataforma de la Izquierda Unida, which got 4.6 per cent of votes and finally in 1989 received 9.07 per cent.<sup>21</sup> In 1992 IU was finally officially registered as a Spanish party—consisting of eight founding parties.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the circumstance that the IU is registered and publicly active as an autonomous party, IU primarily has the characteristics of a party alliance, in which the constituent member parties retain their formal, legal, organisational, and political autonomy. This fact repeatedly leads to tensions among the member organisations, especially in terms of candidate choices for electoral lists, financial resources, and programmatic orientation.

21 See Juan J. Linz and José Ramón Montero, "The party systems of Spain. Old cleavages and new challenges," Lauri Karvonen and Stein Kuhnle (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*, London, New York: Routledge, 2001, pp. 163ff.

22 However, with the exception of the PCE and the Colectivo de Unidad, the founding parties left IU between 1987 and 2001. Today many regional parties also belong to the IU, for example, Catalonia's Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, the left-alternative Trotskyist Espacio Alternativo, the Colectivo de Unidad and the smaller Trotskyist groups Cuadernos Internacionales, Nuevo Claridad, Partido Obrero Revolucionario, as well as the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores—Izquierda Revolucionaria.

The party today is divided into 17 regional IU organisations, which pursue politics locally in parallel to the regional organisations of the IU member parties, themselves in part regional organisations. Ever since its founding, the IU has sought to strengthen its pluralist profile and open itself to the new alter-globalist and social movements or also be active as parts of the latter in the various social forums at the regional, nation-state, European, and global levels. In the report to the Seventh General Assembly of the IU in December 2003, the IU explicitly declares its commitment to socialism and that it will struggle to achieve a society that is "participatory, critical, and alternative to the dominant model".<sup>23</sup> In the view of its members, this includes pacifism as well as ecological standpoints and feminism.<sup>24</sup>

The party's links to the trade unions come principally from its member party, the PCE, which is closely tied to the country's biggest trade union, the Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.). The fact that the PCE had already decided in 1986 to work actively in the creation of electoral alliances, and in the end transform the IU into a party, cushioned the effects on the PCE of the collapse of actually existing socialism in 1989. As a result, the electoral alliance's very good results, 9.6 per cent, in the 1989 parliamentary election could even be improved four years later, when the party received 10.5 per cent of votes. This outstanding showing, however, was not repeated in succeeding elections.

In parallel to the lack of electoral successes, the political, strategic, and programmatic confrontations within IU grew. Above all, the PCE, which for a long time had been on the defensive and, in relation to its relative strength, restrained within the party alliance, now began to demand more influence in its organs.

23 See the resolution of the Seventh IU General Assembly, December 2003, p. 3, [www1.izquierda-unida.es](http://www1.izquierda-unida.es).

24 See Paola Giaculli, "Parlamentswahl in Spanien," *DIE LINKE International*, Juli 2008.

In the 2004-2008 legislature, IU tolerated a minority government under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE) but was hardly able to exert any substantive influence on it. The fact that the PSOE bypassed IU in significant questions and instead sought an alliance with the conservative opposition party, the PP, weakened the United Left just as much as did the PSOE strategy, in general directed against IU, of the *voto útil* (useful vote) or *voto de miedo* (fear vote). IU General Director Gaspar Llamazares announced his resignation already before the national congress of 15-16 November 2008. Although the congress, which was rocked by heated confrontations, was able to elect a new directorate it could not agree on a new chair. Finally, on 14 December, the IU directorate elected PCE member Cayo Lara as new general director. Lara tried to undo the strategic alliance of his predecessor Llamazares with the governing PSOE and emphasise IU's autonomy.

### **Spain: A Crisis-torn Country**

In the regional elections of May 2011 the PSOE, which had been governing under Prime Minister Zapatero up to that year, suffered a dramatic defeat and sunk to 27.8 per cent countrywide (it was at 35 per cent in 2007). Strongholds like Seville and Barcelona were lost. The party's weakness principally benefitted the conservative opposition party, Partido Popular (PP). It entered almost all regional governments and reached a national average of 38 per cent of votes. In May, many Spaniards cast "invalid" ballots to express their protest and solidarity with the mass protests (of the 15 May Movement in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid) that had continued since 15 May 2011.

For the IU, the regional elections offered the first glimmer of hope after steadily declining electoral results in previous years. Especially by winning over disillusioned PSOE voter milieus it was able to improve to 6.3 per cent

countrywide and become the third strongest party. The party also benefitted from the massive social protests against the government's austerity programme, since its members had been active in the protest movement from the very beginning. After the regional elections, IU had more than 58 mayors elected with absolute majorities and 53 mayors with relative majorities. IU also increased its number of seats in the regional parliament elections.<sup>25</sup> Shortly after the regional elections that were so disappointing for the PSOE, Prime Minister Zapatero called anticipated elections for 20 November 2011 and announced he would not be a candidate.

In 2011, Spain was particularly hard hit by the worldwide economic and financial crisis. The boom of the "economic miracle" was over; it had had feet of clay—especially in terms of the construction and real estate sector. Driven by hype in the financial and stock market at the beginning of the decade, new satellite towns had arisen on the periphery of metropolises, whose housing units had mortgages of up to 120 per cent. The consequences of the real estate bubble that burst in 2008 was particularly alarming in Spain: 700,000 unsold housing units awaited buyers; according to Spain's central bank 176 billion euros were outstanding and rested on rickety mortgages. Many people could no longer manage the interest on these mortgages; as a result, since 2008 at least 300,000 Spaniards have been forcibly evicted.

The rate of unemployment also rose during the crisis. If the unemployment figure in 2008 was still officially at about 2 million, in 2011 it had risen to 4.4 million. The rate of unemployment was thus 22 per cent, with youth unemployment even reaching 50 per cent. An entire generation had no hopes of a future. And this has changed very little to this day.

<sup>25</sup> See Dominic Heilig, *Ein Hoffnungsschimmer für die Linke. Eine kurze Einschätzung der Regionalwahlen in Spanien aus linker Sicht*, [www.rosalux.de](http://www.rosalux.de), pp. 4f.

The most important conflict since the transformation of Spanish society after the death of Franco in 1975 is the confrontation between church and state. Spain's society and party system are, in addition, plagued by clientelism and paternalism. This authoritarian political tradition is reflected to the present day in highly personalised parties and weak political participation<sup>27</sup>: in relation to other European countries Spain has a very low rate of party membership.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the transformation of Spanish society is characterised by the fact that from the late 1970s the parties were assigned a role within the institutional fabric out of which it is difficult to develop forces that can mobilise society. The advent of modern mass media substantially changed the requirements of communication.<sup>29</sup> With the transition from the fascist dictatorship to a constitutional monarchy, moreover, a regionalism took shape that still today determines broad sections of political discourse. Regional parties not only dominated the party system but also received a parliamentary anchoring in the national chamber of deputies.<sup>30</sup> The church-state conflict, the conflict between party and institutions, and the centre-periphery conflict today hamper national parties like the IU in building and extending a country-wide party base. It is hard for the IU to present voters with an ongoing and consistent programme. Especially the discarding of class conflict in favour of regionalisation aggravates the problems of establishing left parties that want to be able to act on the national scale.

The neoliberal recipes of the PSOE government for solving the crisis were the same as under PASOK in Greece (under Papandreou) and PS in Portugal (under Sócrates): spending cuts to the detriment of the population in education, the healthcare system, and in pensions and salaries in the public sector. In addition, public budgets are to be replenished by privatising basic public services. Conversely, billions in emergency credits for banks and tax incentives for enterprises are to be enacted.

With the election of a new directorate under the leadership of Cayo Lara, IU paved the way to a "refounding of the party alliance". The first step was continuing membership recruitment

and registration; the second was the expansion of participatory democracy in the party; the third was counteracting the low morale affecting the payment of membership dues. The United Left could rely on the support of the largest Spanish trade union (CC.OO.) in the 2011 parliamentary elections and also benefitted from the new protest movements and disillusioned PSOE voters. In the electoral campaign, Cayo Lara was presented as a "parliamentary indignado," and he urged people not to boycott the elections but to give IU their vote in order "confront neoliberal policy head on". The party's electoral programme showed that this was not a heavy-handed attempt to capture votes but that it was certainly attempting to include Spain's 15-M protest movement. More precisely, this was not really an electoral programme but rather a "call to action against the crisis and for the mobilisation of a social alternative and genuine democracy".<sup>30</sup> It was the product of a broad consensus among those who were "building an alternative social bloc against neoliberal hegemony". The draft-

26 See Rafael Arias-Salgado, "Entstehung und Struktur des spanischen Parteiensystems," *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 1988, p. 379.

27 See Jonathan Hopkin, "Spain: Political Parties in a Young Democracy," David Broughton and Mark Donovan (eds.), *Changing Party Systems in Western Europe*, London, New York: Pinter, 1999, pp. 224f.

28 See Melanie Haas, "Das Parteiensystem Spaniens," Melanie Haas, Oskar Niedermayer and Richard Stöss (eds.), *Die Parteiensysteme Westeuropas*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006, p. 427.

29 See Dieter Nohlen, *Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem—Über die politischen Auswirkungen von Wahlsystemen*, Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000 (third edition), pp. 332ff.

30 See Convocatoria social para 7 revoluciones [Social Call for 7 Revolutions], [http://izquierda-unida.es/sites/default/files/doc/7\\_Revoluciones.pdf](http://izquierda-unida.es/sites/default/files/doc/7_Revoluciones.pdf).

ing process saw the participation of 200 associations and organisations throughout the country as well as 15,000 IU sympathisers in 500 public assemblies and many internet discussions.

Nevertheless, the left's electoral results were disillusioning: the right-wing conservative PP got 44.6 per cent of votes (2008: 39.9 per cent), which gave it an absolute majority of seats, and could name Mariano Rajoy as prime minister, which he remains to the present day. The PSOE, which had governed up to that point, lost more than 15 per cent and only received 28.7 per cent of votes (2008: 43.9 per cent).

If the May 2011 regional elections had already given the IU a glimmer of hope, its score, as of now, still was a success. The party was able to almost double its results in comparison to 2008—and once again became one of the strongest left parties in the EU. With the inclusion of broad social sectors in drawing up its political and programmatic objectives the party had gained more societal grounding. It is especially interesting that the party alliance, which had previously been on the verge of a split and/or dissolution, was able to reinforce its self-confidence through internal reforms. Cayo Lara had been able to implement his programme of "refounding and democratising the IU", and the IU understood how to link the extra-parliamentary and the parliamentary levels. As a result it enhanced its programmatic profile as a left socialist party alliance.

### **Podemos: From Citizens' Movement to Party**

With the executive in the hands of the conservative PP, now commanding an absolute majority, austerity policy was further intensified. This provoked countrywide protests and the emergence of many citizens' organisations, especially strongly regional ones. At the

national level, for example, committees against forced evictions and self-help organisations appeared. The first high point of this protest movement, whose strongest offshoot was 15-M, was the founding of the party Podemos ("We Can").

Podemos is, in a strict sense, a Spanish political citizens' and democracy movement, which formed in January 2014 and was approved as a party on 11 March 2014. Its popular leading figure is Pablo Iglesias Turrión. The party stood its first test in the June 2014 European Parliament elections, in which it got 8 per cent of votes and 5 MEPs in Brussels, who, like those of IU, joined the left GUE/NGL group. This is one of the reasons why the party is categorised as left—it is an external, European categorisation, with which not everyone in the Podemos milieu says they agree.

The origin of the Podemos movement is in the manifesto "Mover ficha: convertir la indignación en cambio político" ("Make a move: turn indignation into political change"). The manifesto was signed by around 30 intellectuals, cultural figures, journalists, and social activists, who pointed to the necessity of fielding candidates for the European Parliament in order to oppose EU austerity policy at the European level as well. Some of the emphasised programmatic points were the redistribution of wealth in Spain from top to bottom, the maintenance of the public character of education and healthcare, the raising of salaries, the creation of a stock of public housing, as well as resistance to the tightening of Spain's abortion legislation. The movement also demanded Spain's exit from NATO.

From the start, Podemos focused on a high degree of citizen participation. It wanted to present candidates for the European election only if at least 50,000 people declared their support for the project. These signatures materialised within 24 hours. Today, according



to Podemos, it has more than 380,000 supporters.<sup>31</sup>

At the time of the 2014 European election, the majority of Podemos' initiators still hoped to create a common candidacy with other left parties and opponents of spending cuts and the dismantling of the welfare system, and many activists of smaller left parties joined the alliance. On 24 February 2014, Podemos and IU met with the aim of sounding out the possibility of a unified slate. These talks revealed areas of agreement but also differences between the two organisations in establishing electoral lists. While Podemos advocated conducting open primaries in which every citizen could take part, IU argued that the parties taking part in the candidacy should determine the leading candidates.

The differences proved insuperable. After the failure of the negotiations, Podemos announced it would stand in the elections alone and conduct an open primary in which non-members could also participate via internet. In the 2014 EU electoral campaign, some regional social movements joined company with Podemos and others with Izquierda Unida. Podemos' primaries—in which candidates had to be proposed by one of the Podemos Circles (Círculos Podemos) in order to run—took place in March 2014. According to some information, 33,000 people took part. 60 per cent voted for Pablo Iglesias as the lead candidate.

However, within the party, in part because of its great heterogeneity, there were repeated conflicts over the direction of the alliance. The biggest conflict—around the party logo for the European election—was at first purely symbolic, but in the end it was to significantly affect Podemos' political-programme orientation. In order to take as many people from the protest movements with them as possible, Podemos' initiators wanted to exclude the symbols

of both the traditional and modern lefts in Europe. For this reason, the decision was made for the EU election to use Pablo Iglesias' face as the logo on the ballot cards. This met with massive criticism in social media. In the party logo or colours today there is—deliberately—nothing that recalls the traditional left in Europe.

In the EU election Podemos instantly became Spain's fourth strongest political force (IU was in third place with 10 per cent). The party profited from the activation of voters who, given other choices, would have abstained, as well as those who were disillusioned with the PSOE and turned their back on it. According to a poll, 66 per cent of Podemos voters were older than 35, with 56 per cent of them men and mostly employed people (50 per cent as against 22 per cent unemployed, 15 per cent students, and 9 per cent pensioners). A third of Podemos voters had voted for the PSOE in the 2009 European election. Ideologically, Podemos voters were located between IU and PSOE. Up to the last moment, 60 per cent of them had not yet decided which party to vote for.<sup>32</sup> Podemos' success was above all due to the establishment parties' loss of credibility and motivated by the middle stratum's fear of falling into poverty.

At the end of July 2014, Podemos began admitting party members. Within the first 48 hours 32,000 people registered on its website. After 20 days Podemos already had about 100,000 members and consequently became Spain's third largest party, bigger than IU.<sup>33</sup>

## **The Question of Alliance Causes Strife**

The municipal and regional elections of 24 May 2015 in Spain heralded the final end of the two-party system. Although nationwide the conservative PP remained the strongest force, it lost more than 10 per cent in relation to the

<sup>31</sup> See <https://participa.podemos.info/es>.

<sup>32</sup> See *El País*, 1 June 2014.

<sup>33</sup> See *El Huffington Post*, 17 August 2014.

2011 election; the PSOE achieved 25 per cent. Thus both major parties that had dominated the country since the 1975 transition taken together only achieved slightly over 50 per cent countrywide.

The winners of the elections were, on the one hand, the right-wing liberal citizens' movement Ciudadanos (C's), which with 6.6 per cent of votes became the third strongest force in the country, and, on the other hand, the Podemos-supported citizens' movements in the cities. (Podemos did not present nationwide candidates but was only on the ballots in single regions in alliance with other groupings.) The local alliances were, in alliance with IU, able to conquer the mayoralties in Barcelona (en Comú) and in Madrid (Ahora Madrid). But in other places too it was possible to score successes where Podemos, IU, and other left parties and groups presented common candidates. By contrast, where there were competing candidacies instead of cooperation, conservatives could get majorities in town halls or defend the ones they had.

For IU, the 2015 regional elections were disappointing in the localities where they ran alone. Their designated party head, Alberto Garzón, who is to succeed Cayo Lara, has thus turned again to Podemos to launch a common left alliance. Pablo Iglesias, however, rejected a common candidacy; there "will be no electoral agreement with IU," he said. He accused the IU of "stewing in its own juices with red stars".<sup>34</sup> The misgivings particularly had to do with the strong and decades-old party apparatus in IU and the antagonistic groups within it. But what especially dismays Podemos is the dominance of the PCE in IU.

Recently, however, Iglesias' influence on Podemos has often reached its regional limits. For example, Podemos, coming as it did from

the Indignados movement, presented candidates together with the Initiative for Catalonia (ICV), a part of the IU, in the 2015 regional election. The election was framed by president of the regional parliament, Artur Mas, as a referendum on Catalonia's independence from the Spanish central state. The ICV alliance with Podemos took neither of the two sides—for or against independence—but advocated more democracy and sovereignty for the population against the ruling, oligarchic major parties. In the end, the electoral alliance received almost 10 per cent of votes. While Iglesias interpreted this result as a defeat and a sign that an alliance with IU had no chances of success, the result in actuality, in view of the sharpened polarity around the independence question, was a completely respectable one.

Due to the continued inability of Podemos' leadership to establish a countrywide left alliance after the elections, Izquierda Unida shortly afterwards unilaterally formed the platform Ahora en Común (Together Now). Alongside IU, its participants are the green party Equo and individual Podemos activists. They all believed that a coalescence of the left would have offered a possibility in December 2015 of being able to follow Greece's Syriza and becoming an influential force in the country. The initiative's name is a combination of Ahora Madrid and Barcelona en Común.<sup>35</sup>

One of the main reasons for Podemos' hesitation about joining this left alliance is that the party wants to be electable beyond the traditional left electorate. Its activists see Spain's political system—and with it also the political left—as being in a profound crisis of legitimation. Podemos therefore uses other terminology, and speaks of struggles for "authentic democracy". In so doing it wants to establish a new class logic, that of the mass against the oligarchy. The relative elusiveness of the proj-

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Ralf Streck, "Podemos zeigt IU die kalte Schulter," *Neues Deutschland*, 27 June 2015.

<sup>35</sup> See Ralf Streck, "Iglesias und 'grummelnder Zwerg'," *Neues Deutschland*, 13 July 2015.

ect certainly makes the party vulnerable. But, on the other hand, this openness allows for a broad political alliance that gives discontent a form.<sup>36</sup>

However, Iglesias' intransigence may have damaged Podemos—at least in the short term. The primary election process in establishing the lists for the parliamentary election was disillusioning; only 16 per cent of the base participated. Even exciting coups, like the news that French economist Thomas Piketty would collaborate on the economic programme, did not help reverse the falling opinion poll numbers; in October, with 15 per cent, Podemos finished fourth place in party rankings.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, IU broadened its electoral alliance *Ahora en Común* and presented itself as *Unidad Popular: Izquierda Unida*, with Alberto Garzón as top candidate.

### **The 20 December 2015 Parliamentary Election: The Left Marches Separately**

After the final failure of the talks, IU and Podemos, in the majority of electoral districts, competed with each other. There was a common list only in the four Catalan electoral districts (under the name *En Comú Podem*, together with the Catalan Left Party ICV and Barcelona's municipal party *En Comú*), and in the four Galician electoral districts (under the name *En Marea*, together with the regional left party *Anova-Irmandade Nacionalista*). Podemos, on its part, ran in the Valencia region together with the regional left party *Compromís*. In addition, IU ran with various smaller countrywide or regional left parties. Alongside these alliances there was a left alliance, *Bildu*, in the three Basque provinces and Navarra. Independently of Podemos and IU, the Catal-

onian left liberal ERC formed an electoral alliance with the small party *Catalunya Sí* under the name *ERC-CATSÍ*.

On the evening of 20 December 2015 it was immediately evident that this election meant the end of the two-party system in Spain. This was substantially due to Podemos. However, there was no left majority present. Spain may not be more easily governable or have become more left after these elections, but it is certainly more democratic. At the same time, the regionally divided political system continues to exist, mostly due to the Spanish electoral system, which has the particularity that the election threshold varies in some provinces, which disadvantages smaller national parties. (Thus in the 2004 election IU needed an average 254,000 votes to win a parliamentary seat, while the PSOE needed only 66,000 votes to win one.) In the new chamber of deputies regional parties occupy 26 of the 300 seats.

The PSOE and PP massively lost support in comparison to the previous election. If in 2008 both parties together had 83.8 per cent of the vote and in 2011 still reached 73 per cent, this time the total figure was less than 50 per cent. The conservative PP lost nearly 18 per cent, receiving 28.7 per cent of votes, while the social democratic PSOE lost more than 6 per cent and only reached 22 per cent.

For the left in Spain the result—despite the 20 per cent for Podemos—has to be disillusioning. It was especially the Podemos leadership's decision not to run together with *Izquierda Unida* that significantly impeded a left change of government. Where Podemos and *Izquierda Unida* ran together they became the strongest force (in Catalonia) or the second strongest (Galicia). Where they ran separately and against each other they tended to be damaged—at least in terms of the complicated allocation of seats. Because the special situation in the Basque country was not an issue addressed by

<sup>36</sup> See Jonas Wollenhaupt, "Inside Podemos," *Neues Deutschland*, 10 September 2015.

<sup>37</sup> See Ralf Streck, "Podemos will den Alleingang," *Neues Deutschland*, 8 October 2015.

either party in the electoral campaign, there were even three left forces—with the Bildu party alliance—that ran against each other, all three of which are organised within the European Parliament's left group (GUE/NGL).

The political scientist Raul Zelik presents a critical view of the course taken by the left-wing Podemos. He notes that the party, only founded in January 2014, has "dropped central substantive positions" in order "to project itself as a trustworthy force for reform capable of governing. It no longer speaks of overcoming the 1978 post-Frankist constitution or of opposition to the EU's austerity policy," he wrote in a short analysis for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.<sup>38</sup> Podemos is now only calling for "a selective reform of the constitution," which may explain its drop in voter popularity in comparison with the beginning of 2015. Podemos conducted its electoral campaign with the aim of getting as many people as possible to the polling booths—

which it succeeded in doing, as voter participation rose to 73 per cent. At the same time, they diminished their criticism of Spain's power structures; to be polemical one might say that Podemos sacrificed content to populism.

But Izquierda Unida, which with its charismatic lead candidate Alberto Garzón utilised the social networks, also had disappointing results. It lost more than 4 percentage points and only received 3.7 per cent countrywide and two (instead of 11) seats.

Forming a government after this historic election eve was more than difficult. The numbers were sufficient neither for a coalition between the conservative PP and the right-wing liberal C's nor for a coalition between PSOE and Podemos, even enlisting IU and other regional left parties. If the new parliament fails to elect a head of government, new elections will be in the offing in June 2016

#### **4. DIE LINKE: A Factor for Stability in the Party of the European Left**

Unlike the parties presented so far, the Federal Republic of Germany's DIE LINKE involves neither a party alliance (like Syriza and IU) nor a party that emerged from a protest movement (like Podemos). Instead, DIE LINKE, founded in 2007, is a hybrid, with its core comprising two components. On the one hand, it is shaped by the part that has existed for 25 years, which counts among the reformed state socialist parties of the East Bloc but which, in several steps, has transformed itself into a democratic socialist party to the left of social democracy. This part previously went under the name Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Its other

component is the (primarily West German) Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (Wahlalternative Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit—WASG) that was founded by former SPD members and by trade unionists close to the SPD who were disappointed with the harsh social cuts (Hartz laws) enacted by the social democratic-green coalition under chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD).

WASG represented a classic left social democratic tendency within the European left that no longer wanted to go along with a neoliberal-oriented social democratic party in Germany that was increasingly distant from the interests of employees, comparable with Tony Blair's "New Labour" in Great Britain.

<sup>38</sup> See Raul Zelik, "Die interessantesten Wahlen seit über 30 Jahren," [www.rosalux.de](http://www.rosalux.de); and Raul Zelik, "Spaniens Linke erstarkt," [www.rosalux.de](http://www.rosalux.de).

Both parties at first created a common list for the Bundestag elections in 2005 and after entering the Bundestag merged in 2007 to form DIE LINKE. Both then dissolved as separate entities. Specific political attitudes and traditions that can be ascribed to the two source parties continue to exist within the new organisation, so that one could call it a hybrid party. This, however, does not mean that the party's course is ambiguous. Programmatically and organisationally, a stable consensus has been worked out amongst the members.

For 25 years, DIE LINKE—in the form of its source party, the PDS—has been one of the stable pillars of the left in Europe. It is true that the PDS's federal election results meant that it always had to worry about getting back into the Bundestag—and in fact it once failed to reach the 5 per cent threshold in 2002 and could only stay in the Bundestag through two directly elected deputies. Nevertheless, Germany's importance within the EU catapulted the PDS and then especially DIE LINKE into the position of perhaps the most important left actor in Europe. An additional factor in this is the high level of constitutional protection parties enjoy in the Federal Republic of Germany and the fact that they are largely financed through tax revenues. Consequently, although DIE LINKE, in terms of its members and electoral results, is neither the biggest nor the strongest left party in Europe, it has the best structures and greatest resources in relation to its sister parties.

DIE LINKE is not one of the self-proclaimed revolutionary communist forces in Europe. Instead it sees itself as pluralist and open "to everyone who wants to achieve the same goals by democratic means".<sup>39</sup> It grants extensive membership rights, among them the right to form groups with others within the party or the right even as an individual member to present

motions to all party organs. There is also the possibility for guest members to be involved, to which almost all membership rights can be conferred. Through this the party wants to open itself to social groups and movements. The response to this, however, has so far been limited. Gender equality is constitutive for the party, and there is a 50 per cent quota.

### **Who or What is DIE LINKE?**

The party—together with trade unions, social movements, and with citizens in Germany, Europe, and worldwide—wants to "build a society of democratic socialism, in which the freedom and equality of each and every individual is the condition for the solidary development of all". This is how DIE LINKE formulates its programmatic objective in its party programme. In it, three basic ideas are connected within the idea of democratic socialism: first, individual freedom and the development of personality through socially equal participation in the conditions of a self-determined life and of solidarity; second, the subordination of economy and the mode of life to solidary development and the preservation of nature; and, third, the realisation of both of these ideas through an emancipatory process "in which the dominance of capital is overcome by democratic, social, and ecological forces". DIE LINKE sees itself as being "in fundamental social and political opposition to neoliberalism and the dominance of capital, to imperialist policy, and to war".<sup>40</sup>

In order to produce alternative social and parliamentary majorities, DIE LINKE strives for broad alliances. The kind of cooperation with other parties required for another kind of government majority will only be considered if this promotes a change in politics and society and takes up core left demands. Among the latter are the withdrawal of Germany's armed forces

<sup>39</sup> Federal Statutes of DIE LINKE, [en.die-linke.de/die-linke/documents/federal-statutes/](http://en.die-linke.de/die-linke/documents/federal-statutes/).

<sup>40</sup> Programme of DIE LINKE, [en.die-linke.de/die-linke/documents/party-programme/](http://en.die-linke.de/die-linke/documents/party-programme/).

from Afghanistan, the abolition of the neoliberal labour market laws (Hartz laws), the raising of the legal minimum wage, and the rejection of pensions that only start at age 67.

It is precisely around the question of political-party alliances and coalitions that heated programmatic and strategic conflicts have repeatedly flared up ever since the party was founded. There are four principal reasons for this. First, coalitions, especially at the federal level (with Greens and Social Democrats) are viewed very critically. This is not least because it was a red-green federal government that was responsible for the first foreign troop deployment of the army, in the form of the 1999 Yugoslav War, in the history of the Federal Republic. By contrast, the majority of DIE LINKE is against any form of military foreign intervention and use of force. Second, ever since they were in government from 1998 to 2005, the Greens and Social Democrats have moved away from the left spectrum and towards the political centre. The Greens are increasingly open to alliances with Germany's conservative CDU/CSU, and the Social Democrats have largely sacrificed their social-policy image. It is controversial within DIE LINKE whether social-policy and solidary political concepts can still be carried out at all with the SPD. Finally, under SPD governance, mini-jobs, precarious conditions of employment, and social spending cuts have been introduced and extended, and privatisation of public basic services has been permitted.

Third, DIE LINKE's (or the PDS's) experiences with coalition government with the SPD were problematic. It is true that these have occurred up to now only in east German states and not at the federal level; however, at the end of these coalition government episodes, the PDS (and then DIE LINKE) has had to face problems of credibility and sagging voter popularity. Although it could easily point to its social-policy successes, the PDS's approval ratings fell massively after government participation as the

SPD's junior partner in Saxony-Anhalt, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and Berlin. This also had to do with the PDS having been shunned by the SPD as a coalition partner for many years. When there finally were coalitions, the party was not prepared for them. Only in recent years has this situation improved, and DIE LINKE can better hold its own now as a junior partner in coalitions. At present, DIE LINKE is governing in Brandenburg as the SPD's junior partner and could finally even name its own prime minister in the red-red-green (i.e., DIE LINKE, SPD, Greens) Thuringian state government.

Four, there were always fundamental differences over the path by which society can be changed. A minority always advocated a more or less "revolutionary" path that had no place for coalitions with the SPD or Greens. Today this debate, mainly because of the successful government leadership in Thuringia, is taking place in a less emotional register within the party. There are hardly party members any longer who categorically rule out government participation. Although there are divergent conceptions of what preconditions need to be present for entry into a coalition, these no longer represent a fundamental conflict.

By now, as the third strongest force in the Bundestag, DIE LINKE has an image of wanting to assume responsibility for change rather than only carry out fundamental opposition. This relative success, however, only first set in after the merger of the PDS with WASG, which emerged from the protest against Agenda 2010's dismantling of the social system and democracy. In Germany's post-war history, Agenda 2010 represents an unprecedented so-called flexibilisation of the labour market and lowering of social standards, which led to increased poverty in Germany and reduced wages and pensions.

The image of DIE LINKE as a protest party against social spending cuts only slowly evolved into its image as a party that can shape reality.

This evolution was possible in part because in the territory of the former GDR—five eastern German federal states and Berlin—it can be regarded as a major party (a Volkspartei). Here people see the party as potentially in government.

Although since 2013 there is an arithmetical majority with the SPD and the Greens in the Bundestag, a left government coalition is not foreseeable in the near future. For this the relationship between the protagonists, especially between DIE LINKE and the SPD, has to substantially improve.

In the meantime, party members derive different lessons from the differences in voter approval: 20 per cent in the east and under 10 per cent in the west—a protest party for westerners, and a major player in the east as a large party seen as able to shape reality. Added to this is the fact that DIE LINKE's parliamentary strength at the federal level is not the result of strong extra-parliamentary resistance or social movements, as with left parties in Spain and Greece, but the result of political-party and parliamentary work.

## **The History of the PDS**

The history of DIE LINKE is a history of two parties, the PDS and WASG. The PDS emerged from the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), which in turn had been founded in the process of a fusion (accompanied by strong state pressure) of the SPD (that is, the parts of it found within the Soviet occupation zones of Germany and Berlin) and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1946. From 1949 to 1989 the SED was the GDR's state party. In the course of mass protests and hundreds of thousands of GDR citizens leaving the GDR for the Federal Republic, pressure on the country's state institutions for political reform grew that did not even spare the ruling SED. This external

pressure on the SED corresponded to the internal pressure exerted by party members for reform. The party leadership accommodated this symbolically by renaming the SED the Party of Democratic Socialism on 4 February 1990. Symbolic reforms were followed by programmatic reforms; the PDS thus renounced its vanguard-party role and gave up its constitutionally guaranteed claim to leadership in the country.

The PDS's first chair was Gregor Gysi. In the first free election of the Volkskammer (the GDR's parliament) on 18 March 1990 it received 16.4 per cent of votes and the party went into opposition. After the unification of the two German states on 3 October 1990, the PDS got 2.4 per cent (and thus far less than the 5 per cent normally required for a party to enter the Bundestag). However, since the Federal Constitutional Court had declared the territories of the former GDR and the BRD as two separate electoral territories for this election, the PDS, which had received 11 per cent of the vote in eastern Germany, entered the Bundestag.

In the 1994 Bundestag election the party was able to increase its results to 4.4 per cent. That it got into the Bundestag again even though it did not make the 5 per cent threshold has to do with a particularity of German electoral law—in East Berlin the PDS received four direct mandates (each citizen has two votes—one for a party list and another for a direct individual representative from the district in question, whom the party has presented as a candidate), which made it possible for the party to enter parliament at its actual percentage level.

In the eastern German federal states, the PDS increasingly developed into a major party and by the end of the 1990s had electoral results that were mostly above 20 per cent. In the 1998 Bundestag election the party passed the 5 per cent threshold for the first time. In the west, however, the party's popularity remained

Table 5: Membership development<sup>41</sup>

State associations	2015-12-31	Female members (incl.)	Percentage of women
Baden-Württemberg	2,836	704	24.82
Bavaria	2,508	602	24.00
Berlin	7,447	3,192	42.86
Brandenburg	6,626	2,898	43.74
Bremen	481	138	28.69
Hamburg	1,307	375	28.69
Hesse	2,525	673	26.65
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	4,034	1,805	44.74
Lower Saxony	2,552	663	25.98
North Rhine-Westphalia	6,465	1,787	27.64
Rhineland-Palatinate	1,594	464	29.11
Saarland	2,114	694	32.83
Saxony	8,677	3,878	44.69
Saxony-Anhalt	4,044	1,747	43.20
Schleswig-Holstein	970	251	25.88
Thuringia	4,767	2,067	43.36
Federal Office	42	16	38.10
Total	58,989	21,954	37.22

weak and under 2 per cent, in some regions even under 1 per cent.

In 2002, with 4.3 per cent the PDS failed to re-enter the Bundestag. Since in East Berlin only two of the previous four direct mandates were elected, the party only had two deputies in parliament. After this the party entered a period of serious internal crisis. However, already by 2004 a consolidation set in, as the PDS became a strong participant in the protests against the neoliberal labour market and social reforms (Agenda 2010) of the second red-green federal administration. In the succeeding years the party's approval ratings rose, though at first only in the eastern German federal states.

To sum up, although the PDS was the legal successor of the state party, the SED, program-

matically it was anything but its successor: In the two programme congresses the party repeatedly distanced itself from the Stalinist system and its crimes committed in the name of socialism in the GDR.

### The History of WASG

In 2004, out of the protest against the Agenda 2010 reforms pushed through in 2003 by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the Wahlalternative (Electoral Alternative) formed in northern Germany simultaneously with (but independently of) the Initiative Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit (ASG—Initiative Labour and Social Justice). In July 2004, both organisations at first came together as the Wahlalternative Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit (WASG). In May 2005 the new party stood in the state

<sup>41</sup> Vgl. [www.die-linke.de/partei/fakten/mitgliederzahlen/](http://www.die-linke.de/partei/fakten/mitgliederzahlen/).



Table 6: Members in parliaments

Parliaments	Total	Female members (incl.)	Percentage of women
European Parliament	7	4	57
Bundestag	64	35	55
Berlin House of Representatives	19	10	53
Bürgerschaft Bremen	17	8	47
Bürgerschaft Hamburg	8	4	50
Hesse State Parliament	6	3	50
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania State Parliament	14	7	50
Saarland State Parliament	8	4	50
Saxony State Parliament	27	13	48
Saxony-Anhalt State Parliament	16	9	56
Thuringia State Parliament	28	14	50

parliament election in North Rhine-Westphalia and got 2.2 per cent of the votes (the PDS received 0.9 per cent). A little later Oskar Lafontaine, former SPD chancellor candidate and party chair, who was also minister of finance under Gerhard Schröder, left the SPD and joined WASG.

The PDS and WASG recognised that the narrow space to the left of social democracy could not be successfully utilised by two competing parties; both ran the risk of failing at the next Bundestag election. Furthermore, the younger formation, WASG, had very few resources. The PDS was still weak in the west, while in the east it could draw on its pre-2002 successes. With the announcement of anticipated new elections for September 2005, the pressure grew on both parties, analogously to Syriza in June 2012, to agree on a common candidacy.

### The Unification to Become DIE LINKE

In June 2005 the PDS and WASG agreed to stand together in September. To do so, WASG members stood on the electoral lists of the PDS—which in July had been renamed Linkspartei.

PDS. (German electoral law does not allow electoral alliances to run, in contrast to Spain and Greece.) Gregor Gysi, who was later to become the chair of the Bundestag group, and Oskar Lafontaine were chosen as the lead candidates. In the 18 September 2005 election, die Linkspartei. PDS reached 8.7 per cent of votes and became the fourth strongest force in the country. Less than two years later, on 16 June 2007, the fusion of both parties to form DIE LINKE finally took place. Through ballot votes 96.9 per cent of the members of the Linkspartei. PDS and 83.9 per cent of WASG members approved it.

The party grew rapidly to over 78,000 members and scored a series of electoral successes. Many new members—from social movements, former SPD and Green members, as well as activists of smaller groups—joined the party. In this way DIE LINKE became a kind of collective movement for radical leftists. In the 2009 Bundestag election the party could grow to 11.9 per cent of votes.

Success also brought inner-party conflicts, especially between members of the former source parties. The result was failures in west German state parliament elections, which in

turn fuelled further party infighting that was waged in public in the June 2012 Göttingen party congress. Nevertheless, after this the party slowly consolidated and was able to contain old rivalries and get members to work at making their common party succeed. Although in the last Bundestag election, the approval ratings for DIE LINKE did drop, at the same time the party became the third strongest force in the Bundestag with 8.6 per cent, making it the largest parliamentary opposition group.

Today the party is still a major party in the new eastern federal states and is represented in all state parliaments there (mostly as the second biggest force). In Brandenburg it has governed since 2009 as the junior partner of a coalition under the leadership of the SPD. In Thuringia its vote meant that the party got to name its own Bodo Ramelow as prime minister of a coalition government with the SPD and Greens for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic. Before this the PDS had been the junior partner in red-red state governments in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. In Anhalt Saxony in the mid-1990s it tolerated a red-green minority government. The party is not represented in all west German state parliaments. It has never been in the parliaments of Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, and Rhineland-Palatinate; but it has been in the parliaments of Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Schleswig-Holstein, though in each case for one legislative period. On the other hand, in Hamburg, Bremen, Hesse, and Saarland it has repeatedly been elected to parliament.

A coexistence of divergent political conceptions and a variety of political cultures and cultural codes continue to exist—in part related to the different degrees of the party's social anchoring and regional strengths. In concrete terms this meant the coexistence of authoritarian social-state-oriented, communist, Trotskyist, left socialist, social democratic, or reformist-libertarian groupings.

Government participation was always a contested issue in the party. However, this question does not describe a conflict between east and west or between supposedly radical and reform-oriented tendencies within DIE LINKE. Hardly any political tendency fundamentally rejects government participation. Instead, the subject of discussion is the conditions under which DIE LINKE is prepared to accept government participation. The debate is also complicated by the SPD's refusal to work within a centre-left alliance at the federal level. Here, in contrast to the state level, DIE LINKE continues to be ostracised by the SPD.

Within the left group (GUE/NGL) of the European Parliament, DIE LINKE is the party with the most MEPs, and the group's chair is DIE LINKE's Gabi Zimmer. She is a founding member of EL, was co-chair with Lothar Bisky, and plays a part in the New European Left Forum (NELF).

With its founding in 2007, DIE LINKE has brought European normality to Germany. In prior decades in the Federal Republic there was no parliamentary representation of a party to the left of social democracy. The east-west conflict, and with it extreme anti-communism, made it difficult for left formations to gain a foothold—in contrast to France and Italy.

However, DIE LINKE not only provided "European normality" in Germany but also brought socio-political alternatives back into the focus of political conflicts. After its government participation in 1988, the SPD had gradually abandoned this kind of project. DIE LINKE, in occupying this area, however, also developed a counter project to austerity policy and Germany's dominance at a time of economic and financial crisis in Europe. This had a special strategic-political value for the European countries hit by the crisis and the left in those countries, which should not be underestimated.

Through the fusion of the PDS and WASG it was finally possible to develop the political left into a pan-German left, even if differences, for example in terms of regional electoral results, continue to exist. But here too the figures point to the development of DIE LINKE into a strong pan-German left party. In reality, the other smaller parties in Germany, like the Greens

and the FDP, also have difficulties in being represented in all of the country's state parliaments, and so in this sense DIE LINKE is not an exception. The strategic question is whether the time will come at the federal level when the SPD's blockade attitude towards cooperation with DIE LINKE can be broken. This would in turn be the basis for other majorities.

## 5. Strategic Tasks for the Left in Europe

The European Union is deeply divided. With the 2015 Greek crisis and then the ongoing refugee crisis, the member states' solidarity has collapsed under German leadership. The German government has up to now found no common or even solidary answer. Many member states, especially in eastern Europe, categorically refuse to receive refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, or the North African-Arab countries—although they themselves are actively playing a part, alongside the United States, in the so-called War on Terror, in civil wars, in famine, and unstable power constructs. The current refugee situation only reinforces the picture of a divided Europe, which is sometimes benevolently described as a Europe of diverse speeds. In addition, the conflict in Ukraine is undermining the relationship to Russia as well as the internal relations of the EU Member States.

Already in 2008 the economic and financial crisis divided Europe into an economically and politically dominant "core Europe" and an economically weak and not politically sovereign south. The diktats of the Troika in Brussels are the instruments for perpetuating this contradiction and are therefore the expression of the social, economic, and political division of the EU.

The left in Europe is facing the challenge of finding an answer to this division at the same

time as formulating policies for the specific situations in the individual EU Member States. This is not an easy task, for the European left, for its part, is a multi-layered—or, viewed negatively, divided—phenomenon. In the eastern European countries it is, with the exception of Slovenia and in part Croatia—absolutely marginalised. Relevant left parties or parliamentary representation to the left of social democracy do not exist there.

In this context, DIE LINKE in Germany represents a special case. It is the only former state party that could—against the trend of a historical and renewed anti-communism in eastern Europe—radically renovate itself and hold its own. The only other former state party that could assert itself is the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KCSM), but it did not take the path of a self-renewing, modern democratic socialist party and has instead adhered to the politics and organisational form of a classic democratic-centralist communist vanguard party.

However, it is not only in eastern Europe that the left finds itself on the defensive. The growing social and intra-European crises has mainly strengthened the populist and radical right. In France, the right-wing radical Front National has become the leading party, while the left is stagnating at a low level, and this despite the fact that there are two different left for-

mations in the country—the Eurocommunist PCF and the left social democratic Parti de Gauche—that have sought to ally with each other. In many other countries right-wing radical or right-wing populist forces are on the rise, for example in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Hungary. In all these countries the left is weak, which may be due to the fact that classical communist parties occupy the space to the left of social democracy.

On the other hand, it can be argued that left parties in the form of protest parties are not viable in the long run. Times of social crises in no way cause people to turn to the proposals put forward by the radical left. In fact, the left has to "enter" the system it criticises in order to be able to carry out the changes it hopes for. Admittedly, all left parties in Europe move within this contradiction. However, it is increasingly difficult for those parties which hold to "revolutionary" solutions to give convincing answers, translating into successful electoral arithmetic, to the question of how people's concrete problems can be solved. Since in the foreseeable future in Europe we cannot expect revolutionary tendencies, these parties cannot achieve decent results in the short and middle term.

The Scandinavian left parties, which had already transformed themselves in the 1970s and 80s into democratic socialist, left socialist, or green-left formations, have for decades now been parliamentary forces to be reckoned with. They were occasionally participants as junior partners in social democratic-led governments. Nevertheless, this did not result in a major leap forward for them.

At present, it is only the south—Greece, Spain, and Portugal—that is a source of strength and renewal for Europe's left. This has been encouraging, and it opens up the opportunity to bring a reinforced alternative left politics back onto the stage of political confrontation.

However, in these countries the resistance of the rulers is also strong. In the case of Greece, conservatives and social democrats throughout Europe, in alliance with oligarchies and economic moguls, mobilised every possible resource to prevent Syriza's electoral victory. When this did not work, they set in motion everything, including EU institutions, in order to bring the EU's first left government to its knees. In what followed, although Syriza was able to assert itself in government, it only did this at the cost of a third anti-social and anti-democratic "aid package". Since then, Europe's left has been arguing about whether the conflict around Greece should be seen as a success or failure.

That Europe's neoliberal elites are not ready to concede power and space to a left anti-austerity party like Syriza that has the majority of the population behind it is seen in exactly the same way in Portugal. Portugal is, like Greece and Spain, strongly affected by the economic and financial crisis and had to be financially supported by the EU and the Eurogroup. Billions were given to rescue banks while social acquisitions, wages, and pensions were cut. The conservative government (2011-2015) under Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho (PSD) left no doubt about its readiness to carry out the privatisation and social spending cuts demanded by the Troika.

Passos Coelho had to pay for this policy in the 4 October 2015 parliamentary election. He lost his majority, and two left formations, the Bloco de Esquerda (BE) and the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP), declared their readiness to support a minority government of the social democrats (PS). Portugal's conservatives stirred up fear about a left government. When this could no longer be prevented, they even made use of the institutional system to impede the formation of a new government. State president Cavaco Silva (PSD) refused the creation of a left government, which had a majority in

parliament, and instead mandated the loser of the election, his fellow party member Passos Coelho, to form a government. Only after months in which this failed was the new left regime finally sworn in.<sup>42</sup>

The examples of Greece and Portugal make clear that the political and economic elites are no longer even prepared to accept democratic electoral results if these could lead to any loss of their power. It is all the more incumbent on the left in Europe to step up pressure if it wants to implement its alternative political concepts against these elites.

The southern European examples show at once that the left in Europe is now strong where it exists as a modern collective movement, takes up the protest of the population, and through broad alliances poses the question of power.

By contrast, the European left is on the defensive wherever it refuses to take steps to reform itself and rejects opening processes, and where it splits, with its parts competing against each other. The election outcome in Spain shows that even successful opening processes like that of Podemos are not free of this. As in Portugal, the left after austerity, and citizens' parties in Spain were not able to come together in a broader alliance. However, while in Portugal it became possible to correct the division of the left (between BE and the PCP) after the election and form a majority, this option does not yet exist in Spain due to its complicated electoral system and the country's regional divisions.

The developments in Spain, but also in Germany, show that success and failure always also depend on institutional conditions (such as electoral law). In addition, factors such as the left's social mobilisation or its capacity to

formulate answers to social changes play an essential role; it is clear that the left—precisely in view of its institutional disadvantage—has to make more effort than other parties to seek out alliances with other, progressive, forces. Only if the traditional divisions of the left are overcome, as in Greece or Germany, and actors agree on common goals—such as the struggle against austerity and de-democratisation—can success be achieved.

It appears that the left parties best prepared to meet these challenges are those that are organised as collective movements, take up social protest, and simultaneously are open for parliamentary alliances to the left of centre. The left in Europe is successful when it subjects itself to a transformational process, turns to new societal milieus, and leaves behind its inherited vanguard character.

Syriza in Greece, Podemos and IU in Spain, as well as BE and the PCP in Portugal have moreover shown that it is no longer enough to be a party of social protest. They emphasise that the systemic question today takes the form of the question of democracy. Without a democratisation of "post-democracy" and European integration, social distortions in the EU Member States or in the EU itself cannot be prevented or reversed. Precisely the example of Greece illustrates that the construction of a more just social welfare system cannot be done without radical reform of democratic sovereignty and co-determination; for it is the current decision-making processes which—alongside the relations of forces in Europe—have up to now severely hampered a social breakthrough in Athens. In Spain, it is the undemocratic instruments for forming a majority coalition, the Francoist constitutional heritage, and the monarchy that impeded a social transformation in December; while in Portugal institutional power—in the form of the state president's refusal to let the left majority form the government—was at pains to prevent a rejection of austerity policy.

<sup>42</sup> See Dominic Heilig, "Den Unterschied herausstellen. Wahlanalyse der Portugiesischen Parlamentswahl vom 4. Oktober 2015," [www.rosalux.de](http://www.rosalux.de); Dominic Heilig, "Portugals Linke vorn," *Disput*, 11/2015.

The left must forcefully pose the question of power against the old oligarchies and power structures—this, too, was strikingly demonstrated by the left parties in southern Europe—, for in the long run it cannot implement its programme as a junior partner of social democracy. This thesis has been confirmed by the experience of the Scandinavian left and Germany's DIE LINKE. More than a few policy corrections are not possible in such parliamentary alliances.

Syriza and Podemos have posed the question of power as new collective parties and movements. Greece's Coalition of the Radical Left succeeded in transforming itself from a marginal formation with 4 per cent voter approval into a party that could get more than a third of the population behind it. Within a year, Podemos was able to get 20 percent of the population to come together behind an alternative political message. In Portugal, where BE and the communists together could assemble almost 20 per cent of the electorate, a similar project was successful. One of the reasons has to be that they credibly conveyed, in understandable language, their readiness to take responsibility for change beyond mere opposition.

If Germany's DIE LINKE, which has been generating between 8 and 10 per cent approval for 10 years now, wants to shape Europe's development it too has to pose the question of power and undergo a second opening. It has to face the particular difficulty that in Germany political conflicts are not expressed by social movements to the same degree as in the south of Europe; nevertheless, there are starting points for a collective movement. Already its first opening—the fusion of PDS and WASG—moved many thousands of citizens to join the new left party. Now the next step has to be taken to broaden its own membership and its own political spectrum.

The history of the European left shows that openings and internal party reforms as a rule

lead to a broadening of the base and electoral success.

By contrast, the communist and reform-communist parties no longer appear to have the impact and internal structure to make a broadening of its base and influence possible. Revolutionary situations are not in sight in Europe despite the ongoing social and economic dislocations. In the 21st century, people on the continent are not waiting for a vanguard to show them the way. It is therefore improbable that these parties can significantly influence the future of the left in Europe or find themselves in a position to conquer political majorities in the EU Member States.

The classical left socialist and left social democratic parties of Europe, as in Scandinavia or the Netherlands, will have a hard time in the near future expanding their—albeit stable—parliamentary spheres of influence. For this they are simply too dependent on the strategic behaviour of the social democrats in their countries.

Only those party formations that open themselves to new members and internal reform will have a future. The worlds of work are very exposed to changes—through globalisation, digitalisation, and the transformation of the capitalist system into financial-market-driven capitalism. This process has a massive effect on social relations and milieus. Only parties that find new programmatic and organisational responses to this may be able to survive and create majorities.

In any case, the very important year 2015 has shown that the left in Europe can only survive, continue to exist, and perhaps even be successful if it no longer limits itself to the nation-state but cooperates and acts on a Europe-wide basis. A single left government in Europe does not make for a red European spring. The left would therefore do well to overcome its

European divisions. With this aim, Syriza and Podemos went into their electoral campaigns: They did not limit their democratisation and social projects to their respective nation-states but related them to the whole European Union. But to do this the left in Europe has to make greater use of its transnational organisations, such as the Party of the European Left and the left group in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL). In this way it may be possible in the future to prevent a situation like in the Basque country where three left parties compete against each other, all of which are members of the GUE/NGL.

The European spring, which began in January 2015 with Syriza's election victory, has not ended in a European winter. But the challenges remain formidable. A lot will depend on

whether after Greece and Portugal there can also be a left government in Spain. And 2016 holds further important elections in store for the left, for example in Ireland—another austerity-shaken EU country. The 2017 Bundestag election will be of decisive importance. If DIE LINKE is able to grow stronger and vanquish Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, the architect of European austerity policy, Europe can develop in a different, a more social and democratic, direction.

What is absolutely certain is that the European left has to meet the challenges of our time and advance. In the 21st century this can only mean defining left politics democratically and pluralistically—and not being content with an oppositional role but instead taking account of one's own capacity and willingness to govern.

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